



Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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Section 1 Introduction

Aim and scope

In its new three year strategy¹ CEOP undertakes to assess regularly where and how children are most at risk from sexual exploitation and abuse, to communicate this widely and develop programmes to mitigate threats. The conduct of this 2012/13 Threat Assessment on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (TACSEA) is the primary step towards meeting that commitment.

The TACSEA is an analysis of the threat to the United Kingdom from child sexual exploitation and abuse. A restricted version is produced for law enforcement. The aim is to provide an accurate picture of the nature and scale of current offending and highlight emerging and developing trends insofar as they are a threat in or emanating from the UK. This assessment represents the most up-to-date understanding of the current level of threat posed by child sexual exploitation and abuse. It takes into account information received by CEOP from industry, the public and law enforcement. This engagement with partners allows for current threats to be outlined and for the identification of areas in need of greater understanding.

The TACSEA reviews the areas identified as priority themes for CEOP in 2011 and assesses the extent to which the offending landscape has changed throughout the year. In keeping with the six strategic objectives set out for the next three years, the intention is to continue to ensure that the deployment of CEOP's specialist resources is focused on addressing areas of greatest risk.

CEOP will form an integral part of the National Crime Agency (NCA), which will be established in 2013. Within the NCA, CEOP will further develop its strategic approach intended to prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse, to protect children and young people who are at risk of victimisation and to pursue offenders who target children in the UK or overseas.

This threat assessment derives in part from CEOP's understanding of the similarities between organised crime and a large amount of child sexual exploitation and abuse. The offending behaviours are often organised, complex and result in serious harm. As highlighted throughout this report, many individuals coalesce to form online offender networks that are as tightly controlled as their 'real world' equivalents. It is understood that the individuals involved in these networks are generally unknown to each other offline and are commonly not financially motivated. The threat these offenders pose will be mitigated utilising the full range of law enforcement tools and assets to prevent the on-going abuse and exploitation of children both online and in the offline world.

Information sources and limitations

This analysis is based predominantly on information derived from CEOP's core business of protecting children from harm. However, in addition to this, professional insight and research conducted by CEOP staff and partners was also utilised. Whilst much more can be done, the increasing use of technology, as well as the enhanced awareness of industry, the general public and law enforcement is leading to a corresponding increase in the availability of data.

Over recent years a rise has been seen in the levels of reporting and convictions for sexual offences against children. However, in this respect we should recognise the potential positive impact of national campaigns to combat sexual abuse, changes to legislation, public policy and public awareness, as well as the work of CEOP and shifts in policing priorities, encouraging the early reporting of such crimes. It is arguable that fluctuations such as these reflect an increasing awareness and understanding of such crimes rather than a rise or fall in the number of offences being committed against children.

¹ CEOP Centre Plan 2012/13. www.ceop.police.uk/publications

Section 2 General Picture and Emerging Threats

Child sexual exploitation and abuse

The most rigorous and comprehensive indication of the overall prevalence of sexual abuse today can be found in a major study - 'Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today'² which is based on asking a representative sample of UK children and young people to reflect on their experiences of abuse during childhood.

In comparison to their earlier study in 2000, the findings suggest a decline in serious forms of contact sexual abuse. In addition, the level of coerced sexual acts against under 16 year olds declined from a 6.8% national prevalence rate in 1998 to 5% in 2009. These findings are consistent with other data.

Additional research has shown a consensus in public perception which identifies 'stranger danger' as the most significant risk in respect of sexual offending against children. However, empirical evidence shows that approximately 80% of sexual offences against children are committed within the family or by persons known to the child or children, often in positions of trust. Similarly, approximately 80% of sexual offences against children occur in the home of either the offender or the victim.

This assessment acknowledges that child sexual exploitation and abuse takes place in both online and offline environments and that the distinction is in many ways artificial to children and young people in 2012.

Self generated indecent imagery

CEOP has seen a marked increase in the number of reports where young teenagers appear to have taken still or video indecent imagery of themselves which is then shared online. For the purposes of this assessment such material is referred to by the generic term, 'self generated indecent imagery' (SGII). It is worth noting that the distribution methods for SGII can vary widely. As such, the term encompasses a range of behaviours and accompanying levels of risk.

During 2011/12, CEOP found that SGII is distributed by its author in the following ways (in order of prevalence):

- ▶▶ live one to one video chat on websites;
- ▶▶ video chat via instant messaging applications;
- ▶▶ files sent by email to another person;
- ▶▶ files uploaded to public video hosting websites;
- ▶▶ files being sent as attachments during online chat sessions; and
- ▶▶ files used as profile images or posted on social networking websites.

In contrast to the findings of the previous TACSEA, the picture in 2012 shows that a vast majority of SGII is being freely produced and uploaded to the internet by children without external influence, coercion or threat from adults or others.

SGII are taken for a variety of reasons within consensual relationships between young people. These include a private image taken for a boyfriend or girlfriend or images taken to be used as online profile pictures. Often these images are subsequently posted online or distributed by the person for whom they were intended as a joke, after an argument or once the relationship has ended. It cannot be discounted, however, that the exchange of SGII, whilst it may have been willingly produced by a young person, can indicate an underlying vulnerability or behavioural concern.

² NSPCC, 2011.

Section 2 General Picture and Emerging Threats

Almost 22% of reports received by CEOP from industry in 2011/12 related to the distribution of SGII³. Whilst the majority of SGII is produced by older teenagers, almost a third of SGII reported to CEOP in 2011/12 related to children under the age of 15. Occasionally SGII, particularly where it involves a subject under 15, can be the product of serious criminal activity by a third party or may be used for such purposes subsequently. Therefore whilst volumes generally are increasing it is important not to lose sight of the real and lasting harm it can cause.

The increase in teenagers' ownership of smart phones, as reported by Ofcom⁴, is likely to result in an increase in the prevalence of SGII production. Two thirds of teenagers say they have used their smart phone while socialising with others. Additionally, a smart phone allows them the means and opportunity for unsupervised access to the internet.

The majority of self taken imagery received by CEOP is currently assessed to have been intended as a private exchange between two young people, where children have been involved in consensual sexual activity and experimentation. CEOP's efforts have focused on identifying and safeguarding the child authors of SGII. More work can be done, however, to identify the sliding scale of risk and harm that accompanies the variety of ways in which SGII is being produced and distributed, and the extent to which these are driven by the malevolent intentions of a third party in grooming, deceiving and threatening children.

To protect children better, a greater focus is required on the criminals who actively exploit their victim's relative vulnerability through threats and intimidation. This aspect is addressed in detail as a priority theme later in this document.

Randomised video chat

Throughout 2011, CEOP has noticed an increase in the number of reports received relating to randomised, anonymous video chat services. In the last year there has been a proliferation of such websites following the success of market leaders. Sites offer randomly chosen webcam chat sessions, which are engaging for children, but often expose them to high levels of sexual activity and sexualised conversation.

Social networking

In 2011, social networking accounted for more than 20% of all time spent online⁵. The growth of this medium since 2009 has largely been driven by the growth of Facebook with an estimated 24.8 million UK users visiting the site each month, six times more than visited Twitter, the second most popular site. Facebook remains the world's most prolifically accessed social networking website, with a wide and continually growing membership of children.

Whilst children can make themselves vulnerable in relation to their online behaviour it is equally the case that offenders target and exploit this vulnerability. CEOP sees frequent grooming behaviour targeted towards children and social networking sites are the most commonly reported environment in which this activity takes place. This is likely to be due to the ease with which individuals can create profiles on such sites.

Criminals use a number of methods to build friendships with children on social networking sites. Once a relationship is formed the offender will use their position to initiate some form of sexually exploitative activity, be that in non contact forms via webcam (as discussed later in this document) or through contact offline.

³ Sample of 2293 reports received from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in November 2011.

⁴ Ofcom Communications Market Report – August 2011.

⁵ UKOM/Nielsen August 2011.

Section 2 General Picture and Emerging Threats

The trafficking of children to the UK

The UK continues to be a significant transit and destination country for child trafficking, with reporting confirming the existence of child trafficking both into and within the UK. Children are trafficked into the UK from a diverse range of countries for a range of reasons and the trafficking routes used and methodologies employed by traffickers remain varied. CEOP has recently completed an assessment of the trafficking⁶ of children into the UK. The report covers the period from 1st January 2011 to 15th September 2011 and highlights the following trends and patterns identified from the data.

Overall, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe were the most notable source regions for child trafficking into the UK. Victim demographics for this reporting period show a number of established trends. Across all regions the vast majority of victims were aged 14-17, with relatively low numbers of trafficking victims identified for younger age groups. When looking at gender, there were generally more female victims of child trafficking identified than male, with significant differences existing between regions. The majority of victims originating from Africa and Eastern Europe were female, whilst from Asia, they were mostly male. The explanation for these trends is likely to lie in the type of exploitation the children were trafficked into the UK to suffer. Many Eastern European girls, for example are trafficked to the UK for prostitution, whilst many Vietnamese boys are trafficked to work in the illegal drugs trade. However, intelligence suggests that a number of trafficked children are the victim of multiple forms of exploitation and abuse.

Discussions have taken place between CEOP and the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC), clarifying responsibilities in respect of the trafficking of children into the UK from abroad for sexual purposes. In keeping with its remit, the UKHTC will take strategic and operational primacy for all trafficking into the UK, including where this is for purposes of sexual exploitation.

⁶ Strategic Threat Assessment of Child Trafficking in the UK.



Section 3 Priority Themes

1. The targeting of children online based on their heightened vulnerability

There are a number of ways in which children are persuaded, manipulated, groomed or threatened into performing sexual activity over webcam or sending indecent images to an adult offender in a way that constitutes non contact sexual abuse. In many cases this follows a similar pattern to offline grooming where persuasion by the offender for a child to expose themselves sexually often gives way to threats and intimidation.

In the past year CEOP received reports indicating that children were being incited to perform sexual activity via webcam by means of targeted criminal coercion by offenders. Offenders will use various methods to coerce a child into giving their username and password for a social networking site. Compromising the child's social networking presence in this way is used by the offender to get the child to perform sexual acts or send indecent images online. This then forms the basis for further threats and incitement to perform increasingly serious sexual acts.

In such situations, children often fail to understand the abuse they have suffered. Researchers and therapists believe that this is because of children's heightened sense of shame, exposure and lack of control over the disclosure process. Operational experience over the last year supports this.

In the online environment, evidence from a study of 25,000 children across the European Union in 2011 found that teenagers reported encountering more risks online than younger children, with 63% of 15 and 16 year olds reporting one or more forms of illegal or upsetting behaviour online. Significantly, the study also found no discernable difference between the likelihood of girls and boys encountering such risks online.

Whilst Ofcom's Children's and Parents' Media Use and Attitudes report found that the number of 12–15 year olds communicating with people they don't know in such environments fell by a quarter in 2011 to 24%, a wider report for EU Kids Online⁷ identified that almost half of 15 and 16 year olds across Europe had contact with new people online.

Whilst online grooming for sexual purposes is not new, the use of sometimes subtle social engineering techniques to this end appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. Without sufficient recognition and intervention from law enforcement there is every likelihood that this trend will grow. With the forecasted growth of internet use across the world, particularly in developing nations, it is also increasingly likely that UK children will also be targeted by offenders based overseas.

Key findings

- ▶ Offenders are targeting children through social networking sites.
- ▶ Offenders use social engineering techniques to gain control over the social networking accounts of young children.
- ▶ Offenders use threats to coerce children into performing harmful and degrading sexual activity online.

2: Those who sexually offend against children using the anonymity afforded by the hidden internet

The hidden internet provides a perception of anonymity for those surfing or hosting websites. Websites facilitating money laundering, drug use, trafficking and other forms of criminality proliferate across such networks with a significant and growing use by those with a sexual interest in children. Of course, not all users of the hidden internet access these networks for criminal purposes but the overwhelming majority of sites and forums available relate to unlawful activity of one form or another.

Hidden internet sites are believed to be a source of new or 'first generation' indecent images of children. Many indecent images and videos are seen for the first time on such sites, suggesting many of the users are involved in the production

⁷ Disadvantaged Children and Online Risk, Livingstone et al, 2011.

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of the material and contact sexual abuse. In some cases children are being abused to order by members of forums with the resulting imagery subsequently shared within the community. In due course, some of these first generation images and videos find their way onto peer-to-peer ('P2P'), image hosting and social networking sites on the open internet.

CEOP remains committed to targeting all those involved in the production, distribution and possession of indecent images of children.

Key findings

- ▶ Many UK offenders are using the hidden internet to network and distribute IIOC.
- ▶ IIOC are being produced by those using the hidden internet and first posted in that environment.
- ▶ Almost half of UK hidden internet use is estimated to involve paedophile activities.

3. The production, distribution and possession of indecent images of children

In a representative sample of 610 actionable reports received by CEOP from industry, 306 (51%) were found to relate to the production, distribution or possession of IIOC (excluding self generated indecent images). The majority of these reports (58%) related to images uploaded to a storage facility or email service and approximately 11% were social networking sites⁸.

Another principal route for the distribution of IIOC is assessed to be peer to peer (P2P) networking or file sharing. These systems are developing to create a relatively enclosed global network environment for the distribution of indecent images of children in both still and video form.

A key characteristic of a new generation of P2P, which sets it apart from conventional facilities, is that in order to share files, users must first be invited into smaller groups in much the same way as happens in social networking environments. This means that it is not possible for those outside the group to see which files are available from a particular user.

CEOP is aware of a number of international investigations that have focused on such P2P services which have resulted in successful prosecutions. CEOP data suggests that it is predominantly users in the developed world who currently make use of such services as a vehicle for viewing and distributing IIOC. With the rapid growth of the internet, an increase in the use of P2P technology is likely, particularly in developing countries⁹.

Between 2010/11 and 2011/12, CEOP has observed an increase in the number of offenders identified for producing IIOC involving multiple victims. Over the same period, CEOP has also seen a rise in the number of female IIOC producers identified, with all but one, acting in collaboration with male offenders.

Observations by CEOP also suggest a rise in offenders taking so called 'candid' IIOC of multiple child victims covertly in public and private settings. This may be a result of technological advancements in still and video camera technology over recent years, with high quality equipment now lending itself to concealed use.

CEOP's Thematic Assessment 'A Picture of Abuse'¹⁰ identifies a strong correlation between those who commit IIOC possession offences and contact offending, and explores research and practitioner experience to deliver in-depth analysis of this issue.

Peer to peer networks and other related technologies are likely to evolve and mutate to accommodate changes in legitimate customer needs. They are also likely to improve their security features, enable new functionality and increase the speed and availability of downloads. CEOP assesses, through professional observations, that an offending path beginning with

⁸ CEOP Referrals data 2011.

⁹ Research Article – A Peer-to-Peer Internet for the Developing World Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 2009, 3 1-4.

¹⁰ www.ceop.police.uk/publications

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the sharing of IIOC on the clear internet, through P2P and its variants to the more hidden areas of the internet is becoming increasingly widespread in 2012.

CEOP and its partners across law enforcement will continue to target the P2P networks' growing user-base to identify individuals who use this service for the mass distribution and consumption of IIOC.

Key findings

- ▶ Over half of reports to CEOP from industry concerned IIOC.
- ▶ P2P remains a significant method of accessing and distributing IIOC in 2012.
- ▶ CEOP data shows a 30% increase in the number of offenders producing IIOC in 2011.
- ▶ Our analysis makes a strong link between possessing IIOC and contact sexual offending.

4. Those who travel overseas to sexually offend against children

At the beginning of 2011, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, child pornography And Trafficking of children for sexual purposes) reported that 135 British nationals were detained in foreign countries in relation to offences of child sexual abuse, with CEOP receiving 61 notifications regarding British nationals who had been arrested abroad for child sexual abuse offences during that year. These notifications covered 26 different countries, the most common being the USA, Spain, Australia, Netherlands, France, Germany, Cambodia and Thailand. However this may reflect the efficiency of notification procedures rather than more prevalent offending.

Where dates of birth and conviction data were provided, analysis showed 80% of these offenders were aged between 40 and 70 years.

There is evidence to suggest that serious sex offenders who are known to authorities in the UK seek out teaching or volunteer jobs abroad. Although in the majority of cases the occupations of these individuals are unknown to CEOP, it is recognised that a disproportionate number of travelling sex offenders seek access to children through their work as teachers. Other occupations found to be common amongst this group are charity worker, orphanage worker, day-care worker or church minister. This concurs with findings from ECPAT UK (2011) that international orphanages, children's homes and schools will be targeted by offenders wanting to sexually exploit children. It is important to note that the characteristics that make a child in the developing world vulnerable differ significantly, with socio-economic status, for example, contributing significantly to a child's vulnerability.

In response to the large number of offenders gaining employment as teachers, CEOP is currently working to implement a worldwide recognised certificate to allow international schools to access an offender's criminal record.

Key findings

- ▶ Offenders travelling abroad for the purpose of sexually exploiting children remained a problem in 2011. This is accompanied by an increase in the level of reporting, suggesting a raised awareness of the issue.
- ▶ A number of offenders attempt to gain access to children through related employment and as such the different aspects that make such children vulnerable must be considered when creating solutions.

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5. Group and gang associated child sexual exploitation (GGACSE)

Whilst CEOP's understanding of group and gang associated child sexual exploitation (GGACSE) is growing, the full nature of scale of the threat from this type of offending is not yet fully understood. One of the reasons for this is that victims, particularly those from vulnerable groups, often disengage from protective services as a result of their grooming and exploitation. Awareness of these forms of child sexual exploitation has increased markedly in recent months with a number of police investigations attracting significant media coverage.

CEOP's thematic assessment 'Out of Mind, Out of Sight' published in 2011 found that whilst group associated sexual exploitation is taking place across the UK, much of it falls below the radar of the authorities. The assessment set out to draw on the experiences of police forces, NGOs, academia and victims to identify patterns in offender and victim profiles and offending methodologies. The aim was to inform investigative and educational responses to the threat.

Whilst there are many common characteristics shared by both types of offending, such as the age and vulnerability of victims, group and gang associated exploitation are two distinct typologies. In group associated sexual exploitation, offending generally takes place within loose networks, connected through formal and informal associations. This can be distinguished from gang associated exploitation where offenders see themselves, and are seen by others as affiliates of a named criminal group, with distinctive beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The sexual exploitation of children within a gang setting can be accompanied by levels of violence not generally seen in group associated offending.

This type of child sexual abuse is complex with the causes, behaviours and motivations often very difficult to untangle. Those victims who have disclosed have been vulnerable and under social, financial and economical pressures. Some have taken to leaving home or have gone missing whilst in local care arrangements, opting or being coerced into informal income as a means to get by. Others have not considered themselves as victims at all, having been normalised to sexual violence. Those within gangs have endured sexual exploitation for the inclusion and perceived protection afforded by their gang.

There is little demographic data available which helps in predetermining GGACSE offenders or victims. In those cases of which CEOP is aware, the offending is predominantly male against female although there are a small number of exceptions. Ethnicity is one area which has received high profile media attention as a result of recent convictions. Data currently suggests that a disproportionate number of offenders are British Asian, particularly British Pakistani, males. However, more work needs to be done with a broader set of data to better understand whether any correlation exists.

The recent convictions highlight the need for all those who come into contact with children to be aware of the possible signs of GGACSE and for a multi agency intervention to take place as soon as possible. CEOP remains committed to working with partners across the country to fill gaps in our current knowledge of this offending and the role of schools, police, children's services and health agencies cannot be understated. Such offending is a key priority for CEOP in 2012/13.

Key findings

- ▶ The scale and nature of GGACSE remains undefined, but is happening across the UK. Victims must be encouraged, and have the confidence to engage with protective services.
- ▶ In the majority of cases, networks of male offenders are targeting female victims with social, financial or economical vulnerabilities.
- ▶ Greater awareness of GGACSE among frontline services is needed to identify potential victims.
- ▶ Appropriate multi agency interventions and support services should be put in place for the victim as soon as possible.

Section 4 Summary

The TACSEA identifies and analyses the five priority themes set out below which represent key threats for child sexual exploitation and abuse for 2012/13. Given the interdependence and overlaps present in this type of offending, there are cross-cutting issues that are common to more than one priority theme. Matters not falling within one of the priority themes undergo a separate prioritisation process to ensure that they receive a measured and appropriate response.

The priority themes identified by CEOP in 2012/13 are:

- ▶▶ the targeting of children online based on their heightened vulnerability;
- ▶▶ those who sexually offend against children using the anonymity provided by the hidden internet;
- ▶▶ the production, possession and distribution of indecent images of children;
- ▶▶ those who travel overseas to sexually offend against children; and
- ▶▶ group and gang associated child sexual exploitation (GGACSE).

These priority themes will inform CEOP's business planning process for 2012/13 and the formulation of its operational priorities for the year. The themes will be subject to on-going assessment throughout the year to monitor the extent to which the threat changes. This will provide CEOP and its partners with an overview of vulnerabilities and trends, so that it can properly formulate effective policies, programs and plans in response.

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