Child Pornography in the XXI Century: Brief Considerations about Victims and Offenders

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Abstract

In a digital age with a constant technological evolution, child pornography has transcended all barriers and has become a worldwide problem. Thus, it becomes imperative to know the characteristics of victims and offenders, with respect to sociodemographic, personality, history of development and criminal background, for a more rigorous strategy of prevention and treatment of both. This understanding requires identifying the specificities of the role of the digital world in the perpetuation of this crime, such as the strategies that facilitate contact with child pornographic material, what motivates offenders to share these materials with children on the online world and what factors prompt offenders to contact with children in the offline world, since the important risk to commit child sexual abuse on these circumstances. Regarding to the victims, is fundamental to explore the psychological consequences of this crime. In most cases, the victims feel that will be emotionally persecuted by the trauma and, objectively, by the impact of knowing that their images will be always available on the internet.

Keywords: Child pornography; Victims; Offenders; Prevention

Introduction

Accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of sexual exploitation of children in a digital age facilitator of the dissemination of pornographic material and anonymity of the perpetrator, has become a worldwide challenge in criminal investigation [1-4]. Child Pornography (CP) is a legal term that defines media depicting sexual exploitation of children [5]. These authors indicate other terms that tend to be used in the literature, such as child sexual abuse material and child exploitation material. Victims of child pornography can be direct and indirect. The direct victims correspond to minors who have suffered the abuses portrayed in images or videos. The indirect victims are those to whom these images are sent for gratification of the offender's fantasies and which are at risk of become direct victims themselves [6,7]. Adds the risk to be aroused curiosity in secondary victims and they later become offenders and abuse other children. Primary victims tend to be female, caucasian [8], and often close to the offender, who manipulates them into producing pornography [8]. Not infrequently, the perpetrators of child pornography crimes are family members or acquaintances, and the crime tends to last more than a year [9,10]. When abuse is perpetrated by people close to them, it tends to have more serious

and long-term consequences [52], as the shake of beliefs about trust and intimacy [11]. A risk that the child is dependent and/or lives with the perpetrator, making him or her more vulnerable to repeated abuses, inhibiting disclosure and seeking help as well as receiving more negative reactions, such as disbelief from adults [12,13].

According to [14] being a victim of intrafamily abuse is highly correlated with having a younger age at the time of abuse. In Gewirtz-Meydan and colleagues [9], research, 83% of survivors were under 12 years of age, and the younger the exposure to trauma, the higher the risk of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder [15]. However, it has also been argued that advanced age is associated with a higher risk of psychopathology [16], Given the increased awareness of social stigma [17]. This traumatic experience becomes particularly disruptive due to the attitude of the victims in the images, who tend to be smiling or with neutral expressions. This phenomenon, on the one hand, helps offenders to convince themselves that their fantasies are not deviant, because the images do not tend to be indicative of refusal or displeasure. Not infrequently, coercion does not tend to be present, since that offender's resort to seduction and manipulation, which

once again allows them to feed their sexual fantasies [6]. On the other hand, it fosters victims' feelings of guilt, shame, and concern to be recognized and judged for their appearance in images [10,11]. According to MacGinley, Breckenridge, and Mowll these feelings tend to negatively impact self-concept and the way victims understand abuse. Another characteristic of this traumatic experience is continuous victimization [11]. In addition to the offender being able to continue threatening and silencing the victim, with resource to possession of pornographic material, thus maintaining a perverse relationship with the victim the lack of control over the sharing of images of abuse and the consequent public accessibility when they go online may be one of the most difficult aspects to overcome, as the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (CCCP) (2017) warns. According to Martin [18]. symptoms of trauma do not occur in the aftermath of abuse. This abuse is, according to the author, always ongoing and without apparent end. The victims experience an ongoing fear about the circulation of their images online, as well as a concern to be recognized in public [11], which contributes to feelings of permanent vulnerability and powerlessness [14]. Studies show that victims experience, in adult life, symptoms of anxiety and depression, accompanied by ideation and suicide attempts; they adopt a posture of hypervigilance and register paranoid symptoms; they present low self-esteem, ideation difficulties in relationships, in sexual life and tend to resort to self-mutilation. But who are the offenders? According to [19], there are child pornography offenders on the Internet (ICPOs) and mixed offenders, who have victimized minors on the Internet (e.g., sharing photographs) and in the real world (e.g., sexual abuse of minors). Despite the fact that consumption of child pornography is not recognized for potentiating physical offenses against a child, it can be a means of sexual stimulation for those who have already committed offenses [19]. In accordance with Aslan, Edelmann, Bray e Worrell [20], when examining mixed offenders, the risk of a history of sexual contact with children before being charged and/or convicted of child pornography offences is high. And what distinguishes these offenders? Previous studies have found that ICPOs are less likely to be parents [21], and therefore, have less access to minors; they do not tend to have antisocial characteristics in their functioning [22] or criminal history [23]. In contrast, these offenders are more likely to present Personality Assessment Inventory results that suggests depression, borderline personality characteristics, and reduced levels of aggression and dominance. However, in the study by Bourke & Hernandex [24], involving ICPOs, they admitted that could have had sexual intercourse with a child if an opportunity had arisen that was conducive to crime. Mixed offenders admitted using child pornography as a substitute to avoid new contact offenses. They are significantly more likely to engage in sexually deviant behavior, such as talking to a minor, sending pornography communicating their sexual interests, and arranging a meeting [25], a greater likelihood of having antisocial characteristics [26] and the diagnosis of pedophilia [19]. In short, in what refers to risk factors for the consumption of pornography involving consequent contact with a child, it highlights the presence of antisocial traits (e.g., impulsiveness), an atypical sexuality (e.g., paraplegic sexual interests) and situational factors such as the opportunity to commit the crime [27-29].

In the context of situational factors, Houtepen, Sijtsema & Bogaerts [26], distinguish as risk factors environment online versus environment offline. In the first, child pornography offenders may experience habituation through regular exposure, which results in the need for more severe pornographic material and, in some cases, turn to hands-on offenses [30]. On the internet, the offenders may be at risk for negative influences from others who provide tips to offend, reinforce distorted cognitions that justifying sexual offenses and provide social status and support [30]. In the second, when child pornography offenders are isolated from people with more healthy views about this type of offending, may be at greater risk for committing child sexual abuse [30]. Once again, the offline access to children is also a risk factor for cross-over, since these offenders tend to choose victims who are easily 'available' [31]. A tool built to distinguish these two types of offenders corresponds to the Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool [23]. In a few words, this device allows the police to prioritise the most dangerous offenders, which means the most likely to commit hands-on sexual offences against children [23]. Through the evaluation of four domains: previous behaviours (e.g., convictions for a range of sexual offences); access to children (i.e., any access to children but particularly those of friends, acquaintances or neighbours); current behavioural facilitators (e.g., sexual communication online and offline) other factors (e.g., domestic abuse). In this regard, stands out the investigation of Chiua, Seigfried-Spellarb & Ringenbergb (2018) [32], which analyzed the differences between contact child sex offenders (CCSO), also known as hands-on child sex offender [33], and fantasy child sex offender (FCSO) also known as Internet solicitors [33] in online interaction. In opposition to FCSOs, who might psychologically harm children, CCSOs are a greater threat to children [30]. CCSOs can both physically and psychologically harm children and, according to McCarthy (2010), are much more likely to repeat the crime. This study has revealed that CCSOs, in their online chats, were more likely to use specific categories of words in their messages, such as for example first-person pronouns with negative or positive emotion words. It was demonstrated that the offenders recurred to self-disclosure as a strategy for building trust and therefore try to meet their victims in the offline world. These messages on the online world suggestive of self-disclosure elicited reciprocation, that is, after a message with a first-person pronoun (positive emotion or negative emotion), the next person's message often had some words from the same category(ies), suggesting that self-disclosures elicited other's self-disclosures [30]. According to the authors, the replication of these study can inform undercover police training and serve as the basis for a digital forensics tool that detects CCSOs. In this sense, undercover police can be trained to recognize the presence of self-

disclosures (especially involving negative emotions) and, in turn, identify CCSOs [30]. In line with Seigfried-Spellar, Ringenberg, Chiu and Rogers another idea is building a digital forensics tool that automatically analyzes online chats to detect CCSOs. In this sense, Fortin, Paquette, and Dupont suggest another promising tool: script analysis. This strategy explains how different types of crime may be committed in a particular sequence and, according to the authors, this tool is particularly important in considering the future orientation of research and prevention of child pornography. In the investigation of the mentioned authors, four episodes were identified:

The Beginning: The offender begins with the consumption of legal pornography.

Exploration: the traditional tools and material no longer suffice the purpose and the offender explores virtual spaces and tools, embarking on a process of socialization that facilitate the discovery of illegal child sexual exploitation material.

Immersion: the offender interacts systematically more with other internet users in order to access content that is rarer and considered more interesting, while learn how to acquire content and avoid apprehension by law enforcement agencies.

Acting Out: the objects of collections become real world targets and the child sexual exploitation material is used to facilitate their assaults by disinhibiting, seducing or blackmailing victims and/or to stimulate themselves prior to their assaults; others offenders use chat rooms to recruit victims for webcam sessions and in some cases, real-world meetings that may involve the filming of the assaults in order to share this content and try to obtain peer approval and community status.

As for the rates of recidivism in the consumption of child pornography, these are reduced, ranging from 0% to 9% for new crimes of child pornography [30,34-36], and 0% to 4% for new crimes of child sexual abuse [14,36]. When the samples include mixed sex offenders, there was an increase in sexual recidivism rates to numbers like 25% [10]. A recent study by Elliott & colleagues [37] examined the recidivism rates of 584 offenders consuming child pornography and 106 mixed offenders, and after an average follow-up of 13 years, only 2.6% of the first group were convicted of a sexual contact offense, as opposed to the 9.4% identified in the mixed group. Although the majority of the offenders are male, there is a small number of women involved in this crime [38]. These women record in their biographies significantly higher rates of abusive experiences than the general [39] and forensics [40] population, including women convicted of violent crimes as sexual and physical abuse in childhood [38,41,42] and adulthood [39] perpetrated by multiple social network offenders [38]. Given the intensity of the experiences of abuse [9] and parental neglect [43] experienced by these women, weaknesses in mental health arise, such as a history of suicide attempts and substance abuse [38] relationships of dependency

(Gannon et al, 2008), weak social skills (Hislop, 2001), low self-esteem [38], antisocial characteristics [44] substance use, trauma-related mental disorders [45-47]. Regarding the characteristics of child pornography crimes committed by women, in the study of Gottfried, Shier and Mulay 29% were convicted for possession, 32% for production of pornography without contact and 40% were convicted for production with contact. About 66% committed the offenses with a male co-offender and 71% of the victims were the children of these women [38]. Elliott & Ashfield [48-57] suggest that women are more likely to be driven by an effort to maintain the perpetrator's emotional involvement than by the monetary or exchange value of child pornography. This crime tends to involve three actors, namely a man motivated to acquire pornography, a child victim, and a person who gives access to that victim - not infrequently, his own mother.

Conclusion

The constant evolution of new technologies has brought new challenges to forensic science and criminal investigation. In the case of child pornography, the importance of psychological intervention with victims, who experience feelings of fear, impotence, stigma and hopelessness in the face of the impossibility of obtaining some control over the material circulating on the Internet, deserves particular attention. At the same time, there are also challenges in intervening with offenders, who reinvent their strategies, using the online world, to reach their victims in the offline world. As far as offenders are concerned, it is important to outline measures also based on technology for an automatic analysis of online content as a way to prevent the act from happening, as well as to develop, for example, longitudinal studies for a better understanding of the risk assessment of these offenders, distinct from other crimes. According to Westlake part of the existing gap between offenders who use technology and forensic sciences in the study of these offenders refers to the lack of knowledge of recent phenomena that cover both areas and translate into a slow response to sudden phenomena such as sexting. This phenomenon also reinforces the imperative need for digital literacy for a parenting in the digital age, given the risk of children and adolescents feeding the world of child pornography, without any intention or awareness of the consequences of this act.

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