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European
Online
Grooming
Project_

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Safer internet *plus*

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¹ OJ L 149, 11.6.2005, p. 1.

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1. Introduction

The sexual abuse of young people via the Internet is an international problem, a crime without geographical boundaries. A recent report from the Centre for Missing and Exploited Children described 2,660 incidents of adults using the Internet to befriend and establish an emotional connection with a child, in order to entice them into meeting. As more young people use the Internet to socially network with friends, the potential for contact with sexual offenders' increases. There is however limited information available about the behaviours of Internet sexual offenders to inform effective risk management strategies for policy makers, law enforcement agencies, parents and young people. In response to this, the European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme has commissioned a consortium of leading experts from the UK and across Europe to develop an understanding of the different ways in which sexual offenders approach, communicate and 'groom' young people online.

The consortium comprises: Stephen Webster (National Centre for Social Research); Professor Julia Davidson, Professor Antonia Bifulco, (Kingston University); Professor Thierry Pham Belgium (UMons university); Professor Vincenzo Caretti Italy (Univ of Rome and Palermo); and Professor Petter Gottschalk Norway (Oslo Business School).

The overarching objectives of the research are:

- describe the behaviour of offenders who groom and their account of young people who are 'groomed' and explore differences (e.g. in demographics, behaviour or profiles) within offender and victim group and how these differences may have a bearing on offence outcome.
- describe how information, communication technology (ICT) is used to facilitate the process of online grooming.
- further the current low knowledge base about the way in which young people are selected and prepared for abuse online.
- make a significant contribution to the further development of educational awareness and preventative initiatives aimed at parents and young people,
- contribute to the development of online sex offender risk assessment and management knowledge.

To meet this set of objectives, the project involves three separate but inter-linked phases. First, a scoping phase that encompasses; a review of recent police case files, interviews with key stakeholders working to prevent online grooming and a literature review. This phase is now complete and the reports have been published on the project website²: The fieldwork and analysis of Phase two of the research,

² <http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/>

(in-depth interviews with men who have been convicted of online grooming in each consortium country) is also complete. These research interviews investigated in detail the behaviour of Internet sexual offenders and described the variation in their actions according to the characteristics and response of different young people. This report provides an overview of our phase two findings - also available on the project website. The interviews with online groomers will be written up in further detail within the December 2011 final report. This will ensure that the findings can be reported in the context of our phase three data encounters.

Phase three of the research involves disseminating findings via a series of workshops across Europe to policy makers, practitioners, teachers, parents and young people, to make a significant contribution to the development of educational awareness and prevention initiatives. The focus groups with young people are an additional data collection encounter to the body of work set out in the original description of work. As such they have been developed and administered by the research team with no additional resources from the European Commission. This report will provide an overview of phase three progress to date.

1.1 Work Packages

Activity within each of the research phases described above is set within a project delivery framework of six Work Packages (WP). These are: WP1 Project Management; WP2 Scoping Study; WP3 Sample Design, Recruitment of Online Groomers and Fieldwork Design; WP4 Project Assessment, Evaluation and Ethical Standards; WP5 Data Analysis; and WP6 Dissemination of Findings.

1.2 Structure of the Report

This report has three sections. The first provides a brief overview of project achievements and impacts. The second section summarises activities by each work package. The final section of the report appraises progress and identifies risks and contingency plans for the final six months of the study. The appendices provide additional detail to supplement the annual report. Appendix 1 sets out the final sample achieved from the online groomers' interviews and Appendix 2 reports website activity from the last 12 months. Appendix 3 presents the slides from the February 2011 launch event of phase 2 findings. Finally, Appendix 4 contains promotional material from dissemination events over the time-period covered by this report.

2. Achievements and Impacts

2.1 Building on foundations to develop unique findings

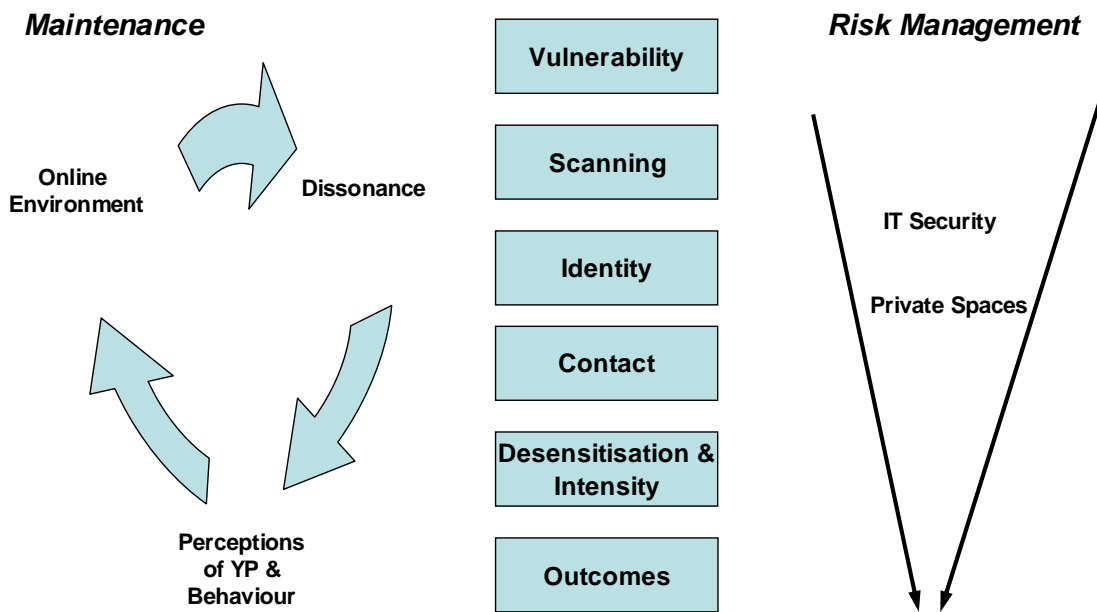
The overarching aim of the European Online Grooming Project is to empower carers, teachers and young people to use the Internet safely, and provide treatment programmes with a robust evidence base in which to develop effective interventions for online groomers. To this end, the first annual report set out the consortium's initial steps to achieve this aim by detailing findings from the scoping exercise. To summarise this initial work, 19 depth-interviews with professional experts across Europe, analysis of convicted online groomers police case-files, and a review of European legislative and empirical literature regarding online offending resulted in the development of hypothetical model of online grooming. The hypothetical model was set in the theoretical context of self-regulation, online disinhibition, attachment and contextual ecological models, and used to develop a topic guide of key themes to explore in the in-depth interviews with online groomers across Europe. Each of these themes was linked back to the core objective of the research, to provide robust data about online groomers to inform prevention policy and practice.

The consortium worked closely with strategic partners in each country to develop effective and ethical recruitment procedures for phase 2 of the research. Consequently, a total of 33 in-depth interviews were conducted with convicted online groomers across Europe (Appendix 2 sets out the sample characteristics). It is our understanding that this research represents the largest sample of this type to have been developed for in-depth qualitative research. Interviews took place in secure settings such as prisons or treatment centres and were carried out by members of the research consortium. Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours, and was digitally recorded for verbatim transcription. Interviews were transcribed into English where necessary, for full case and theme-based analysis using the Framework method³. Prior to full data analysis, analytical plans were discussed with all consortium partners at a meeting in Rome (December 2011). This ensured the data was interrogated in the most effective possible way.

The first step in developing a robust understanding of online grooming was to assess the hypothetical model developed in the scoping phase. Thematic analysis of offender interviews indicated that some refinement was necessary to reflect the complexity of online grooming. The first high level refinement was to rename the model as 'features of online grooming'. There were two reasons for this: first, 'model' assumes a linear pathway through phases – our interviews with online groomers showed this is not the case. Online groomers enter and exit particular phases according to their objectives and the perceived 'needs' of the young people targeted. Second, the word model assumes that all aspects of the described process are relevant to the population of groomers. Again, our research indicates this not to

³ <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/about-us/our-approach/framework>

be the case. That is, although some groomers described taking a measured and lengthy approach through a sequence of pre-determined steps there was also evidence of fast and almost random approaches to young people. In the section below, we briefly describe our typology of online grooming that explains these diverse offending behaviours. Before doing so, the Figure below sets out the features of online grooming described by the offenders interviewed.



As noted above, the key features of grooming behaviour the study identified *do not* apply to all groomers in all contacts they have with young people. These features of online grooming include factors that help *maintain* the behaviour such as the online environment, dissonance and offenders perceptions of young people and their behaviour. The research also identified *salient behaviours* in the grooming process such as: *scanning* the online environment for potential people to contact, the *identity* adopted by the groomer (be it their own or another); the *nature of contact* with the young person; the different ways in which the online groomer can *intensify* the process of grooming and the diverse range of *outcomes* toward the end of the process. In particular, it is clear from the research that not all episodes of online grooming result in a physical meeting.

Development of the thematic framework was followed by detailed within and between case analysis to identify and understand associations between broad grooming features and individual offender characteristics. These analyses led to the development of a classification that encompassed three types of online groomer across nine behavioural dimensions. These analytical dimensions included whether the offender: had any previous convictions for sexual offending; used their own or another identity; the nature and extent of indecent image use; contacted other offenders online; the type of offence-supportive beliefs described; the speed of contact made with young people; how contact was made and sustained; and finally, the outcome of the offence (online offending and/or offline meeting).

The first 'type' of groomer identified is the **distorted attachment** offender. Men in this group had offence supportive beliefs that involved seeing contact with the young person as a '*relationship*'. As such, they did not get involved in other online behaviours that indicated to them, and others, that they were sexually offending. Men within this group did not have any indecent images of children and they did not have any contact with any other sexual offenders online. This group also seemed to spend a significant amount of time online talking to the young person before they met the victim. All men in this group went on to meet the victim to develop or further the '*relationship*'.

The second type is the **adaptable online groomer**. This group of men had offence supportive beliefs that involved their own needs and seeing the victim as mature and capable. Unlike the group above, they did not seem to have discussed the encounter in terms of a relationship. Some men in this group had collections of indecent images of children but they were not significant collections in terms of size. They also tended not to have significant contact with other sexual offenders online. Men in this group were adept at adopting their identity and grooming style according to how the young person presented online. Similarly, the speed at which contact developed could be fast and/or slow according to the how the victim responded to contact.

Finally, the **hyper-sexualised** group of men were characterised by extensive indecent image collections of children and significant online contact with other sexual offenders or offender groups. Some men in this group also had significant collections of extreme adult pornography. They adopted different identities altogether, or had an identity picture that was not of their face but of their genitals. Their contacts with young people were highly sexualised and escalated very quickly. Their offence supportive beliefs involved 'dehumanising' young people. They tended not to personalise contact and so did not seem to be using the phone or other personal media like the other groups of offenders.

The final aspect of the analysis at phase two of the research encompassed understanding the behaviour of young people online via the interviews with online groomers. Despite the research not directly interviewing young people that have been harmed online, the offender interviews provided an insight to the diverse behaviour of young people. It was clear from the accounts of offenders that safety messages are getting through to a resilient group of young people. However, those young people who seemed to

be susceptible to the approaches of online groomers displayed a range of vulnerability features that could include: loneliness, low self-esteem, self-harming behaviour, family break-up, and incidence of ongoing sexual abuse by other offenders.

Analysis of the offender accounts of their contact with young people made it clear that that online grooming cannot be comprehensively understood and managed without understanding the interaction between the offender, online environment and young person. In particular, the nature of online disinhibition and how this influences the behaviour of both online groomers and young people. The final report due in December 2011 will cover this association in detail, and drawn on both the offender data sets and group discussions with young people.

Reflecting on the research project at 24 months, the development of the typology represents an important contribution of this research to the literature, as it *challenges* some of the common grooming myths such as:

- *“All online groomers want to meet young people...”*
- *“Pornography and indecent images cause online offending...”*
- *“Young people are passive when communicating with adults....”*
- *“All online offending involves socialisation.....”*

In testing and challenging these assumptions, the research empowers policy makers to understand the complexity of offenders and young people’s online behaviour and may assist in the development of effective intervention programmes. Consequently, the final phase of the research is underway and involves two components. The first is a series of workshops in schools discussing online behaviour and the research findings. These will be followed up by further group discussions with teachers, policy stakeholders and frontline professionals to discuss the implications of the research on effective online intervention programmes.

2.2 Project impacts

In the second year of the study, the consortium has continued to raise awareness about the research and present emerging findings in a range of ways:

Project Website

The dedicated project website continues to⁴ provide an overview of the project, its aims, objectives and the methods employed, and the project timeline. The site also hosts press releases, downloadable EC deliverables, presentation slides and audio recordings discussing research findings. The project is also

⁴ <http://www.european-online-grooming-project.com/>

being promoted on a page within the NatCen website⁵ Appendix 3 contains a report of website hits and activity in the period covered by this report. It is pertinent to note that traffic peaks in February 2011 at the time of the findings launch, thereby demonstrating the impact of this event. We anticipate increased traffic during the final six months of the study as the project disseminates integrated findings from the online groomers and young people / stakeholder datasets.

Policy Impact

The research is having an impact on promoting Internet Safety and the development of robust programmes for sexual offenders. Regarding the former, we are working with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre to inform the development of the Think U Know programme and other initiatives in the UK. In addition, the consortium is networking with Safer Internet Node representatives (via conferences) to publicise the work and in future to disseminate the findings. The consortium is now connected with InHope to inform their practice in respect of hotlines. To ensure that study findings are disseminated beyond the EU to other countries to inform policy and practice, Professor Julia Davidson is now working with UNICEF, the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) and recently the United Nations. Similarly, Stephen Webster presented scoping findings at the Association for Treatment of Sexual Abusers International Conference in Phoenix, USA, and will be returning to Canada in October 2011 to update the conference with full findings. Antonia Bifulco is presenting findings at international psychological conferences later in 2011 (Rome and Romania). Finally, the consortium plan to meet with providers such as Facebook in the dissemination phase of the research to provide advice on safety issues and approaches.

Regarding policy for sexual offenders, HM Prison Service in the UK are fully engaged with the research and provided valuable support in recruiting online groomers for the UK interviews. HM Prison Service is in the process of reviewing its treatment programmes with sexual offenders and the consortium has been invited to feed findings from the research into this review of treatment delivery. Consequently, Stephen Webster will present findings to Treatment Managers on 14th July 2011. This then ensures that intervention programmes for online sexual offenders will be developed using the most recent empirical evidence and so demonstrates the operational policy impact of the research.

Wider dissemination

The expertise of the consortium coupled with interest in the project has led to numerous presentations, academic articles, events and workshops being delivered over the past year. A detailed list of this activity is set out in the review of work packages in section 3.6 below. In summary, the consortium has delivered: 13 conference presentations, held two specific project dissemination events (London and Rome), five articles / book chapters, and shared findings online using social media services such as Twitter.

⁵ <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/european-online-grooming-project>

A key highlight of the year was the launch of findings from the online groomers interviews, held at the British Academy on 3rd February 2011 (see Appendix 3 and 4). Delivered by Stephen Webster, Professor's Davidson and Bifulco, the launch provided a review of research findings and proposed that online grooming and the sexualisation of young people is a public health problem. The event included a panel discussion of experts from the Internet Watch Foundation, Facebook, Microsoft and the Marie Collins Foundation, and was attended by child safety, academic, policy, offender treatment and Internet industry leaders.

3. Work Package Review

In this section of the report, a summary of activity by each of the six project work packages is provided.

3.1 WP1: Project Management

WP Objective

To ensure that phases 1 to 3 of the research are well integrated across the participating sites and that communication is maintained throughout. To ensure that each phase of the project is completed to the deadline set and that overarching project and work package goals are achieved.

WP Activity

- The core aim of this package is to ensure that the various elements of research are well integrated and the programme of work overall managed effectively. This has been achieved in four ways.
- We have provided regular updates to the EC regarding project progress.
- Second, we have developed a brand, logo and presentation templates for the European Online Grooming Project. This material is to be used in all dissemination activity for the project and ensures that the project's unique selling point is recognisable to audiences across Europe, irrespective of who is presenting the findings.
- Third, Stephen Webster, as co-coordinator has ensured that the components individually and together meet the study objectives and that there is synergy and integration in the design, conduct and interpretation of each component. To this end, with Professor's Davidson and Bifulco, there has been regular contact with the consortium and dissemination of project management materials such as timesheet, timetables, scoping topic guides, phase 2 recruitment materials and topic guides and regular email updates.
- Fourth, the entire research team has come together four times to discuss the design and progress of each phase of the research, the research instruments and measures used, findings, and implication for any changes in the wider policy and research context.

3.2 WP2: Scoping Study

WP Objective

Given the absence of literature on comparative legislation and approaches to online child safety in each country and on the characteristics and behaviour of online groomers, a scoping study was conducted before the main research fieldwork with offenders began in 2010. The aim of the scoping research was to equip the research consortium with vital information to help refine the main research design and aid the development of robust data collection tools before extensive resources are deployed in the field.

WP Activity

- This stage involved a literature review of internet grooming behaviour, legislative context and approaches to online safety in each partner country, along with information from other EU countries. The full review is provided in Appendix 1.
- Content analysis of a small sample of online groomer's case files in the UK was conducted alongside interviews with stakeholders who work with Internet sex offenders in each partner site (n=19). Results of these analyses have informed the development of a topic guide for use during the online groomers' interviews and a hypothetical model of online grooming that can be tested in the next stage of the research (WP 3 & 5).
- Appendix 2 of the first annual report (activity at 12 months) provides the full scoping report.

3.3 WP3: Sample Design, Recruitment of Online Groomers and Fieldwork Design

WP Objective

The research will attempt to achieve up to fifty in-depth interviews across the partner sites with men who have been convicted for a sexual offence against a child involving online grooming. This phase of the research aims to explore online behaviour with specific focus upon the selection and grooming of vulnerable children and young people.

WP Activity

- Recruitment materials such as advance letters, project information leaflets and consent forms were developed in the UK and disseminated for use to all partners.
- A topic guide was also developed for the offender interviews. This was signed off by the EC.
- Sample Frame: **In the UK:** the sample of online groomers was provisionally selected from sexual offender assessment data collected by HM Prison Service Rehabilitation Services Group. This group are an 'internal partner / sponsor' for the research.
- Demographic and offence-specific data were interrogated to in which to draw a purposive sample of online groomers.

- Prior to the commencement of sampling in January 2010, HM Prison Service took advice about the research to ensure that all procedures fully complied with the Data Protection Act.
- Following this review of recruitment, the research team were required to re-design their recruitment strategy into a two phase process. Phase 1 involved treatment providers seeking individual offenders consent for contact details to be passed to the research team. Phase 2 involves the research team contacting individuals who have consented to release their details about participating in the study.
- These negotiations with HM Prison Service alongside the review of recruitment procedures and extended recruitment process have led to a 3 month delay to the timetable for WP3. Consequently, offender interviews were completed in October 2010. This delay has not adversely effected the analysis and dissemination stages of the research (WP5 and 6)
- A total of 33 interviews were achieved with convicted online groomers across Europe. In **England and Wales**:
 - Twenty six interviews with online groomers were conducted in prisons. Each offender interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours and provided rich detail about the process of online grooming before, during and after each encounter with a young person.
 - As to be expected when interviewing offenders, attrition remained a challenge up to one hour before an interview takes place. This meant that interviewers sometimes travelled considerable distance to conduct a pre-arranged interview, only for the encounter to be cancelled with very little notice.
- In the **3 partner countries/sites**
 - Five interviews were conducted in Norway and two in Belgium. These transcripts were sent to the UK for analysis.
 - In Italy, researchers found it challenging to identify and recruit online groomers for the research. This was an identified risk to the study at inception and was acknowledged by the EC. To ensure that there is still research coverage from Italy, transcripts of Italian online offenders' interactions with children were sent to the UK. These were analysed and tested against any analytical model developed in WP5.

3.4 WP4: Project Assessment, Evaluation and Ethical Standards

WP Objective

The key objectives of this WP are to ensure that the project is managed to high quality standards throughout each of the three phases, and to ensure that the research complies with the highest ethical standards throughout.

WP Activity

- The project was submitted and approved by the National Centre for Social Research Ethics committee. This multi-disciplinary body meets the ethical requirements set out in the recent ESRC Research Ethics Framework.

- The project was also scrutinised and approved by the National Offender Management Service National Research Board.
- Strong ethical practice has been maintained throughout the project, as demonstrated by the redesign of the offender recruitment process (see WP3) following HM Prison Service Feedback.
- WP1 also sets out the robust project management processes that are also ensuring ethical and high quality outputs.
- Conducting in-depth interviews with online groomers about their offending can be a challenging process for researchers. With such challenging work, the risk of vicarious trauma is acute. To manage this risk, each research interviewer (N = 3) is received personal support sessions from a qualified counsellor. In total the research team received three counselling sessions each.
- Personal support has also been offered to staff transcribing the in-depth interviews and research assistants charting the data into the conceptual framework.
- For the **Stage 3** groups with young people, educators and parents, ethical approval was granted by Kingston University in the UK and relevant bodies in Belgium and Italy where parallel sessions were held. Such permissions involved getting school head teachers written consent, parental informed opt-out procedure and young people's informed written consent to participate in the workshops, The young people volunteered for the workshops, which were restricted in time (45 minutes) and held on school premises during the lunch hour with food provided.

3.5 WP5: Analysis

WP Objective

- To ensure that data from a diverse range of sources is collected and analysed systematically and is integrated effectively throughout the research. To also ensure that data is collected to deadlines set to enable study progression between phase 1 and 2. To quality control data and ensure robust and consistent methods throughout.

WP Activity

- **Stage 1:** A review of this activity is covered in the annual report at 12 months.
- **Stage 2:** Online groomers interviews were transcribed verbatim to aid systematic analysis.
- Data was analysed using the *Framework* method of qualitative analysis, developed by NatCen (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003)⁶
- A charting framework was developed to manage the online groomers' interview dataset.
- Following charting an analytical plan was developed and disseminated to consortium partners for review in September and December 2010.

⁶ <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/about-us/our-approach/framework>

- Full analysis was conducted in January 2011 with detailed notes circulated to the consortium for feedback.
- The analysis of online groomers interviews was successfully launched on 3rd February 2011.
- **Stage 3** analyses will be led by Professor Julia Davidson in the autumn 2011.
- All analysis will be incorporated into the final report due December 2011.

3.6 WP6: Dissemination of Findings

WP Objective

The key aim of this package is to ensure that findings are promulgated across the EU as and when they develop. This ensures that findings have the maximum potential to make a policy and operational impact.

WP Activity

Dissemination to date encompasses:

- Development of a specific project website <http://www.european-online-grooming-project.com/> and webpage hosted by NatCen <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/european-online-grooming-project> Appendix 2 provides a report of website activity over the past 12 months.
- Production of a detailed literature review and report of research from the scoping phase (see annual report at 12 months for detail).

- Press releases:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media-centre>

<http://www.kingston.ac.uk/pressoffice/latestnews/2009/june/11-Europes-first-study-of-online-grooming/>

http://www.cats-rp.org.uk/media_and_news.htm

<http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/wp-content/file-uploads/Study-reveals-complexity-of-online-grooming-problem.pdf>

- Nodes:

http://www.inhope.org/gns/news-and-events/news/11-02-03/The_European_Online_Grooming_Project.aspx

- Radio:

BBC R4 Woman's Hour discussion on Internet safety (November)

- Science Daily Website:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/12/091209193906.htm>

- TG Daily Website:

<http://www.tgdaily.com/security-features/53914-three-types-of-online-groomer-study-finds>

- Twitter

<http://twitter.com/#!/search/online%20grooming%20research>

- Daily Telegraph Article - UK:

www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/6617442/Sexual-offenders-using-the-internet-to-fast-track-abuse.html

- Herald Scotland Article – UK
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/children-put-themselves-at-risk-online-1.1083220>

- Articles in the Norwegian media:

www.vg.no/teknologi/artikkel.php?artid=548462

www.idg.no/computerworld/article128561.ece

- Academic articles and chapters:

Gottschalk, P. and Kristoffersen, R. (2009). Understanding the process of online grooming: The behavior of men who target young people online in Norway, *International Journal of Digital Crime and Forensics*, 1 (4), 1-18.

Online Groomers – Profiling, Policing and Prevention, Julia Davidson and Petter Gottschalk, Russell House Publishing, Dorset, UK, 2010.

Child Internet Abuse – Current Research, Policy and Police Practice, Julia Davidson and Petter Gottschalk (editors), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London, UK, 2011.

O'Brien, M. & Webster, S. (2010). Assessment and Treatment of Online Sexual Offenders. In. J. Davidson & Gottschalk, P (Eds.). *Child Internet Abuse – Current Research, Policy and Police Practice*,

European Society for Trauma and Stress Studies Bulletin (2009). Understanding the process of online grooming.

- Conference/Event Presentations

'Using internet offender's accounts to inform young people's online safety practices'. 29 and 30 September 2009, Warsaw, Poland. Polish Centre of the "Safer Internet" Program. (Davidson).

'Online grooming: using offender's accounts to inform young people's online safety practices'. 12 and 13 November, Moscow, Russia. Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk within the Council of the Baltic Sea States. (Davidson).

UKCCIS PPT presentation delivered as part of an expert research panel. Title: 'trends in offender behaviour online'. The consortium also exhibited information about the European Online Grooming Project throughout the day. 8 December 2009. (Davidson, Webster & Grove-Hills).

The following link: <https://secure.symphonyem.co.uk/UKCCIS/sponsorship.aspx> shows the project as a key exhibitor at the event. Clicking on the project log allows delegates to be sent directly to the project website.

House of Lords: '*Internet Grooming: Understanding offender behaviour and protecting young people*'. Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS). 26 March 2010. <http://www.cats-rp.org.uk/>. (Bifulco & Davidson).

HM Prison Service: National Rolling Programme Treatment Managers Meeting 'European Online Grooming Project: Scoping findings and online groomer recruitment'. London, 16 March 2010. (Webster).

Internet Safety and Online Groomers: Bahrain May 2010. (Davidson).

Online Grooming: Understanding the evidence and managing the risks. Presentation to Ra.C.I,S (Raggruppamento Carabinieri Investigazioni Scientifiche) & R.A.C (Reparto Analisi Ciminologiche) Viale Tor di Quinto, 119, Rome, 13th December 2010 (Caretti et al)

October 2009: Understanding the process of online grooming: emerging findings from a European Union study. Paper presented to the 29th Annual Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Phoenix, AZ. (Webster)

October 2010: EC Safer Internet Forum , Luxembourg, 21st-22nd October , '*Presentation of EC Online Groomers study: Understanding Offender Behaviour*'(keynote) (Davidson)

Lancaster University Conference, Offenders and P2P Networks, 27th October, London '*Understanding Online Offending Behaviour*'. (Davidson)

November 2010: US Department of Justice, 8th November, Presentation to Attorney General and Legal Team '*Online Offending behaviour: Preliminary findings from the European Commission Study*'. (Davidson)

November 2010: FOSI Annual Conference : Internet Freedom, Safety & Citizenship- A Global Call to Action. Washington DC, 9th -10th November '*Understanding Online Behaviours: The Offender and Young Person perspective & reflections from the Middle East*' (keynote) (Davidson)

European Online Grooming Project – Launch of Research Findings. British Academy, London, 3rd February 2011 (Webster, Davidson, Bifulco)

To follow in 2011:

July – presentation to HM Prison Service Treatment Managers (Webster)

September – presentation at the Applied Psychology Conference, University Alexandru Ioan Cuza Iasi, Romania (Bifulco)

November – presentation to the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers Annual Conference, Toronto <http://www.atsa.com/conf.html> (Webster)

November – presentation to the Society for International Studies in Psychiatry: (Psychotherapy, Psychopharmacology and Treatment, Rome (Bifulco)

4. Conclusion

4.1 Overview

The European Online Grooming Project has the potential to make a significant contribution to the international body of policy and practice knowledge. The interviews with online groomers have provided a detailed understanding of the complexity of grooming and make a seminal contribution to the literature. The phase 3 focus groups with young people, parents and educators will complete a rounded picture of online groomers and young people's behaviour and lead to the development of evidence based intervention programmes that can be targeted to meet the specific needs and/or vulnerability factors of particular young people.

Twenty four months into the project we are confident about the status of the research. All work packages are underway with some completed. The consortium is operating effectively as a partnership and has met on four occasions (two of these were to present/launch findings to invited audiences). Numerous dissemination opportunities have already been exploited, with further impact activities scheduled throughout the remainder of 2011.

4.2 Project risks

The key risk to the project was the delivery of productive online groomer interviews in Italy (where there was a limited available sample of offenders). Although considerable effort was made by Italian partners to recruit online groomers, the relatively new nature of the offence in Italy has made this challenging. To manage this risk, chat-logs containing verbatim accounts of Italian online groomers' conversations with young people were provided to the research team to aid analysis of the groomers' data. In addition, Italian partners have committed resource to delivering additional focus group discussions.

A secondary risk relates to the impact the project may have on negative perceptions of the Internet. This risk was identified by stakeholders in the scoping study (see annual report at 12 months) and may manifest as a result of sensational media coverage of study findings. The consortium continued to work closely on dissemination events to ensure press releases and other impact activities are appropriately balanced.

4.3 European Dimension

It seems that in each country, researchers (and other stakeholders) are reasonably aware of the research. This is demonstrated by our diverse dissemination activity across the partnership and website activity report. The consortium has to date conducted project meetings in London, Oslo, Rome and Brussels, a final meeting is scheduled for late 2011. The consortium is networking with Safer Internet

Node representatives (via conferences) to publicise the work and in future to disseminate the findings.

The consortium is also connected with InHope to inform their practice in respect of hotlines.

Appendices

Online Groomers Demographics – Achieved Sample (N = 33)⁷

		Conducted
Age	18 - 24	4
	25 – 34	7
	35 – 44	11
	45 – 54	7
	55 and above	4
IQ Score	Less than average (90 or below)	5
	Average (91 – 109)	7
	Above average (110 +)	15
	Don't know	6
RM 2000 score	Low risk (0 – 1)	6
	Medium risk (2)	10
	High risk (3+)	10
Offence	Online grooming no meeting	2
	Online grooming meeting	8
	Images and online grooming – no meeting	5
	Images and online grooming – meeting	18
Offender access to children	Yes	17
	No	16
Sex offender treatment received this sentence	None	2
	Core programme	26
	Core plus other (Booster, Extended, HSF)	5
Sex offender treatment received (prior to sentence)	None	25
	Core programme	1
	Core plus other (Booster, Extended, HSF)	1
	Thames Valley SOTP	1
Pre-convictions	None	16
	Non - sexual	6
	Sexual - children offline	6
	Sexual - children online	5
	Sexual - children online and offline	0
	Sexual - adult offline	0
Victim age (of grooming)	5 - 9	1
	10 – 12	5
	13 – 15	27
Victim gender (of grooming)	Male	5
	Female	28
	Both	0

⁷ some missing data from Norwegian encounters

Appendix 2 – Website diagnostics.



(Double-click on slide for full show)



The European Online Grooming Project_ Findings Launch

The British Academy
3rd February 2011

ATSA PRESENTATION – OCTOBER 2010, PHOENIX, AZ**Understanding the process of online grooming: emerging findings from a European Union study**

The sexual abuse of children via the Internet is an international problem, a crime without geographical boundaries. Solutions both to perpetrators' use of the Internet and to the safety of children and young people online must be sought and found at a broad level and will necessarily involve agencies working to protect children at local, national and international levels. The police have suggested that an increasing number of online sex offenders are grooming children and young people online, including using online social networks and internet chat rooms. Whilst a great deal is known about sex offender behaviour and there is an increasing body of pioneering work addressing those accessing indecent child images, little is known about online groomers and the way in which they select victims.

To this end, the European Union Safer Internet Plus programme⁸ invited proposals for projects that aim to enhance the knowledge of the online sexual abuse of children, with a particular focus on online grooming. Following a competitive tendering exercise, the European Online Grooming Project was commissioned. This consortium is comprised of researchers from across Europe, tasked with meeting the following overarching research objectives:

- describe the behaviour of both offenders who groom and young people who are 'groomed' and explore differences (e.g. in demographics, behaviour or profiles) within each group and how these differences may have a bearing on offence outcome,
- describe how information, communication technology (ICT) is used to facilitate the process of online grooming,
- further the current low knowledge base about the way in which young people are selected and prepared for abuse online,
- make a significant contribution to the development of educational awareness and preventative initiatives aimed at parents and young people,

The Project has three separate but interlinked phases. The first is a scoping component. This encompassed a review of police case files and interviews with stakeholders across Europe working operationally to manage online grooming. The second and third phases involve in-depth interviews with convicted online groomers across Europe and dissemination to professionals, parents, carers and young people respectively.

This presentation will present findings from the scoping phase of the research and in-depth interviews with online groomers. A model of the online grooming process will be presented that is set in the context of two existing theoretical frameworks. Ward and Hudson's (1998) *self-regulation model of the sexual offence process* and Suler's (2004) theory of the *online disinhibition effect*. The presentation will conclude by making recommendations for future research.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm



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European
Online
Grooming
Project_

Online Grooming: Understanding the evidence and managing the risks

Presentation to Ra.C.I,S (Raggruppamento Carabineiri Investigazioni Scientifiche) & R.A.C (Reparto Analisi Ciminologiche)
Viale Tor di Quinto, 119, Rome

13th December 2010

9.30 – 9.50	Introductions and welcome (Vincenzo Caretti)
9.50 – 11.30	Presentation of preliminary research findings
11.30 – 11.45	Tea/Coffee
11.45 – 12.30	Panel discussion: Chaired by PG and TP
12.30 – 1.30	Lunch
1.30 – 4.00	Consortium meeting

FEBRUARY 3RD LAUNCH EVENT PROGRAMME

co-funded by the European Union



Venue: The British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. Click [here](#) to view a map.

Date & time: Thursday, 3rd February 2011, 12.30 - 4.30 p.m.

Programme

12.30 – 1.30	Registration and lunch
1.30 – 1.45	Welcome
1.45 – 3.00	Presentation of research findings
1.45 – 2.10	
2.10 – 2.35	
2.35 – 3.00	
3.00 – 3.15	Coffee/Tea
3.15 – 4.15	Panel discussion – Responding to the evidence at a policy, industry and local level. Confirmed speakers: John Carr, OBE (Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety), Richard Allan (Facebook) & Laurent Masson (Microsoft)
4.15 – 4.30	Feedback and closing comments.

Find out more about the European Online Grooming Project [here](#).