

Internet Facilitated Sex Crimes

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Abstract

The internet is a unique and interesting place. This is a place where people from all levels of society can connect. This is a place where you can book a last-minute reservation at your favorite place. This is also a place where you can pay bills from the comfort of your own home.

Unfortunately, everything about the internet is not very bright and happy. As much good as the internet is used for, there is also a lot of bad. Many crimes get committed daily on the internet, in particular sex crimes. As unfortunate as it is, it still happens. This research highlights the concepts of sex crimes, who commits them, how they impact the victims, and preventative measures. The intended outcome is that knowledge will be gained and shared, to help prevent online sexual exploitation.

Introduction

Since their conception, computers have undeniably made our day-to-day lives easier. Computers today come in various shapes and sizes, phones, tablets, laptops, and even watches. Another treat that came with computers, is what we know as the internet. Both of these working cohesively allows for many good things to happen. Shopping around for a home loan, just use your preferred computing device and click into your favorite browser. Need to type a report and upload it, doing so is as easy as a snap of the fingers. Even our least favorite task of paying bills, is much easier than it has ever been. As with any person or piece of “advanced” technology, nothing is perfect. Even though computers and the internet are such great tools that we are fortunate to have in our lives, not everything with them is all peaches and cream.

As much good that they bring, they also bring an equal, if not greater, bad with them. A lot of not-so-great things happen with computers and the internet. Many of those not-so-great things involve breaking one or multiple laws. As the internet and computers started their world domination, there also came a new faction of crime. It takes no rocket scientist to figure out that crimes are committed on the internet ,if I had to guess every hour on the hour like clockwork. There are many crimes that can be facilitated by using a computer, or computing device, and the internet, some worse than others. One of the more troubling and sickening ones are sex crimes facilitated through the internet. These crimes involve everyone from months old children to people well into adulthood in a numerous number of situations. This research will discuss and highlight the in’s & outs of sex crimes in relation to the internet. Different internet crimes and the

people who facilitate them along with sensitive topics such as prostitution, child grooming , and child pornography will be discussed. How law enforcement agencies and our governing bodies act to prevent and protect people from these crimes will also be discussed. The importance of highlighting these crimes and how to keep safe from them is unmeasurable. Keeping the internet a safe place to operate should be everyone's top priority.

Internet & It's Present-Day Use

For the majority of people and countries around the world, the internet and devices that are enabled by them, make their world go round. In this new era of technology, the internet is described as a “universal global neural network,” due to the extent of which it is used. (Dudhe, Kadam, Hushangabade, & Deshmukh, 2017) This concept of the internet being a “ neural network,” is better known by the term Internet of Things(IoT). This basically describes how multiple systems & devices are connected with each other, locally and globally, through the internet to transmit data. In the IoT world, communication can come in forms such as, smart devices interacting with each other, radio frequency technologies, and different infrastructures interacting with each other. Because of these communications and data processing, everyday devices we use are much more efficient, safer, and easier to use. (Dudhe, Kadam, Hushangabade, & Deshmukh, 2017)

The application of the IoT concept comes in many unsuspecting forms and major fields. In factories and production plants, oxygen and toxic gas levels, internal temperature, and ozone levels can all be monitored. In the event that an irregularity is detected, an alert can be triggered ensuring the safety of all workers and employees. (Dudhe, Kadam, Hushangabade, & Deshmukh, 2017) In the health care field, patients with conditions such as diabetes, dementia, & Alzheimer's, can be remotely monitored so health care professionals can collect data and

respond appropriately to the needs of their patients. (Dudhe, Kadam, Hushangabade, & Deshmukh, 2017) Without a doubt, the relief that has been ushered in by the rapid development of technology is unmeasurable.

Technology Facilitated Crimes & Their Facilitators

According to a study done in 2011, North America alone averaged about 273.1 million internet users since then, the number has grown. (Shipley & Bowker, 2014) The internet and the devices that we use to connect to the internet are great tools to have. Tasks that once required physical interaction with another entity, are now able to be completed with a few clicks or taps. Though this is great, both the internet and any device capable of connecting to it, can be a straight-shot uninterrupted gateway to crime. The internet and its associated devices have the ability to serve as a medium for a various number of crimes. “Criminal acts on the Internet are as varied as there are crimes to commit.” (Shipley & Bowker, 2014) This is basically saying that there are but a few crimes that you can’t facilitate through the use of the internet. Crimes conducted through the internet are referred to as cyber and internet crimes.

Broadly speaking, a cybercrime is defined as a “ criminal offense that has been created or made possible by the advent of technology, or a traditional crime which has been transformed by technology’s use.” (Shipley & Bowker, 2014) This is not to be confused with the definition of Internet Crimes, which are “ crimes committed on or facilitated through the Internet’s use.” Hacking and computer intrusion would be examples of internet crimes, while social engineering and malware delivery would be examples of cybercrimes. (Shipley & Bowker, 2014) Now that we’ve defined the crimes, the question to be answered is who commits said crimes. The term to

describe the people who conduct these crimes is known as cyber or internet criminal. These are typically late teen to middle aged people, usually males, who are either very technically skilled or have little to no technical experience. (Shipley & Bowker, 2014) There are multiple categories that an online criminal can fall into, some dependent on skill level, some just general categories. Regardless of which category they fall in, all of them contribute to the realm of online crimes.

Dark Side of the Web

As we know by now, the number of crimes that can be conducted online & through a digital device is virtually limitless. Some are very harmless minor in nature crimes, while others are profoundly serious crimes that carry felonies and lifelong confinement sentences. Focusing on one of the more serious crimes, a theme very prevalent in our current technological age are online sex crimes. It is important to know though, not all sexual related material facilitated through the internet is not illegal nor does it constitute a crime. Things like sexual education or legal sexual entertainment are examples. The problem comes in when internet users deviate from the legal side of online sexual activities to the illegal side. That is the opening to a path down an unbelievably bad rabbit hole.

Prior to the invention of the internet and the capabilities of our current computer systems, sex crimes for the most part required in person physical contact with a person. Today this is substantially “easy for a perpetrator to remain anonymous and sexually assault digitally.” (Dulger, 2023) In addition to the anonymity of the perpetrator, the current digital environment also facilitates the commission of crimes in general, especially those in our focus of sexual crimes. (Dulger, 2023) Communicating via the internet is, as we know, the quickest way to share data etc. throughout the world. A concerning aspect of this though, is that it creates opportunities

for perpetrators of sexual crimes and sexual crimes in general to be committed and creates a new type as well as area of crimes to be committed. (Dulger, 2023) The occurrence of these types of crimes being committed steadily increase day by day.

As we've now discussed cybercriminals and sexual crimes, it's time to get an understanding of who commits these crimes. According to research done, people who commit sexually based crimes on the internet are usually addicted to the adventure of sexual satisfaction. This person, at one point, only aroused by "reasonable" content, eventually "needs" deviant content in order to be aroused. After a while, the person becomes insensitive to "sexual perversion, which can easily result in committing a crime. (Dulger, 2023) The act of committing these crimes, produces the idea of the use of internet for sexual crimes. As stated before, this is the result of the current nature of the worlds internet. The internets accessibility, affordability, and anonymity are all traits that have been identified as reasons people commit sexual crimes online. The internet is accessible for majority of the world's population, is fairly cheap to purchase, and considerably easier to hide your identity. Everything considered, it seems that conducting sexual crimes on the internet is easier than anyone probably imagined.

Out of the traits discussed, one of these stands out the most to cybersex offenders, or predators as they are more widely known as. The hidden identities of these predators draw them in the most. (Dulger, 2023) This also clears a path for victims of sex crimes to be more vulnerable. Predators then take advantage of this newly found vulnerability, to find and exploit their targets. Because of the fact that there is no need to physically interact, there comes a lack of sensitivity and empathy towards people. Both predators, and victims, become detached from the idea of being on the internet leading to the interactions with each other. According to a study done in 2017, at any given moment, there are approximately 750,000 predators online.

(Dorasamy, Kalianna, Jambulingam, Ramadhan, & Sivaji, 2021) Predators often interact with their victims, very easily, through chat and video platforms, sometimes even their personal phone text messages. In one example, a 23-year-old male admitted to using the video game Minecraft to lure minor children to engage in sexual conversation. In 2015, he was sentenced to jail for those conversations that involved a 12- and 14-year-old boy. (Dorasamy, Kalianna, Jambulingam, Ramadhan, & Sivaji, 2021) Apparently, nothing is off limits when it comes to predators looking for a victim.

Sex Crimes

The overall definition of online predators interacting with their victims, mainly adolescents, to gain their trust for sexual and sex trafficking purposes, is referred to as grooming. A study conducted in 2017 on a school of children, in Malaysia, yielded a handful of results. A ratio of 1:10 of the children had at one point been asked to upload explicit content of themselves to the internet. An astounding 80% of reported rape cases recorded in the same study involved victims under the age of 18. (Dorasamy, Kalianna, Jambulingam, Ramadhan, & Sivaji, 2021) Another unsuspecting crime that can occur is sexual harassment. Usually, people may think of this as of the crimes that need physical contact, but that is not the case. In the cyberworld, harassment can come in many forms. Sending unsolicited sexual messages, making obscene “jokes,” or sending unsolicited sexual images are examples. In the realm of harassment, there is also a concept of unwanted interest, which is a form of harassment. This may look like asking about another person’s genitals, sexual life, or other intimacy related area. (Dorasamy, Kalianna, Jambulingam, Ramadhan, & Sivaji, 2021) Any time this is done through an online platform, it is a form of online sexual harassment, which is a crime. Online sexual coercion is another area. This happens when methods of threats, extortion, or compulsion are used to force unwanted

sexual encounters. One of the most prevalent areas of online sex crimes are those involving images, of both over and underaged victims. There is a concept known as revenge pornography. This happens when sexually explicit images or videos are obtained and distributed, for the purposes of this research, online. Continuing with the topic of image related crimes brings up the topic of child pornography. This is defined as the possession, production, or distribution of images or videos involving minors presented in a sexual nature. In the country of Turkey, this particular crimes, unsurprisingly, is labeled as both a “Crime against society,” and a “Crime against public morals.” (Dorasamy, Kalianna, Jambulingam, Ramadhan, & Sivaji, 2021) One thing to note though, there are definitely more sex crimes than the ones mentioned that are facilitated online.

Laws & Law Enforcement

By now there should be an understanding that crimes occur on the internet. As much as there are crimes and predators occurring online, there is also law enforcement working to detect and prevent these crimes. Law enforcement officials use various methods of investigation, which in turn helps prevent these heinous crimes while simultaneously catching the predators committing the crimes. An interesting fact is that investigating in cyberspace is not new to this century. In fact, the first traces of a computer related investigation appeared in the late 1970's. The overall response to investigation cybercrimes in general come from various levels of law enforcement. Any entity from local to federal plays a part in this investigative process. More specifically for minor related instances, there is a national agency known as the US Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces. This agency specifically helps detect and prevent online sex crimes against children.

There are many techniques law enforcement agencies use to proactively catch predators in the act. One method in particular involves an officer creating a fake online identity in hopes to catch a suspected groomer. For the purpose of the investigation, they might pose as a child or another predator with email accounts or cell phone numbers to back up their identity. This particular method has now been distributed across the globe and is used by many agencies in several countries. (Urbas, 2010). Even though these people often times get caught, not always are they punished as they should be. Every country, naturally, has different laws and punishments calling for punishments for cyber groomers to be applied differently based on location. In Australia, for example, there is a criminal code that prohibits using an electronic device to “procure” an underage person. Violating this code carries a minimum of 15 years imprisonment. (Chopin, 2021) In Singapore, violating what is essentially the same exact criminal code, carries a 3-year imprisonment and/or a fine. (Chopin, 2021). There are also very tricky situations that law enforcement run into while attempting to investigate, prosecute, and jail online predators that may hinder their ability to do their jobs. Specifically in the United States and Canada, there is a term known as entrapment that is often used as a defense while in court. This term refers to the engagement of undercover “sting” operations conducted by law enforcement agencies. Though this defense does not always mean much of anything, it is definitely a loophole used by defense attorneys to get their clients out of a jam. The good news for using this defense is that there has to be proof that the officials conducting the sting “engaged in deceptive conduct.” (Chopin, 2021). Trust that agencies all over the world are proactively attempting to remove the bad spirits from the web.

Victim Impact & Prevention

Undoubtedly going through a sexual assault or abuse experience, is a traumatic one. In general, not person is going to respond to similar situations exactly the same. Broadly speaking though, many victims have similar post experience impacts. In past studies, it has been showing people involved, whether it be the victim or the perpetrator, are more susceptible to being exposed to and involved in cyber-sex crimes again. (Lee & Lee, 2024) The same study showed that victimization in the cyber world and intimate relationships resulted in depressive symptoms. More specifically, in the events of cyber victimization symptoms of antisocial behavior was found to exist. (Lee & Lee, 2024) A conclusion drawn from this is that cyber victimization has longer term emotional and behavioral impacts, which as a result increases the likelihood of experiencing online exploitation again. These people are also more likely to be less responsive to witnessing online violence and may engage in it themselves as a result of being exposed to it. As we acknowledge that more people participate in these crimes and the severe impact these crimes have on their victims, we also need to acknowledge ways to prevent this from happening.

With children, the role of the parent in preventing online sexual exploitation is critical. In a framework developed in 2015, the importance of parental action to prevent this was highlighted and three main factors derived. The framework showed the parental restriction, guidance, and monitoring of self-efficacy and self – regulation all influences a child's internet usage. The framework also measured the knowledge of parental awareness of digital laws and technologies for privacy protection. A conclusion drawn from this is that parents' who are unaware of those laws and protections are at an increased risk of exposing their child to cyber exploitation. (Lee & Lee, 2024) In addition to being aware, several other measures can be taken as a way of prevention. Limiting internet time minimizes the opportunity for exploitation to occur. Being sexually educated helps identify indicators of online grooming and exploitation.

Withholding identifying information, such as age, from unknown people who may be inclined to take advantage of that information. One last thing to consider, spending time with family. Do so can help deal with any emotional and mental factors that might contribute to the vulnerability that might cause someone to be taken advantage of online. People of all ages can use these tips, which will hopefully prevent and deter any attempts from preying online predators.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we cannot deny that the internet brings, those who it is available to, great joy and less stress. It helps us in many aspects of our everyday lives, which is much appreciated. The way that most the world has adopted and adapted to the use of the internet, since its inception is quite amazing. While we are able to acknowledge the good, no one should disagree that the bad also needs to be acknowledged. The internet can be a very dark and dangerous place to operate. As we have the ability to, almost instantly, connect with many different people and visit so many sites, those things are not always to best. There are people who are online absolutely waiting for the opportunity to take advantage of the most vulnerable people. As we know, there are law enforcement agencies who work to help prevent these crimes, but they cannot detect nor prevent everything. It is important for people of all ages to be aware and vigilant when operating online. Even if you have to take a course on internet safety, or do some research of your own, staying safe is the top priority. Once the knowledge is obtained, it is encouraged to spread and share that knowledge with other people. Working together can make the internet a safer place.

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