



Webcam Child Sex Tourism

In 2013, the children's rights group, Terre des Hommes, created a virtual 10 year old Filipino girl named Sweetie designed to catch child sex predators. After spending 10 weeks in 19 public chat rooms, Terre des Hommes encountered over 20,000 predators from 71 countries. Sweetie was able to identify 1,000 men worldwide that were willing to pay to virtually abuse the girl. Most of the predators came from Western countries.¹

Although this action has undoubtedly helped to focus public attention on a still too little known phenomenon, namely sex tourism involving children by webcam, it has also caused controversy regarding the legality of using a virtual bait program. The Director of Europol Cybercrime Center regretted that he had not been involved from the very beginning of the strategy to verify the legal aspects.² Furthermore, a list of 1,000 suspects was given to the police, making the matter public through media and possibly accusing innocent individuals or conversely, allowing culprits to quickly eliminate all evidence. Even echoed by Interpol: The lack of cooperation with law enforcement and the media coverage of the case have a negative impact on the prosecution of perpetrators and affects a child's right to be protected against these types of abuse.³

Despite this controversy, Sweetie illustrates a new disturbing trend that has emerged on the Internet and increased tremendously in the past few years: the sexual abuse of children via webcam. To better understand this serious violation of rights of the child, this analysis aims to examine some aspects, namely its causes, consequences, the profile of abusers, the existing legislative framework and the necessary actions to effectively fight against this crime.

Webcam Child Sex Tourism (WCST)

WCST is a form of child sexual exploitation that combines both child pornography and child prostitution. Predators from across the world pay and gain access to live streaming video footage of children, typically in other countries, being subjected to various forms of sexual abuse. The predators can dictate what they want to see, such as nudity, masturbation, or sexual acts between several children. This harmful abuse involves both boys and girls and generates a significant amount of money. However, children might only receive a small percentage of the profit or nothing at all. The

¹ Salinari, Raffaele K., Freedom from Fear Magazine, Issue 9, 2014, <http://f3magazine.unicri.it/?p=613>.

² Council of Europe, Octopus Conference Cooperation Against Cybercrime, 2013, http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/cooperation/economiccrime/cybercrime/cy_octopus2013/Octopus2013_en.asp

³ Terre des Hommes, Webcam Child Sex Tourism. FAQs, May 2014, http://terredeshommesnl.org/media/documents/FAQ_English.pdf.

money received depends on various factors such as the presence of an intermediate taking a percentage (pimp, parents, etc.), the duration of the video and the nature of the sexual act.⁴ According to Europol, a film can cost 10 USD (7.5 euros) or a 50 USD subscription (37 euros) for 3 months. However, abusers are sometimes willing to pay up to 1,200 USD (900 euros) for new material, demonstrating the increasing demand for new child abuse materials. As in all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, intermediaries play a major role since they facilitate these abuses and complicity in genocide. Several types of people can be accomplices of this crime by placing the children in front of the lens to perform unspeakable sexual acts and accept money. Families might view their children as a commodity and exchange live streaming videos of child sexual abuse against their own children. Online grooming, which is the act of establishing a relationship with a child on the Internet in order to manipulate them into a sexual relationship, can also be a form of WCST as the use of webcam plays a major role in the grooming process.⁵ There are also organized criminal groups that will rape children on live streaming videos and make people pay to watch it. The intermediaries vary but all of their actions exploit children.⁶

What causes WCST?

Increasingly widespread Internet use has facilitated the exploitation of children live via the new technologies.⁷ According to the International Union of the United Nations Telecommunications, the number of Internet users will reach 3 billion at the end of 2014, two thirds being from developing countries.⁸ These technological advances create new behaviors, such as WCST. Globalization has also increased intercultural contacts, bringing together diverse societies. Poverty is another factor that promotes child commercial sexual exploitation. The economic crisis pushed individuals to find ways to make money by becoming exploiters or being exploited. Periods of financial instability also mean instability within the judicial system, causing corruption and making it more difficult to pursue the perpetrators of such offenses.

Who is involved in the WCST?

⁴ Europol, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online A Strategic Assessment, October 2013, Pg. 9. https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/efc_strategic_assessment_public_version.pdf.

⁵ Webster, S., Davidson, J., Bifulco, A., Gottschalk, P., Caretti, V., and al., European Online Grooming Project : Final report – Executive Summary, 2012. Pg. 9. <http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/wp-content/uploads/European-Online-Grooming-Project-Final-Report.pdf>.

⁶ Hans Guyt, Octopus conference Cooperation against Cybercrime, 2013, http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/cooperation/economiccrime/cybercrime/cy_octopus2013/Octopus2013_en.asp.

⁷ World Tourism Organization, 29th Meeting of the World Tourism Network on Child Protection, 7 March 2014. <http://www2.unwto.org/event/28th-meeting-world-tourism-network-child-protection>

⁸ United Nations News Centre, 5 May 2014. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47729#.UR5PrySxgw>

Few data on perpetrators and victims are available because the phenomenon is relatively novel and particularly difficult to detect by its illegal and hidden nature. Services such as TOR⁹ network, enable abusers to use a hidden IP address, making it impossible to identify users. Services like TOR make it possible to hide a user's IP address, which creates difficulty for law enforcement officials to identify sex offenders and networks behind the commercial sexual exploitation of children online.¹⁰ This lack of reliable data should not obscure the magnitude of phenomenon. The United Nations and the FBI estimate that about 750,000 potential predators are connected every second to the Internet and 40,000 online discussion forums are used daily to get in touch with children.¹¹

According to INHOPE, the international association of Internet hotlines, 1,210,893 reports of child sexual abuse material were processed in 2013. Among the reports, 44% of the material was found in North America, 41% within the EU member states, and 15% in other regions of the world. Regarding the nationalities of the offenders, Interpol found that individuals committing child pornography offenses are mainly from USA, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom and France.¹²

Regarding the victims, INHOPE also revealed the increasing demand for younger female girls. The percentage of girls depicted in child abuse materials was 81%, an increase from 70% in 2011. 71% of all child abuse materials were of pre-pubescent children.¹³ Other organizations, such as Terre des Hommes, state that Southeast Asia is thought to be a major region that supports WCST due to severe poverty, increasing access to the Internet and their established reputation of child sex tourism. However, this does not mean that WCST does not happen in other countries as well.

Consequences of WCST on children

The consequences of WCST on children can be extremely devastating. Firstly, because of the sexual abuse and violence, the physical effects can be numerous: damage to the genitals, infirmities, unwanted pregnancies, etc. and the risk of contracting the AIDS virus. Although there is no direct contact between the abuser and the victim in the case of TSW, the child may be abused by intermediaries. Many psychological issues also arise from sexual abuse. Children found in WCST show signs of aggression, anxiety, and depression. Other psychological consequences of

⁹ Short for The Onion Router, TOR is a free software enabling access to a network of computers to circumvent censorship and to make web browsing anonymous.

¹⁰ Europol, New Cybercrime Report Examine Disturbing Trends in Commercial Online Sexual Abuse, October 2013, Article from <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/new-cybercrime-report-examines-disturbing-trends-commercial-online-child-sex-abuse>. Retrieved on August 20, 2014

¹¹ Council of Europe, Octopus conference, Global Campaign Against Webcam Child Sex Tourism, 2013, http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/cooperation/economiccrime/cybercrime/cy_octopus2013/Octopus2013_en.asp.

¹² Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children. First report on Child Pornography. 2011, p. 166, <http://www.dutchrapporteur.nl/reports/1st-report-CP/>.

¹³ INHOPE, Infographics 2013, <http://www.inhope.org/Libraries/Infographics/INHOPE-2013-Infographic.sflb.ashx>.

sexual abuse may include guilt, fear, and lowered self-esteem. These are permanent psychological effects and may cause nightmares, as well as lead to suicidal, anorexic, or other physically harmful tendencies, which irreversibly affect the health of the child. In addition, images of child pornography produced and disseminated via new technologies never truly disappear from the Internet, which has particularly adverse consequences for the child, because there may be a feeling of abuse in each new viewing. At the social level, the child will have difficulty trusting adults and risk of isolating or, conversely, to be aggressive, affecting its ability to develop its relationship with others. The reintegration of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation can therefore last for years and must remain a priority for governments respond to new trends like WCST.¹⁴

Legislation against WCST

Most countries have a legislative framework that punishes “virtual” sexual exploitation of children, including via new technologies. However, these laws are difficult to implement, because the evidence is difficult to track and investigations are long and expensive. The Sexual abuse of children through live video streaming is a challenge for law enforcement because access to streaming is not an offense if the author does not keep a copy of materiel.¹⁵ Therefore, laws must be amended to criminalize WCST directly.¹⁶ Several international instruments can be used to prosecute perpetrators of such acts. Article 34 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that States Parties are responsible for protecting the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.¹⁷ This is an obligation, which has been reasserted in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography.¹⁸

At European level, The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse¹⁹ also states the offence of “knowingly obtaining access, through information and communication technologies, to child pornography [sic],” This convention is truly important to the protection of children because it was the first time an international treaty included new forms of sexual abuse against children and clearly defined terms such as grooming and sexual exploitation. The first prosecution happened in Australia in 2012. The defendant

¹⁴ Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Long Term Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse, April 2008. Pg. 2, http://www.wcsap.org/sites/www.wcsap.org/files/uploads/resources_and_pubs/rad/RAD_v10_i1.pdf.

¹⁵ Europol, New Cybercrime Report Examine Disturbing Trends in Commercial Online Sexual Abuse, October 2013, Article from <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/new-cybercrime-report-examines-disturbing-trends-commercial-online-child-sex-abuse> retrieved on August 20, 2014.

¹⁶ Aljazeera, Unplugging Online Child Sex Tourism, 22 May 2014, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201405221627-0023755>.

¹⁷ United Nations, Convention on the rights of the Child, 2000, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

¹⁸ UN OCHRC. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPSCCRC.aspx>.

¹⁹ Council of Europe, Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse 2007, http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/children/default_en.asp.

transferred money and instructed people to have children perform sexual acts while he watched via webcam.

Recently, the VGT (Virtual Global Taskforce) announced in early 2014, 29 international arrests of individuals that forced children to be sexually abused on live video web stream for money. The investigations were carried out by the U.K. National Crime Agency, the Australian Federal Police, and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.²⁰ The children were all found in the Philippines and were placed in the custody of the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development.²¹

Actions against WCST

Fighting WCST requires coordination from international and local governments, civil society, and law enforcement. According to a report by the European Financial Coalition against commercial sexual exploitation of children online, “awareness raising activity targeting prosecutors and judges has been identified as essential to achieving convictions and adequate sentencing for such offences...”²² Payment methods used by offenders is also an important element of WCST that needs to be investigated. Monitoring the purchase of child sexual abuse material online can help track down offenders and lead to exposing other criminal activity that sexually exploits children. This should be done in collaboration with the private sector, particularly the financial, ICT, and tourism sector. In the US, European Union, and East Asia Pacific Region, Financial Coalitions Against Child Pornography were formed which encourage credit card companies, banks, online payment channels, law enforcement, to work together. The collaboration has proven to be very effective and essential in the fight against sexual exploitation of children.²³

Raising awareness among Internet users, especially among youth, is another important part of combating WCST. While Terre des Hommes “Sweetie” campaign raised some controversy, it also raised global awareness of the new trend. Over one billion people saw the campaign and 400,000 people signed the petition to encourage justice ministers, police chiefs and child protection chiefs to act and end this injustice. The more people know about the problem, the more pressure civil

²⁰ Australia’s Federal Prosecution Service, Case Reports Child Sexual Exploitation 2011-2012. Article from <http://www.cdpp.gov.au/case-reports/roger-allen-rivo/>, Retrieved on August 20, 2014

²¹ Virtual Global Task Force, 29 arrested in international case involving live online webcam child abuse, 12 January 2014, Article from <http://www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com/2014/29-arrested-international-case-online-webcam-child-abuse/>.

²² Europol, Strategic Assessment of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, October 2013, https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/efc_strategic_assessment_-_public_version.pdf. Pg. 8

²³ ECPAT International’s contribution to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s Child Rights and Business General Comment, April 2012. Pg. 10

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CallSubmissionBusinessSector/ECPATInternational.pdf> Pg. Retrieved on August 20, 2014

society can put on international law enforcement officials and policy makers. This can lead to more convictions and discourage demand.

Conclusion

The fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children through live video streaming is a global issue and a heinous crime against children that needs to end. Poverty, globalization, and advances in technology are important factors that contribute to WCST and should be addressed. Western men constitute the majority of abusers. Understanding this is essential to understanding this new reality. "Traditional" patterns of domination: rich / poor, male / female, white / color, adult / child remain prevalent in this issue. The effects of WCST on children are extremely detrimental, causing severe psychological, physical, and social suffering. National and international laws should continue to be modified and better implemented in order to protect children against this new trend. In order to address the challenges, there needs to be more awareness raised among local and international governments, law enforcement officials and civil society. There also needs to be stronger coordination among key actors, especially within the financial sector. WCST requires efforts from key actors in both the private and public sector. It is through these actions, that commercial sexual exploitation and abuse of children will end.

This analysis was written in August 2014 by Blair Allan (trainee) and reviewed by ECPAT Belgium.

ECPAT Belgium is the Belgian member of ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes). The mission of ECPAT Belgium is to fight against sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes: child prostitution, child pornography, trafficking of children for sexual purposes and child sex tourism.

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