

Online Child Sexual Exploitation

What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation is when a child is exploited for the sexual benefit of another person. Although this may seem consensual, there will be an imbalance of power in favour of the perpetrator. This is a separate offence to child sexual abuse. However, it can still have links to this. The internet makes this easier to carry out as it provides more opportunities for offenders, as well as a level of anonymity. Even if a child receives something in return for a sexual act, it is still not their fault.

The victim and the perpetrator

A victim is under the age of 18 – even if they are over the legal age of consent which is 16. They are more likely to be those who are vulnerable in some way – for example if they have prior experiences of neglect and/or abuse, having a disability and having connections to others who are being sexually exploited. However, this may also not be the case at all. The perpetrator is often a social outcast - however this is not always true. The perpetrator often knows the victim - however they may be an unlikely suspect. Although there are factors which increase the likelihood of someone being a victim or a perpetrator, these are not always present.



Online Child Sexual Exploitation

An increase in the use of online communities, such as social media platforms, has allowed people access to things they may not have previously had easy access to – for example, communication with children from different geographical locations. For example, perpetrators can often pretend to be somebody other than themselves in order to communicate with a child. This could be argued to give them a sense of anonymity, however they may still leave a 'digital footprint' too. Predators also use the internet to form online communities who often legitimise this exploitation and to share inappropriate content, further increasing the risk to children.

What can be done or is being done?

Legislation is in place so that these criminals can be convicted. Specially trained officers are used to hunt down these people and to track where they are, what they are doing etc. Although the internet provides a level of anonymity, these officers are trained to look into their 'digital footprint' and therefore this can be used against the perpetrator. Vigilante groups are often taking the law into their own hands or trying to pass on information to the police. This can be both good and bad.

Conclusion

- Child sexual exploitation is an imbalance of power used for sexual gratification for the perpetrator against a child under the age of 18.
- The internet provides perpetrators with more means to commit crimes against children.
- Legislation is put in place to prevent this from happening and to convict those who commit these crimes.
- Specially trained officers are used to help combat this.



Crystal Andrews
14535394