

Internet Watch Foundation: Study of Self-Generated Sexually Explicit Images & Videos Featuring Young People Online

Aims

The aim of Internet Watch Foundation's study was to provide a snapshot of statistics relating to the volume of sexually explicit self-generated images and videos featuring young people currently in circulation on the internet. It also attempted to quantify the extent of the risk relating to loss of control of that content once it has appeared online.

Key Findings

- During the course of the 4 week study 12,224 images and videos were assessed as being self-generated content featuring young people
- 7,723 of these were images and 5,076 videos
- In 10,776 instances (88%), IWF analysts determined that the content assessed had been harvested from its original upload location and reposted on a third party "parasite website" over which the young people depicted had no control regarding its removal or onward distribution
- The study also collected illustrative quotes from young people who have reported finding such images of themselves posted online, demonstrating the impact of such experiences:
 - "One explicit image I took when I was young but I cannot be specific to if I was 15 or 16 because it was long ago, and I never posted it to the internet...It is coming up on the first page of [search engine] also if my name is searched and on [search engine] images for my name which could jeopardize any future career I have or if any family/friends come across it."
 - "I came to regret posting photographs of myself naively on the internet and tried to forget about it, but strangers recognized me from the photographs and made lewd remarks at school. I endured so much bullying because of this photograph and the others...I was eventually admitted for severe depression and was treated for a suicide attempt."
 - "...the photos were on a phone that was stolen around 2 years ago...the photos were taken when i [sic] was under 17 years old."
 - "I'm an individual who was coerced into posing for this site at the age of 16, and have regretted this ever since...My parents would be horrified...I have suffered badly from depression, and every time I begin to feel good and confident about myself ...I just remember these pictures and what I did."

- “Please remove this from the internet as soon as possible as one family member has already come across it... I feel like ending my life as I am so ashamed and embarrassed [sic] and this has been put up without my consent.” [sic]

Policy Context

It is intended that the results of the study will be utilised by organisations (e.g., Childnet and South West Grid for Learning) working with young people to raise awareness of the risks surrounding creation and distribution of self-generated content online, and to consolidate the messages behind their awareness raising initiatives.

Methodology

The study took place over a four week period in September 2012. IWF Internet Content Analysts were asked to assess leads generated from public reports of URLs displaying potentially criminal child sexual abuse material made to the IWF Hotline in relation to three criteria:-

1. Is the content being assessed “self-generated content” featuring “young people”?
2. Is the content being assessed a still image or a video?
3. Does the content being assessed appear on a “parasite website”?

Background

Experts working in this field have for some time been aware of an increase in the online availability of self-generated sexual content featuring young people. As a result, a number of awareness raising initiatives exist to educate young people regarding the risks of creating and distributing this type of content, and how easily control over the circulation of that content can subsequently be lost.

The purpose of this study was to provide a snapshot of statistics relating to the volume of sexually explicit self-generated images and videos featuring young people currently in circulation on the internet, and also to attempt to quantify the extent of the risk relating to loss of control of that content once it has appeared online. This research was launched at the IWF Awareness Day 2012 in conjunction with IWF's Safer Internet Centre partners Childnet and South West Grid for Learning.

Source <http://www.iwf.org.uk/about-iwf/news/post/334-young-people-are-warned-they-may-lose-control-over-their-images-and-videos-once-they-are-uploaded-online>

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