

Child Abuse & the Internet

- The past decade has seen the rapid development and tremendous growth in the use of electronic, computer-based communication and information sharing via the "Internet".
- Australia is currently the third highest Internet user
- In 2000, more than half of Australian households had at least one computer, 34% being connected to the Internet
- Use of the Internet promises many benefits for society, by effectively avoiding the effect of geographical distance and facilitating information sharing.
- The Internet has also been found to have particular benefits for children and young people, who claim that it improves their writing and language skills
- Internet offers online support and information for children experiencing emotional difficulties

Child sexual exploitation

- The development and spread of the Internet enables easy and private access to children therefore providing increased opportunities for the demand of children and the committing of abusive acts by offenders outside the family.
- The increased opportunities for the sexual exploitation of children has increased access to offensive and age-inappropriate material through the Internet media.
- The Internet also facilitates the activities of offenders by providing a simple and quick means of communication which allows a person to remain anonymous and/or create false identities.

Solicitation of children

- Internet has become a popular mean for this situation as it provides both easy access to children and a reduced risk to offenders of being identified
- An offender may lurk in Internet chat rooms, gathering information until an opportunity arises to move the conversation with a child to a private chat room, and then ultimately arrange a real life meeting

"At risk" children

- Sexual offenders often target children with particular characteristics which may include: children in the care of the state, emotionally immature children with learning or social difficulties and problems, love or attention deprived children, and children from single parent families.

Other forms of child abuse on the internet include promotion of child sexual tourism, harassment of children, commercial exploitation of children, extended use of the internet and when they can't distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Prevention Strategies

A number of non-profit organisations have been formed with the aim of promoting the protection of children who use the Internet. For example, an international coalition of people and groups to support actions against the misuse of the Internet, the "World Citizens' Movement to Protect Innocence in Danger" .