

Exposure of children to pornography

Exposure of children to pornography at the Internet Cafes.

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The Internet is a worldwide network of computers. The theory behind the Internet is simple; any link in the system can help send data to its destination, even if the sending and receiving computers are not directly connected. The Internet is also home to the World Wide Web, a vast series of Web sites which contain information and which may be linked to other sites. These ultramodern communication have no moral basis. They are neither good nor bad. The new technologies are very useful and cheap and have changed the people's lives in many ways. The ugly side of the picture is that the new technologies have also changed the nature of pornography and have equipped the child exploiters with new tools and skills. Digital cameras have made the material production easier and cheaper with very little risk of detection. Reproduction is improved as digitized images do not age or lose their quality through copying. The distribution of pornography has become easier, cheaper and faster through the Internet. As the Internet by passes national boundaries and laws, detection and prosecution becomes increasingly difficult. Using digital graphics software, it is now possible to combine two images into one, or distort picture to create a totally new image: a process called Morphing. Non pornographic images of real children can be made to appear as pornography and pornographic images of "Virtual children" can be generated.

Currently, Pakistan is in the grip of information technology (IT) fever. The Government has taken a number of steps to create a conducive atmosphere for the growth of IT in the Country. The Internet connectivity has tremendously increased in the recent past and almost 5 82 cities and towns are currently connected, with new ones coming on board at a very fast rate. Due to a very high demand, cyber cafes or Internet clubs have mushroomed in all parts of the Country. Young people from the middle and lower socio-economic classes mostly frequent these clubs, where they enjoy the facilities of computer and Internet at a reasonably cheap and affordable price.

The Internet clubs and kiosks are in turn provided access facilities by the Internet Service Providers (ISPs). ISPs run the computers, which make up the Internet. These computers are usually referred to as "Servers". They are the points of entry to the Internet for most individual users. ISPs provide dial-up access to the Internet, where users gain access to e-mail, chat and millions of sites, providing information on virtually everything on the earth. Users can also upload and download files in various ways and ISPs provide the mechanisms for the exchange of files. ISPs assign IP (Internet protocol) addresses to individual computers, which use their Services to log onto the internet. The IP address identifies a particular computer on the Internet and tells the other computers where to find it. In recent years, the so-called free "ISPs" have emerged

on the net. Once an individual has joined a free ISP service, there are usually few attempts to verify the true identity and this can allow easy access to bogus, cost free Internet identities

Another interesting feature is the Internet Relay chat. The chat system allows two or more people to speak over the Internet using text messages. It provides the basis for chat rooms, which are particularly popular with children and young people. Individuals often use pseudonyms in chat rooms. While some chat rooms are monitored for inappropriate language and content, others are not. Child abusers will sometimes enter chat rooms and pretend to be children in order to elicit information from real children and to gain their confidence, often with the intention of trying to meet a child in real life in order to abuse them. Pornography may also be used as a tool to lower a child's inhibitions and by showing pornographic poses, entice that child into compromising situations.

Pornography and the Rights of the child.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Article 34 states that: "State Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of Sexual Exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, State Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
- The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

On 25 May, 2000 an Optional Protocol to the CRC was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the subject of Sale of Children, child prostitution and child pornography. The Protocol extends some of the measures contained in the CRC. Under the provisions of the Protocol, States who ratify it must ensure that production, distribution, dissemination, importation, exportation, offering, selling or possessing child pornography are criminalized, if any of those acts are for the purpose of sexual exploitation of the child. An attempt to commit any of the acts, or complicity or participation in any of the acts must also be covered under the criminal law of the ratifying State. Similarly, it is a criminal offence and must be dealt with the appropriate legal instruments.

The Present Study

In 1999-2000 the Child Rights and Abuse Committee PPA, conducted a Situation analysis of Sexual abuse and Exploitation of children in Pakistan in collaboration with Save the Children, Sweden. The study used a number of instruments like Press reports, Police records, medicolegal data, interviews with key informants, Focus Group Discussion, Walk through Surveys and meta-analysis of secondary data. The study had identified video shops as high-risk places in the context of child sexual abuse. At that time, the Internet Cafes were not included in the Study. At a subsequent meeting organized by National Commission on Child Welfare and Development, some participants disclosed, that based on anecdotal evidence, the internet clubs may be yet another emerging high risk place for children, which need to be researched through a rapid study

Objectives of the Study:

- The main objectives of the present Study were to;
- Find out the dynamics of exposure of children to pornography at the Internet clubs .
- Investigate any possible links between exposure of children to pornography and their vulnerability to sexual abuse.
- Suggest preventive measures based on the conclusions of the study.

Study Methodology:

The Study was conducted in three major cities of Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar during the months of July-Sept. 2001. 3 teams of investigators (one each at 3 cities) visited around 5 internet Clubs, located in various parts of the 3 cities. The research teams used the following methodology:

- Observations
- Informal exit interviews with the Net users
- Informal chats with the Cafe owners
- Filling of a pre-designed questionnaire (anonymous) by the net-users. (Only the Karachi team used this last method.)

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Results and Conclusions

There has been a mushroom growth of Internet Clubs in all parts of Pakistan, during the last 2 years. Internet clubs/cafes are generally located in busy markets and shopping plazas but some are also housed in semi-residential areas. The exterior of a typical cafe is not at all appealing rather a low profile is applied usually. These clubs are not very spacious but they can house about 10-90 personal computers (PC's) along with a server and a counter for the manager who is usually the owner of the club. The doors of these clubs have colored or tinted glasses. The interior of nearly all clubs is similarly designed with small wooden or cardboard cabins covered from all the sides containing one PC per cabin. Between the two rows of cabins is a narrow passage. A casual visitor will get no idea what the users are doing as nearly all the PCs face in the opposite direction and a user sits with his back to the wall. When asked about the level of privacy provided to the clients in his club, an owner laughingly remarked, "it is as good as in your bathroom". Some of the Internet clubs are air-conditioned (and expensive) and usually they are clean, well kept and quiet. Many Internet clubs have cabins with two chairs and a door, which can even be locked from inside.

Internet clubs provide facilities for internet chatting, browsing and audio and video clipping. They provide head phones at no extra cost. If the user can bring his own CDs to watch songs or a movie (whatever the ratings). The two chairs are utilized by the user and one of his friends usually a new comer or one who pools in money for the Internet hours. The computers used are from older 486 generations at different clubs with different downloading speeds and consequently with varying rentals from Rs.15 to 25 per hour of one computer usage. Air conditioned clubs charge up to Rs.35 and there is a

concession for regular users or members. Some clubs also sell floppy disks for people to copy text or graphics to view later. Most of the computers are occupied almost continuously and people have to wait for their turn in busy hours. Occasional Internet clubs also provide refreshments and snacks and charge for them.

All kinds of people visit the internet clubs including children (even 8-9 years old), young adults and elders, though girls and women visit very infrequently. Most people (70-80%) come for Internet chatting and for watching pornographic pictures, which can be done simultaneously in different windows. Some (<90%) people come to check E-mails or use computer for their different work and not use the Internet. Some people only watch movies or watch listen to songs.

Majority of people who visit Internet clubs are 20-30 years old (about 70%); children below 18 are 90%; and people over 30 years are about 10%. Almost 100% of children come for watching pornographic material. Some of them do chatting as well but as most of them are not well versed with English language, they spend most of the time in downloading pictures while some watch movies. These children are from two different social strata. Young laborers, who work at hotels or workshops, earn money, pool it and in the free hours come to see pictures. The other group is from lower middle class. They know computer and have been brought by friends to see pictures. Some of them also have PCs at home but they cannot see these sites in front of other family members. These students spend a lot of their pocket money on Internet and many also pool money or get it through other means. They also use Internet on credit.

The owner obliges regular customers through concessions and credits. Operating the Internet is so easy (user friendly) that any learns it in a few hours and so the Internet club manager does not have to teach any one. The sites also come in automatically through addresses or links. If one is doing a chat, links to the pornographic sites continue dropping in on the PC. If one opens one porn site, the other start showering on the screen. People do not have to log in any membership or credit card numbers. If required credit card numbers are also very easy to hack (get some one else's without his knowledge).

Interviews with children:

Exit Interviews were conducted with 56 children. Besides few differences, the responses were almost similar. The majority were 15-18 years old (range 12-18 years). Most of them belonged to lower middle and middle socio-economic class. They spend 1 -9 hours per day and visit the club 2-3 times/week. They were spending Rs.25 to Rs.50 per day. One young boy at Karachi informed that he spent as much as Rs. 100-150 per day. This child belonged to a very well to do family and despite having a PC at home enjoyed visiting the cafe. Some said that they do not have Internet connections at home or parents don't allow them to access the net or they visit whenever they are short of Internet hours, still the majority said that they visit the cafe for more privacy which they do not enjoy at home. Some children initially visited a cafe with their friends who are instrumental in introducing them to Net club but once they are familiarized with the place, they visit alone. The main purpose of their visits is chatting and surfing on the net. A few told that they came to check their E-mail at the free Internet accounts. Almost 50% of the children admitted that they have visited a pornographic site but when asked whether they know of a porno-site, over 80% named a number of sex sites. Some of the most known/watched porno-sites are desibaba.com. worldsex.com, pureteen,

moondesire.com and cybersex.com. The children informed that it is very easy to access porno-sites on the Net; all you have to do is to connect to one and you will get a shower of links and addresses of other such sites popping on your screen. Many children at Peshawar told that they were interested in getting pictures of famous Indian or Hollywood films stars in nude. They said that they watch these pictures just or will usually share their experience with classmates and other friends. Almost all of the children interviewed said that they were against the idea of downloading movies from the net. They said that these movies are cheaply available at the Video shops and the downloading at low speed PC's is a much costlier alternative. When questioned if their education was disturbed, they all claimed it did not disturb their studies but no body responded that Internet usage helped them any way in their studies. The atmosphere of the clubs otherwise is very peaceful. There is no noise and everybody is absorbed in his own work. There have never been any violent incidents and no body has tried to approach these children indecently. None except one child at Karachi reported an unpleasant incidence at the cafe; the child described the incidence as a visit by police. One child said that once he ended up in a very embarrassing situation when his cousin caught him visiting a porno-site. Majority of the children confirmed that they have not sought their parent's permission for visiting the cafe. They also told that the managers of the Clubs never keep an eye on the children. They are only concerned with money the children remarked.

Interviews with the Club owners.

16 club owners were interviewed. All owners except one at Karachi, were very cooperative and provided detailed information to the interviewers. According to them, most of the people who visit Internet clubs are young adults (18- 30 years), however people of all ages, including children are amongst their clients. According to them most of the people who came to Internet clubs were serious visitors and porn sites were visited by less than 50% of the clients. Students of Computer Colleges visit these clubs very often and were good because they are regular customers and spend more time (and money) daily. The owners informed that children older than 10 years do come to play cyber games, listen to songs and do chatting. Some people visit for checking E-mail or watch movies on CD-ROM, which they bring with them. The owners at Lahore and Peshawar said that they discourage the use of movies because usually sex movies are watched. The CDs have a lot many scratches and they cause the CD-ROM drive to malfunction. Some have removed CD-ROM drives of their computers. 8 club owners said that they discourage children visiting the porno sites and admonish them. One owner at Lahore said that he has restricted children from watching movies in his club. The children, who cannot see movies or open porno sites, then stop coming to the club. He said that earlier many children used to visit his club but now the number has decreased. This has not affected his business as now there are more serious minded people working on PCs for longer hours. He said, he used better PCs and charged more but people want a good downloading speed and so visit his place. There are many other clubs with older slow PCs and they charge R. 1 5/hour. They do not work well on Internet rather they download a CD movie (mostly a dirty one) on their network hard drive and show it on all PCs. They change the movies once or more every week and so are virtually working as mini cinemas. They attract many children as the children can see movies easily and do not need to click on any thing else. He said children even younger than 10 visit these clubs: older children 12-15 also visit these clubs very frequently. These are usually workers at shops or workshops and they do not know a word of

English. They only come to watch porn 100% of times. They have only learnt to click some button and they even over load the PCs. These children come in groups of four or five and share their money in order to pay the rental. They sometimes even bring a younger boy of 5 years of age with them to show pictures only to get his monetary share. Older children do a lot of chatting but also open porn sites. For them, cabins also provide security and privacy to open up any site. Children usually do not need help, they know computers and they know what sites to open. They sometimes bring a piece of paper with site addresses. No body pays for porn sites; one can spend hours or days only watching free previews and get his money's worth. There are also sites that do not require any authentication and show every thing free of extra cost. These sites also give you free video clips and written material. He said he saw a club in Multan who had provided links to some porn web sites on desktop openly. A club owner at Karachi said that he does not interfere with what children are watching as the pornographic movies are available on CDs and cassettes and any one can have easy access to these movies so why stop his clients. He further added that soon TV monitors will be linked with cables from various clubs and then even people who do not have PC at home can have access to Internet, and these sites may be watched at home. The owners informed that there have been non-violent incidents and no one takes any undue advantage of younger children. Younger children come with younger children and older with older so it is very unlikely that any thing wrong goes on in the cabins. The owners give credit to regular customers. Young children usually visit every day or on alternate days for about an hour. Time is limited by the money, they have otherwise they are no hurry to go home. The owners informed that Police have never raided a club; in fact some policemen come to play cyber-games or watch porno-sites!

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Recommendations to Prevent Children's Exposure

As given by owners of Internet Clubs.

The best solution is filtering pornographic material at the Internet Service Provider (ISP) level. All of them should be filtering the material as done in Saudi Arabia and Singapore. Safe online and a few other ISPs are already providing filters but their speed is very slow and has not been very popular.

If one does not show movies at his club, smaller children and those who come solely for this purpose and do not even understand English will be discouraged.

There can be restriction of age and children younger than 12 may not be allowed without accompanying parents or guardians. However, most of the young working boys do not live with their parents.

At present, there is no association of Internet clubs. The association can work on this issue and implement voluntary restriction to be followed by all the members.

Other Recommendations:

Legislation

Pakistan has signed the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifically deals with child pornography. The next step is to ratify the protocol and enact laws that deal with various forms of child pornography and exposing the children

to pornography on the Internet. Till that time, the existing laws should be utilized to deal with criminal activities involving children on the Internet. The essence of all laws and actions should be "Zero tolerance on child pornography" .

Parental Involvement:

Parents need to be educated and involved with their children's Internet experience. They need to be vigilant and keep an eye on the Internet Clubs in their neighborhoods. There are software packages and web site rating schemes designed to help parents guide their children's Internet experience at home while still allowing the child Internet independence.

Filtering Software:

The Internet clubs should mark and specify the computers to be used by children (up to 18 years). These computers should use rating and filtering software designed to identify content, which may be hazardous to child viewers? Filtering software follows three main models; black listing, White listing and neutral labeling. Blacklisting blocks access to listed sites whereas white listing allows access only to listed sites, blocking all other sites. In neutral labeling, the sites are labeled or rated, but it is up to the user to decide how to use the rating system. The Net clubs should use the White listing system, in order to protect children from all terms of pornography.

ISP Filtering:

The Internet Service providers can play a crucial role to curb the menace of pornography and protect children of having access. Filtering software can be installed by ISPs, which will hinder access to pornography both on PCs at home and at the Internet clubs. This form of filtering is gradually becoming popular in many countries around the world. There is a need to design a code of conduct for ISPs in order to clarify their roles and responsibilities relating to the illegal content on the Internet.

Child 's Participation:

Educate children to ensure their own safety and protection while surfing on the Internet. In many countries, ECPXE groups and other organizations have already begun awareness raising programs with young people about being safe on the Internet.

Net Smart Rules

Never tell anyone you meet on the Internet your home address, your telephone number or your school's name, unless your parent or carer specifically gives you permission.

Never send anyone your picture, credit card or bank details, or anything else, without first checking with your parent or carer.

Never give your password to anyone, not even to best friend.

Never arrange to meet anyone in person without first clearing it with your parent or carer, and get them to come along to the first meeting, which should always be in a public place.

Never hang around in a chat room or in a conference if someone says or writes sonnets which makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, and always report it to your parent or rarer.

Never respond to nasty, suggestive or rude e-mail or postings in usernet groups.

Always tell your parent or carer if you see bad language or distasteful pictures while you are connected. Always be yourself and do not pretend to be anyone or anything you are not.

Always remember if someone makes you an offer which seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Ref. [Protecting children Online- An ECPAT Guide.](#)