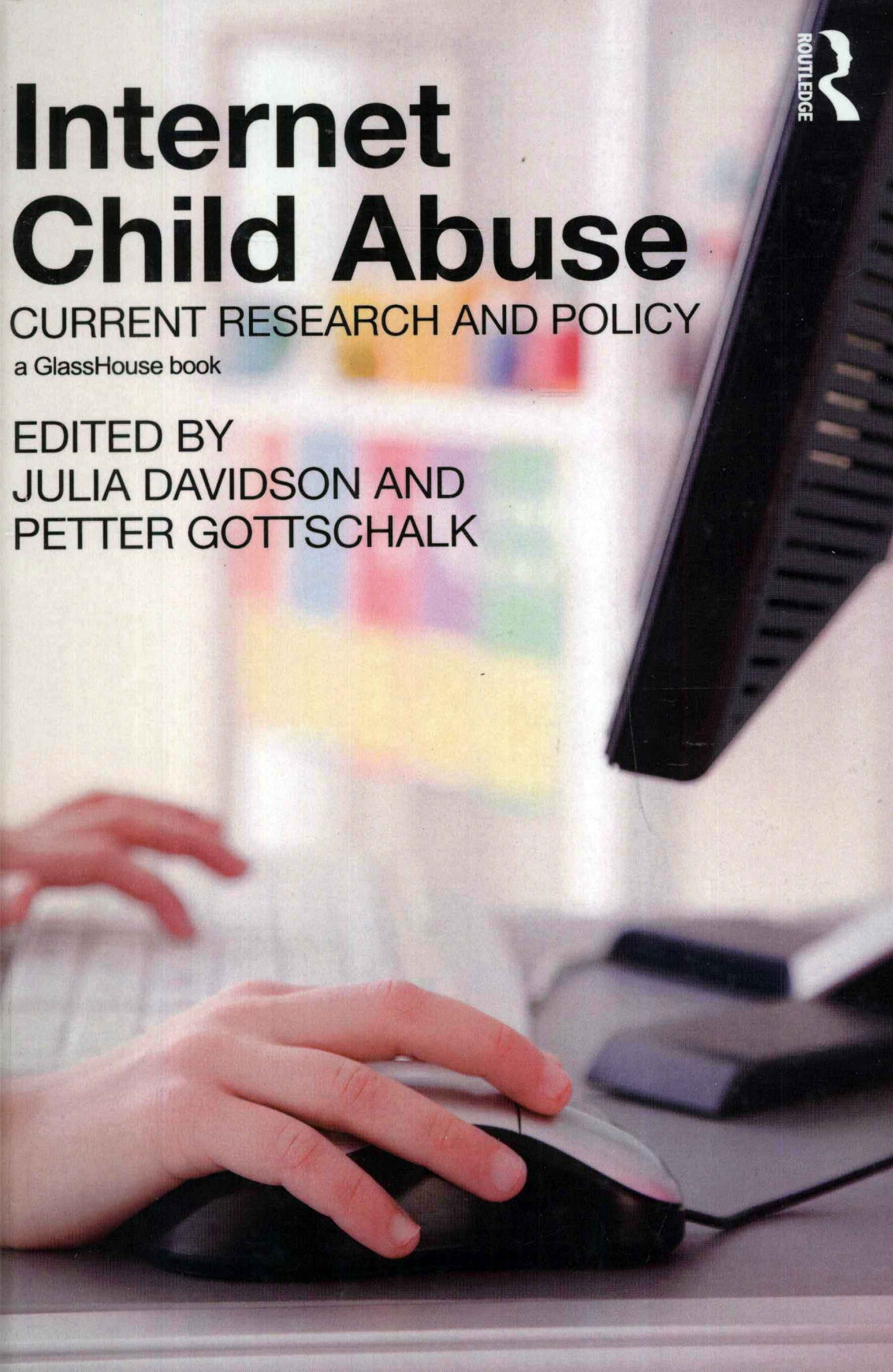


Internet Child Abuse

CURRENT RESEARCH AND POLICY

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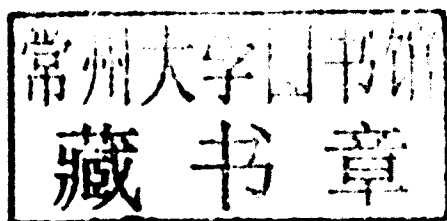
EDITED BY
JULIA DAVIDSON AND
PETTER GOTTSCHALK



Internet Child Abuse

Current Research and Policy

Edited by
Julia Davidson and Petter Gottschalk



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Editors' Note

This book has sought to avoid the use of the word 'paedophile'; the term 'sex offender' is used as an alternative. The term paedophile refers to those who have a sexual attraction to only pre-pubescent children; the term has become a popular label that includes all types of child sexual abuse.

Contributors

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Introduction

Julia Davidson and Petter Gottschalk

This book provides a timely overview of international policy, legislation and offender treatment practice in the area of Internet child abuse. The book is based upon the most recent and current research (some of which is unpublished) in the area. Contributors are key experts, police practitioners and researchers working in the Internet abuse field. The book will appeal to an international audience of academics, researchers, criminal justice agencies, policy makers and criminal justice practitioners. The Editors and one of the chapter contributors (Webster) are involved in the largest European study of Internet abusers' victim-targeting practices, funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Programme (2009–11).

Context and relevance

Internet use has grown considerably in the last decade. Information technology now forms a core part of the formal education system in many countries, ensuring that each new generation of Internet users is more adept than the last. Recent comparative work (EUKids Online) on Internet use across 27 European countries reveals that there were substantial changes in Internet use between 2005 and 2008. In 2005 70% of 6–17-year-olds in the European Union (EU) used the Internet. By 2008, this had risen to 75 per cent on average. The most striking rise was among younger children – by 2008, 60 per cent of 6–10-year-olds were online. There was also a substantial difference between 2005 and 2008 concerning location of use. In 2005 use of the Internet at school was as common as home use. By 2008, 6–17-year-olds in all European Community (EC) countries were much more likely to use the Internet at home (65 per cent) than school (57 per cent), and 34 per cent are now going online using their own computer. (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). In Russia recent research in large urban centres on children and teenagers' attitudes and perceptions of the Internet reveals that it is the primary information source ahead of television, books and printed mass media for both 14–15-year-olds and 16–17-year-olds. Approximately 65 per cent of 16–17-year-olds say that parents allow them free use of the Internet and do

so without imposing any time-limit. This was less the case with the younger 14–15-year-olds (58 per cent claiming the same). In terms of perceived risks and dangers, it is clear that the 16–17-year-olds are currently more aware of pornography (80 per cent) than the 14–15-year-olds (45 per cent) although as many of the older group placed viruses as an equal risk to pornography.

The Russian data on risk-taking behaviour revealed that more than half from each age group gave out personal data without thinking. The difference between the two age groups in terms of the type of personal data was that a larger proportion of 16–17-year-olds (23 per cent) appeared to be providing both personal photos and photos of relatives as compared with 11 per cent of 14–15-year-olds doing so (The Russian Foundation for Internet Development Research, 2009).

Research studies in the UK suggest that the majority of young people aged 9–19 access the Internet at least once a day. The Internet provides the opportunity to interact with friends on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as MySpace and Bebo and enables young people to access information in a way that previous generations would not have thought possible. The medium also allows users to post detailed personal information, which may be accessed by any site visitor and provides a platform for peer communication previously unknown (Davidson and Martellozzo, 2008).

Research, carried out by Ipsos Mori on behalf of Ofcom in the UK, comprised 797 face-to-face interviews with children aged 7–16 and their parent or carer. Just over 10 per cent of the children claimed that they use their mobile phone to go online. When online they most frequently say they are downloading or playing music (80 per cent), visiting social networks (45 per cent) and making use of instant messaging (38 per cent). The EUKids Online research also looked at risks for children online. Giving out personal information is the most common risk – approximately half of online teenagers seeing pornography as the second most common risk. Mobile phone use is widespread among children and young people and an increasing number access the Internet via a mobile phone. They make extensive use of the Internet using interactive services such as games, SNSs and instant messages, increasingly to be found as mobile phone applications.

In a study of Internet use among young people conducted in Belgium (2008) by the *Centre de Recherche et d'Information des Organisations de Consommation* (CRIOC; Belgian centre for consumer group information and research), it emerged that 88 per cent of the sample ($N = 2336$) surfed the Web regularly. The general average was 9.5 times a week, that is, more than once a day. All the age groups surveyed engaged in surfing. Indeed, it was already customary practice for 72 per cent of respondents 10 years of age. The pre-adolescents surveyed (11–12 years old) declared requiring no help to connect to and use the Internet. Their favourite online activities were (a) viewing cartoons or music videos, (b) playing games, and (c) communicating via the Microsoft Service Network (MSN) or email. Young adolescents

(13–14 years old), too, required no help using the Internet and their favourite activities included (1) creating and managing a personal blog to showcase themselves, (2) communicating, and (3) downloading music, games and videos. As for adolescents over 15 years of age, they reported for the most part possessing their own personal computer and using the Internet to (1) communicate with others, (2) comment on specific topics in discussion forums and (3) download music, games and videos. As we can see, although the points of interest vary across age groups, ‘communicating’ is nevertheless a constant. When asked what activity they most engaged in, ‘chatting’ came out on top (82 per cent of respondents). Surprisingly, 74 per cent of the children still in elementary school already chatted on a daily basis.

Recent research suggests that young people associate the term ‘online’ strictly with the computer. They do not associate the term ‘online’ with using a mobile phone to, for example, check their Facebook page or to chat on MSN. The connectivity now offered on mobile phones increases risk by isolating potential victims for online grooming. Research also suggests that adult perceptions of online risk-taking behaviour such as providing personal information to strangers or agreeing to meet with strangers or ‘virtual friends’ (Davidson and Martellozzo, 2008:56) are perceived by young people as acceptable Social Networking Site behaviour (Davidson *et al.*, 2009).

Book structure

In Chapter 1 Davidson describes and critically evaluates legislation designed to protect children and young people from Internet abuse. One of the key problems in policing this global crime is the variation in legislation between countries. This new offence category was included in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 in England and Wales (with application also to Northern Ireland¹): section 15 makes ‘meeting a child following sexual grooming’ an offence, with application to the Internet, other technologies such as mobile phones and the ‘real world’. ‘Grooming’ involves a process of socialisation during which an offender seeks to interact with a child (a young person under 18 in Scotland, England or Wales), possibly sharing their hobbies and interests in an attempt to gain trust in order to prepare them for sexual abuse. The process may also involve an attempt to normalise sexual relations between adults and children. The Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 includes ‘meeting a child following certain preliminary contact’ (s1) meaning where a person arranges to meet a child who is under 16, having communicated with them on at least one previous occasion (in person, via the Internet or via other technologies), with the intention of performing sexual activity on the child.

Several countries are beginning to follow the UK lead in legislating against ‘grooming’ behaviour. Sexual grooming has also recently been added to the legislation in Norway (2007-Crimes Civil Penal Code (‘straffeloven’),

S201)² Section 201a is the new grooming section in Norwegian criminal law. This section was included in The General Civil Penal Code in April 2007. The grooming section is different from other sections about sexual activity in that it does not concern a completed offence, but rather the *intention* of committing an act. However, the perpetrator must actually appear for a meeting (sometimes a police trap); intention itself is not sufficient. Possibly it should be, but it is difficult to prove beyond doubt. Therefore, the legal phrase is: 'has arrived at the meeting place or a place where the meeting place can be observed', meaning that the offender has arrived at, or is in view of, the place where the offence was intended to take place. In the United States it is an offence to electronically transmit information about a child aged 16 or under for the purpose of committing a sexual offence (US Code Title 18, Part 1, Chapter 117, AS 2425). Davidson (2009) argues that differences in legislation across jurisdictions, such as variations in the age of consent to sexual relations, make international consensus and agreements such as the EU Framework Decision (2009) difficult to enforce.

In Chapter 2 Gottschalk provides a definition of Internet child abuse. Internet use has grown considerably over the last five years. Information technology now forms a core part of the formal education system in many countries, ensuring that each new generation of Internet users is more adept than the last. Research conducted in the UK by Livingstone and Bober in 2004 suggested that the majority of young people aged 9–19 accessed the Internet at least once a day. The Internet provides the opportunity to interact with friends on Social Networking Sites such as MySpace and Bebo and enables young people to access information in a way that previous generations would not have thought possible. It also allows users to post detailed personal information, which may be accessed by any site visitor and which provides a platform for peer communication hitherto unknown. There is, however, increasing evidence that the Internet is used by some adults to access children and young people in order to 'groom' them for the purposes of sexual abuse; MySpace have recently expelled 29,000 suspected sex offenders and is being sued in the United States by parents who claim that their children were contacted by sex offenders on the site and consequently abused (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6277633.stm> 19/7/2007 'MySpace is sued over child safety'). The Internet also plays a role in facilitating the production and distribution of indecent illegal images of children.

In Chapter 3 Carr and Hilton describe international moves to protect children online. There have already been considerable efforts to increase online child protection internationally. The G8 countries have agreed a strategy to protect children from sexual abuse on the Internet. Key aims include the development of an international database of offenders and victims to aid victim identification, offender monitoring, and the targeting of those profiting from the sale of indecent images of children. Internet service providers and credit card companies, such as the UK's Association For Payment

Clearing Services, have also joined the international movement against the production and distribution of sexually abusive images of children online. Their efforts have focused primarily on attempting to trace individuals who use credit cards to access illegal sites containing indecent images of children. There has also been an attempt to put mechanisms into place which would prevent online payment for illegal sites hosted outside of the UK. Organisations such as the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) are making some headway in attempting to protect children online. VGT is an organisation that comprises several international law enforcement agencies from Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Interpol. Through the provision of advice and support to children, VGT aims to protect children online and has recently set up a bogus website to attract online groomers. A report to VGT by a child has recently led to the conviction of a sex offender for online grooming and the possession of indecent images (VGT, 2006). The Internet Watch Foundation is one of the main government watchdogs in this area. Although based in the UK the IWF is a part of the *EU's Safer Internet Plus Programme*. Carr and Hilton argue that much more needs to be done to centralise international efforts to protect children online.

Chapter 4 provides the context for the following two chapters. Gottschalk presents the idea of a staged approach to online grooming, suggesting possible stages through which an offender might move in progressing from indecent image use to contact abuse.

In Chapter 5 Martellozzo explores perpetrators' online behaviour. Very little is known about Internet offenders and there is little research in this area. The author has just completed a doctorate with the Metropolitan Police High Technology Crime Unit (one of the foremost online Internet abuse policing units in Europe) exploring online offender behaviour. Her research provides a current and unique perspective – applicable across the international community. It is clear that the Internet is more than just a medium of communication: it constitutes a new virtual reality, or a cyberworld, with its own rules and its own language. The Internet provides a supportive context within which the child sexual abuser is no longer a lonely figure but rather forms part of a larger community that shares the same interests. The Internet gives new meaning to the term 'sex offender ring', as the potential for offenders to organise to abuse children is so considerable. The chapter also explores the concept of denial in Internet sex offenders.

In Chapter 6 Taylor builds upon the preceding chapters by exploring online grooming behaviour in the context of Internet policing. Jon Taylor is an undercover officer working at the Metropolitan Police High Technology Crime Unit who interacts every day with adult men seeking sexual relations with young people. The chapter offers a unique, first hand insight into both offender behaviour and policing response. The aim of Taylor's research was to explore how Internet Social Networking Groups have influenced sex

offenders' *modus operandi*, in an attempt to enhance the understanding of grooming techniques amongst researchers, law enforcement agencies and practitioners working in this arena.

In Chapter 7 O'Brien and Webster explore the treatment of Internet sex offenders. This is a very new area and there are few programmes that focus specifically on this issue. The chapter will provide an overview of current treatment practice in the Europe, the US and Canada. Stephen Webster is a researcher at the forefront of this area of work: he designed one of the first assessment tools (Internet Behavioural Attitudes Questionnaire (IBAQ)) for Internet sex offenders which is currently used in the UK Prison Service. Treatment approaches with sex offenders whose offending is Internet-related tend to be based on the cognitive behavioural treatment (CBT) model. However the structure and delivery of such programmes differs. In England and Wales there has been a recent attempt to centrally develop and organise a CBT programme for Internet sex offenders that is now in use by the National Probation Service (July 2006) and will possibly be introduced to prisons. The Internet Sex Offender Treatment Programme (i-SOTP) runs alongside the existing sex offender treatment programme. Another CBT treatment programme is currently operational at a local level at the Forensic Department, University Hospital, Basel, Switzerland. This inpatient and outpatient clinic for sex offenders includes those remanded in custody; those on probation; those post-release from prison and some self-referring (approximately 15–20 per cent of all Internet offenders are self-referring). Forty men have attended the programme so far; therapy lasts for 1 year (weekly sessions of 1.5 hours) and is based upon relapse prevention models adapted for use with Internet sex offenders.

Notes

- 1 The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (England and Wales) is currently under review in Northern Ireland. Some concerns have been raised regarding a lack of clarity around the age of consent and informed consent. Currently the age of consent is 17 in Northern Ireland (it was raised from 16 to 17 under the Children and Young Persons Act 1950). NI Office, July 2006.
- 2 Section 201a:

With fines or imprisonment of not more than 1 year is any person liable, who has agreed a meeting with a child who is under 16 years of age, and who with intention of committing an act as mentioned in sections 195, 196 or 200 second section has arrived at the meeting place or a place where the meeting place can be observed.

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