

Grooming, sextortion, and other online predatory acts: How online child sexual abuse happens and how to prevent it

[Nicai de Guzman](#) December 7, 2015

Children and young people are exposed to the Internet as soon as they get their first laptop, tablet, or mobile phone. While they may use it to simply communicate with family, friends, or to play games, logging onto the Internet also means that they are vulnerable to strangers who may trick them or solicit them to do sexually explicit acts.

These sexually explicit acts pertain to asking for nude photos of the children or asking them to do lewd acts in front of a web camera. Understanding the techniques of online predators and devising ways for children not to fall prey to their attacks were discussed in a parallel session of [Ako Para sa Bata 2015: Cyberprotection of Children](#) held in Marco Polo Plaza Cebu on December 1 and 2, 2015.

The session called “Unwanted Exposure and Online Solicitation” brought to light the methods online predators use such as [child grooming](#), modelling, or even creating fake relationships.

Grooming and pay-per-view

Detective Superintendent Paul Hopkins, [Australian Federal Police](#) Senior Liaison Officer in Manila, said that two groups who are most adept at avoiding the police are terrorists and pedophiles. “They can take one step ahead, which is why we need the help of the whole community,” he said.

Hopkins gave three case studies of Australian nationals who were caught soliciting child pornography in the Philippines. They would use the technique of grooming to make the victim feel comfortable with them.

Grooming is a technique where the predator would befriend the victim and maybe even send them gifts to gain their trust.

One case involved a 60-year-old male who contacted a 13-year-old girl in Northern Philippines. He even went to their province to visit her. He then offered her family a car and computer if she were to “marry” him. Thankfully, her parents did not agree. He simply withdrew his offer but since there was no actual exchange, he couldn’t be convicted.

It could have been a case of attempted trafficking but it would be hard to prove, Hopkins said.

Another case was of another male who befriended a mom and promised her that he would send her kids to school. Being poor, desperate, and uneducated, this mother was duped into complying with the requests of the online predator, who occasionally wired money to her account on a pay-per-view basis.

“We call it, in police terms, [Stockholm’s Syndrome](#). Gradually he gets inside her mind until such time that she’s actively putting her own children in front of the video, at first just naked and then actually leading into sexual activity,” Hopkins said.

By intercepting his communication after getting tips from concerned citizens from Australia, he was investigated and both the predator and the mother were caught.

“I do feel sorry for her. She was pretty much conned into doing it by this disgraceful person back in Australia. He will face years in prison, he might get seven or eight years but she’s facing life. We argue whether or not the worst thing you can do as a parent is harm your kids and as a parent I agree, but on the other hand here’s a very poor person and it’s just a sorry, sorry case,” he said.

The most popular case involves Peter Scully, who collaborated with multiple Filipino offenders in making online videos of sexual assaults on young Filipina victims. One violent video, called “Daisy’s Destruction,” had women torturing a little girl.

These videos were then sold on the Internet for as much as \$10,000. Filipino and non-Filipino nationals, including a German and a Brazilian doctor, were caught during an entrapment operation.

“Our work in the law enforcement is such a small part that needs to be done all around the world,” Hopkins said.

Scully is currently facing trial over five counts of rape and one count of human trafficking. He is also under investigation over the rape of an 18-month-old baby girl and the murder of a 12-year-old girl whose remains were found in the backyard of a house he’s renting.

“We sometimes get all the credit but we only catch very few and it’s far, far better to prevent than to catch an offender,” Hopkins said.

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Sextortion

The Philippines is one of the countries with the highest child sextortion cases in the world, according to Police Superintendent Ma. Ivy Castillo, Assistant Chief of the Cyber Security Research and Analysis Division of the [Philippine National Police Anti-Cybercrime Group](#) (PNP-ACG).

Sextortion is the act of extorting money from someone by blackmailing them with sexually explicit photos or videos, Castillo explained.

Perpetrators would use the method of “modelling,” or conning the victim by pretending to be a talent scout. The perpetrator would contact the victim and pretend to offer a career in modelling so that he or she would send sexually explicit or nude photos.

After the photos or videos are sent, the perpetrator would then reveal his or her true nature and blackmail the victim. The perpetrator would threaten the victim that his or her sensitive materials would be spread if he or she does not send money or gadgets.

Another method is “U Send, I Send” or engaging in a pretend relationship with the victim. For this method, the perpetrator would get into a fake relationship with the victim so that he or she would send sexually explicit or nude photos. In this purely online relationship, the perpetrator would often ask for several pictures with the promise that he or she would also send nude photos if the victim sends the photos first.

After the photos are sent, that’s also when the perpetrator would reveal his or her true nature to extort money. They would also sometimes “break up” with the victim, after which they would sell the photos they gathered to online child pornography sites.

Pay-per-view also happens in the Philippines. Most of the time, the mediator between the perpetrator and the child is someone the child knows. Sadly, for 40% of the recorded cases, the mediators are the parents, followed by 27% being the neighbor or friend.

Most of the mediators rationalize their acts of exploitation, Castillo said. “Kumikita ‘yong bata kaya kaunti lang ‘yong nagrereport sa atin kasi kumikita sila dito (The children earn money from this; that’s why only a few report, because they have made this their livelihood),” she said.

Castillo said that most of the cases they have handled since their division’s establishment in March 2013 would usually come from international referrals. There were 67 international referrals compared to 21 local referrals. Among those, only 54 cases have been formally filed.

Reactive and proactive approaches

Castillo said that the PNP-ACG would use both reactive and proactive approaches when it comes to handling this problem. Their reactive approach entails them to handle walk-in complaints, as well as online complaints from their online referral site, AngelNet.ph.

Their proactive approach includes cyber patrolling or open search investigation, online engagement or baiting predators by taking over the account of victims, as well as the takedown of the offender’s accounts.

Similar efforts are being done in the United Kingdom, implemented since 2006 by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

Stephanie McCourt of the UK Law Enforcement National Crime Agency said that through their Click CEOP or online reporting tool, around 400 victims would come forward every month. Over 200 children, some as young as eight years old, have self-reported cases of online sexual abuse. “The victim should never be blamed,” she clarified.

Through their reporting tool, they have managed to help with 12 operations over the last two years. One was called “Operation Perdition,” where a group of Bahraini nationals, who victimized 17 young people in the UK alone, were caught.

Using over 34 Facebook profiles, 45 email addresses, and 2 Skype accounts, the five Bahrainis targeted victims in Europe because of their “liberal attitudes.” Operation Perdition led to the arrest and conviction of these predators.

“This is not technology. This is behaviour. Child sexual abuse predates the technology, this is just the enabler,” McCourt said.

CEOP’s preventive program is their educational [Think U Know](#) (TUK) campaign that aims to spread awareness and empower children. Through the Think U Know campaign, children can access age-appropriate materials on how to stay safe online. Over the last nine years, the program gained a network of over 31,000 TUK trainers, 100,000 users, and 17 million children have been reached. TUK also go around schools to talk about these issues.

“It’s so important to educate the children. Education is the key,” McCourt said.

Ref.: <http://www.mulatpinoy.ph/2015/12/07/apsb2015-grooming-sextortion-online-predatory-acts-online-child-sexual-abuse-part1/>

Look also here www.children.aboutphilippines.ph & www.media.aboutphilippines.ph