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VICTIMOLOGICAL PREVENTION OF ONLINE CRIMES AGAINST SEXUAL IMMUNITY OF MINORS

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In the article the problem of online sexual abuse of children is analyzed. Especial attention is given to the factor of minor internet users' victim behavior. In the article are introduced the measures of victimological prevention of online sexual abuse of children.

Key words: Internet, minors, crimes against sexual immunity, cyber-grooming, victimization, crime prevention.

The Internet is becoming more and more popular among children and adolescents. There is a growing amount of time spent by minors online, the intensity of internet use. Being online is becoming quite commonplace, everyday way of existence that easily combines with traditional offline reality. According to the research "Children of Russia On-line" conducted by the Internet Development Fund and the Department of Psychology of the Moscow State University in 2010 in 11 regions of Russia [6, 46-55], the average age of first use of the Internet is 10 years, and in Moscow and St. Petersburg - 9 years. Almost 70% of Russian children access the Internet every day or almost every day. A quarter of those surveyed Russian children is online from 7 up to 14 hours per week, one out of six - from 14 to 21 hours. Every fifth child spends online more 21 hours per week that is more 3 per day.

One of the most popular uses of the Internet - is a social network that gives children the opportunity to communicate and share information with their friends.

In our country, more than 75 percent of children have a profile in a social network; with almost a third of them has more than one profile in different networks. The leader of popularity among the networks is a network “vkontakte” – 89%, followed by “odnoklassniki” – 16%, Facebook – 4%, My space – 2% and other social networks. 19% of Russian children have more than 100 friends in social networks.

While in the virtual space of the Internet children are faced with the whole set of cyber threats, among which are malware, Internet fraud, abuse and harassment (cyberbullying) and others. One of the most dangerous among them according to their social consequences is a threat to a child of becoming a victim of crimes against sexual integrity by virtual communication on the Internet. In foreign countries to denote adult’s actions aimed at establishing on the Internet a rapport with a child in order to induce him to enter into sexual relations is used the term of cybergrooming or online grooming. They cover both the actions that are intended to getting by a pedophile some sexual satisfaction and actions aimed on involving children in commercial sexual exploitation. On one of the thematic Russian websites on Internet safety in the section “communication risks” describes a typical mechanism of grooming: “an offender often communicates online with a child pretending to be a coeval of the child or a little older. He gets acquainted with a victim in a chat, a forum or a social network trying to establish friendly relations with it and go to face-to-face communication. While communicating in person (“in private”), it gains a confidence of the child, trying to get to know a mobile number and arrange a meeting” [4].

According to European standards cybergrooming is considered as a criminal offense. Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse from October 25, 2007, in the section of substantive criminal law, includes a special corpus delicti of article 23 “Harassment children for sexual purposes”. This article describes the named criminal deed as follows: “Any intentional proposal, through information and communication technologies, of an adult to meet a child, who has not reached the legal age of entering sexual relations, for the purpose of committing any of the following offences: sexual activities with a child, which, in accordance with the relevant provisions of national law has not reached the legal age for entering into sexual relations, production of child pornography, where this proposal has been followed by material acts leading to such a meeting. Russian criminal legislation does not contain similar corpus delicti, and the actions described (cybergrooming) can be classified as a preparation for the commission of crimes under articles 131-135 of the Criminal Code, as well as articles 127.1, 240 and 242.2 of the Criminal

Code. We restrict ourselves to the consideration of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed through the Internet.

Analysis of the Russian crime statistics shows high growth in the number of crimes against sexual immunity of minors. Thus, according to the department "K" of the Bureau of Special Technical Measures of the Russian Interior Ministry in our country in 2011 were committed some 8.8 thousand crimes against sexual immunity of children. In comparison to 2003 the number of registered non-violent sexual harassments against minors under 16 years of age has increased 21.6 times (in 2011, were detected about 4 thousand of such actions), the number of sexual abuse has increased 2.7 times (2.2 thousand) [6]. However, it is currently impossible to set the proportion of crimes committed using the Internet, because the statistics does not allocate them out of the total range of reported crimes.

This category of crime is understudied because of its relative novelty. In this regard, many countries have initiated special studies in this area. Thus, in the European Union under the auspices of the EU program "Safer Internet Programme" several such projects have been implemented. *EU KIDS Online* projects (*Enhancing knowledge regarding European children's use, risk and safety online*) aim at a comprehensive study of the processes of children use the Internet on EU territory, including the issues of online risks and safety on the Internet. The project *ROBERT* (*Risktaking Online Behaviour - Empowerment through Research and Training*) aims to study deviant behavior in online, vulnerabilities and protection of young people on the Internet. Especially it is necessary to highlight the project *POG* (*Understanding the process of online grooming: the behaviors of men who target young people online*), which is the first European specialized study of online grooming.

Strategy for combating crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed through the use of the Internet includes a whole range of aspects. In this article we will focus on such its part as *victimological prevention*. As you know, in criminology it is understood by specific activities of social institutions, aimed at revealing, eliminating or neutralizing factors, circumstances, situations that form victim behavior and causing crimes, revealing risk groups and individuals with a high degree of victimity and exposure to them in order to restore or activate their protective properties, and the development or improvement of the existing special measures to protect citizens from crimes and subsequent victimization [1, 377-378].

Victimity plays an important role in the mechanism of this type of criminal behavior what is caused by a complex of factors. First, by the socio-psychological characteristics of minor victims of such crimes that show trust to information and people, lack of proper critical thinking, limitations of physical resistance

to an offender. Second, the attraction and “trend” of virtual communication on the Internet among children and adolescents, the increasing of virtual circle of “friends” on social networks, which are a source of danger. Third, the anonymity of virtual communication, in which for a potential victim is extremely difficult to immediately recognize the identity and intentions of the counterparty. Fourth, the insufficient social control of parents for their children’s behavior in cyberspace. Fifth, the relative novelty of the very considered threat, and low level of awareness among children and their parents about it and protective measures against it.

These abstracts in many respects are confirmed by the results of the study “Children of Russia online”. According to it, Russian pupils usually go on-line in their rooms at home (70%) and at friends (50%), where the ability of adults to monitor their actions is minimal. Moreover the older the pupils, the less the control of adults: 70% of pupils of 9-10 years and over 90% of students of age 13 and older use the Internet uncontrollably in the absence of adults. The study confirmed the abstract about an insufficient level of skills in online security. For example, among children aged 11-12 less than half can use the Internet safely (to compare sites to assess the reliability of information, change the settings on a social network profile, block messages from someone, destroy history, etc.). Although with age children better master these skills. For example, there are more than half of such children among ones older than 13 years. And the most important number in the context of the theme of this article: a half of Russian children constantly meet new people on the Internet, and 40% of children said they have met online friends in their real life.

The abstracts are only an introduction to the lighting of the issue. For the full disclosure of victimological aspects of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed through the Internet, in Russia requires special criminological research, similar to the European project POG. In this case, as the basis can be taken the methodology used in it [7], which includes three groups of methods: 1) an analysis of the literature, the study of the criminal records and interviews with key participants, 2) in-depth interviews with individuals convicted of these crimes, the study of archives of their correspondence on the Net, 3) focus groups with adolescents, public meetings with parents, teachers and professionals.

However, based on the available basic information about the features of online grooming, we can briefly mark the main directions of victimological prevention of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed through the Internet.

The most obvious and, at the same time, effective measures of victimological prevention this type of crimes should be *public awareness efforts* aimed at raising the awareness of children, parents, teachers and tutors about the threat of online

grooming and protective measures against it. The subjects of such work may be educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, public and non-profit organizations.

Children of a certain age category in an adequate form must gain knowledge of the existence of online grooming threat, ways of preventing and recognition it, actions when confronted with it. It is important to bring the relevant knowledge also to parents and teachers, who must be informed about the characteristics of cybergrooming, ways of protection of their children, signs of “suspicious” behavior of a child, which has begun a virtual or real communication with a pedophile, etc.

The success of public awareness efforts lies in the maximum degree of “coverage” of the population. The most real way to ensure it is the introduction to the general education courses of “Basic Safety” and “Informatics” topics related to the safe use of the Internet. In addition, to this end, we need to use traditional and online media, social outdoor advertising, and public events. Law enforcement agencies based on the analyzing crimes should also inform citizens through appearances in the media, distribution of special reminders online, conducting special classes in schools, etc.

Another important direction of victimological prevention of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed through the Internet is *to provide Internet users necessary tools and protection technologies*. First of all, it is about the means of managing their profiles in social networks, limiting the amount of posted personal information and access to it by unauthorized persons, blocking unwanted interlocutors, etc. In addition to the technological tools for minor users, also must exist additional protection measures for parents (means of “parental controls”).

Appropriate software tools must be provided by both the operators of social networks themselves and third-party software vendors. However, you must understand that in contrast to illegal content, the ability to filter incoming information in the case cybergrooming is very limited. This presents the greatest significance of the means of preventing child meeting with a pedophile in a social network, including appropriate configuration of “privacy”.

All of the tools and technologies will be effective only if the minor “users” themselves and their parents are informed about them and know how to use them. Therefore, they need to be paid special attention within the framework of the previous selected areas of work.

One more direction of *victimological prevention* of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed by means of the Internet is a *consulting assistance to minors, as well as parents and teachers*. It is essential in cases when the above

technological mechanisms to prevent virtual contact of a pedophile with a potential victim-child do not work, and standard knowledge about the needed behavior pattern in a given situation is not enough or when it does not exist.

For this purpose, in foreign countries they organize special kinds of Safer Internet Centers - helplines. In our country already for several years has been working such a helpline entitled "Kids Online" [5]. It is a free all-Russian service of the telephone and online counseling for children and adults on the safe use of the Internet and mobile communications. At the helpline there is a professional psychological and information support that is given by psychologists of psychology department of Moscow State University named after M. V. Lomonosov and the Foundation for the Internet Development.

The significance of these lines among other factors is also caused by the fact that a teenager can be ashamed to tell its parents about the attempts of sexual harassment to it on the web, but on condition of anonymity will seek for support to this line. Is indicative that for two years (2009-2011) of work of Russian helpline "Kids Online", most complaints have been received exactly on the communication risks (45%), with almost one fifth related to cybergrooming problems (19%) [3].

It is also necessary to inform children, parents and teachers about such helplines and conduct their mass popularization. We should strive to put posters with information about them on a bulletin board in every school in our country.

In conclusion let's highlight another direction of victimological prevention of crimes against sexual immunity of minors committed by means of the Internet, which is "at the interface of" with the activity of law enforcement agencies to combat these crimes. It is about *creating a mechanism of notification by the users of social networks on the facts of alleged grooming and response to these messages*.

For the first part, here means that there are in the interface of social networking resources some tools for sending notification of suspicious, from the point of view of the user, behavior. Such tools should be easily detectable by users and easy to use. Accordingly, system administrators of said resources should build a mechanism for verification and response to complaints received. Algorithms of the last require additional elaboration. They can include both the taking of their own measures by social networks' administrators with respect to a user, and the transmission of information to law enforcement agencies for verification through special investigative techniques. These measures will prevent further communication of a child with a pedophile and contact with it in real life. In addition, this may contribute to the identification and arrest by law enforcement agencies of a suspect that may be guilty of other similar crimes.

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