

Visible Evidence – Forgotten Children

The need for a child protection and children's rights focus
in identifying children who have been sexually abused
for the production of child abuse images



Save the Children has been at the forefront in the fight for children's rights since 1919. Save the Children works for:

- A world which respects and values each child
- A world which listens and learns
- A world where all children have hope and opportunity
- A world where children are protected from violence, abuse and exploitation



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Background and Summary

We have very little knowledge about the children who appear in child pornography - very few are ever identified.

Taylor, M & Quayle, E (2003). P.19

In a society where child sexual abuse is shrouded in secrecy and denial, the vast majority of abused children and adult survivors remain silent about the abuse they have suffered. Coercive techniques (grooming) of child sexual abuse offenders and the failure of child protection systems to protect victims and support disclosure exacerbate the situation. The abuse continues when photographic evidence of child sexual abuse is circulated through new technologies and child protection systems fail to coordinate their actions to identify and protect the victims.

Save the Children has been active for many years in raising awareness about the issue of child abuse and has implemented programmes to combat child abuse in all its forms. Within this programme framework, Save the Children provides direct help to children who have suffered sexual abuse by providing support through appropriate therapeutic projects.

Since the mid 1990s six members of the Save the Children Europe group¹ have been engaged in combating the digital distribution of images depicting the sexual abuse of children and in raising awareness about child sexual abuse and exploitation via the Internet and other new technologies. These organisations have worked together to implement hotlines, awareness raising campaigns and advocacy activities calling for increased and improved efforts at national and international levels to fight sexual abuse of children and the production and distribution of child abuse images ("child pornography").

Save the Children Europe group presents this policy paper in response to the fact that very few children abused for the production of child abuse images are being identified, despite the existence of primary evidence within the abusive pictures.

The Interpol database of child abuse images contains photographic evidence of more than 20.000 individual children who have been sexually abused for the production of child abuse images. In May 2006, fewer than 500 of these victims had been identified and become subject to protection².

¹ *The Save the Children Europe group consists of eleven European Save the Children organisations including Save the Children Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK. These organisations work together to promote and protect children's rights in Europe and elsewhere in the world. www.savethechildren.net/brussels*

² *These figures were provided by Interpol in May 2006*

Child sexual exploitation and abuse are severe violations of human rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³. They have far-reaching and devastating implications for the present and future development of the child. However, with the current focus, resource allocation and methods for victim identification, most of the children abused in connection with the new technologies will never become subject to child protection measures and denied the therapeutic support that is necessary for their recovery.

Save the Children puts forward the following recommendations to ensure that an increased number of children abused for the production of child abuse images distributed through electronic media e.g. Internet, are identified and have their right to protection and care fulfilled:

- 1. Ensure political commitment and priority to identification of victims on child abuse images distributed through electronic media such as the Internet**
- 2. Ensure well coordinated international and national policies on victim identification through improved Inter-agency cooperation**
- 3. Allocate resources and staff for victim identification**
- 4. Ensure clear mandates, structures and ownership of investigations at national and international level including cases where geographical origin/location of the crime, perpetrator and/or victim cannot be determined**
- 5. Ensure focus on child protection and improve support services for children who have been identified**
- 6. Provide training for child protection professionals on victim identification and the consequences of being abused for the production of child abuse images**
- 7. Update statistics and ensure academic research is undertaken on the extent and consequences of Internet-related sexual abuse of children**

³ Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets the obligation for all "States Parties [to] take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. Article 34 obliges "States Parties [to] undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

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

Child abuse images – what are they?

The term ‘child pornography’ is almost universally used when describing recorded images of children who are subjected to sexual abuse to produce such material. However, this term is deemed inappropriate by Save the Children within a child protection or children’s rights framework as it undermines the seriousness of the abuse. It also tends to oversimplify what is a very complex social problem, and the fact that there is a cross section of adults (and adolescents) that have a sexual interest in children. Save the Children therefore prefers to use the term “child abuse images” as it better reflects the nature of the offense.

Child abuse images are the visual recording of the sexual abuse of a child and they provide evidence of a crime being committed. The children who appear in such pictures are, at the time they are being taken, subject to degrading, abusive and humiliating acts of a criminal nature. In some of the images, they are beaten or burnt or are subjected to torturous sexual depravities. When made to pose in offensively sexual situations with others, including other children, they are subjected to psychologically distressing manipulation and abuse. No actual child abuse image (‘pornographic’ picture) of a child has been produced without the child suffering or being exploited. The abusive images are for the most part circulated via the Internet and other new technologies.

The right to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation is fundamental in the sense that it largely determines the possibilities to fulfill other basic rights which affect positive child development. Identification of victims is of vital importance to prevent the continuation of what may still be ongoing abuse. Also, these children will be in need of therapeutic support to guide them through the trauma of being abused and having the abuse filmed and distributed.

The "Wonderland" Case

In September 1998, 107 coordinated dawn raids led to the arrest of more than 100 people across Europe, the United States and Australia. They were members of the “Wonderland” network, which at its peak is believed to have had some 200 members worldwide. The network went to great length to keep its operation a secret, and operated with the help of developed technical skills. Each prospective member was required to submit thousands of new child abuse images. The 1263 victims were mostly under 10 years old, some under five, both girls and boys. Only 16 have been identified.

Source: Tech Web - CMP via COMTEX, Jan 11, 2001

The highly publicised “Wonderland” case (see box above) was an early example of how new technologies were exploited to abuse a large number of children for the production of child abuse images. Limited knowledge about the production of child abuse images and lack of collaboration between key child protection professionals, resulted in very few of the over thousand sexually abused children being identified.

The investigation, which focussed on apprehending the perpetrators, was criticised for its lack of a child protection element, and revealed how the primary evidence that existed within in the filmed material was not used effectively to identify the victims of the abuse. Moreover, social services and other child

protection agencies were not involved at a meaningful level in terms of victim identification and the abused children's therapeutic needs.

Why are so few victims identified and what can be done about it?

"A much more effective and strategic use of focused police resources would be to target specific pictures with a view to the identification of the children involved. This would imply a shift from offenders to victims, something that police services in general are not particularly effective at."

Taylor & Quayle 2003, Child pornography: An Internet Crime p. 205

The Children's House Model

Making victim identification work for children will require the judicial system to incorporate a children's rights philosophy that will enable children to access justice. The current legal systems in operation throughout Europe do not offer the vast majority of children justice or protection from abuse⁴.

The Children's House model adopted in Iceland, works on the basis of the principle of the best interest of the child, as set out the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the concept of inter-agency collaboration. It hosts judiciary agencies, child care service and health services, providing the child with all relevant specialists and authorities in one place.

This model enables the investigation and collection of as much relevant information as possible, while protecting the child from repeated forensic interviews and having to disclose the abuse they have been subject to, to many different officials from various authorities.

The Children's House is furnished in a child-friendly manner, with a child-orientated atmosphere which creates a feeling of security for the visiting children. The secure environment makes it more likely that a child is willing to tell his or her story. Because of their qualifications, the interviewer and other specialists in the house will be conversant with the development of children in general, and with traumas in particular.

The Children's House model generally provides the following four services: 1) arranging a judicial hearing, 2) medical examination, 3) advice and guidance to the child, next of kin and the specialists employed in the support system, and 4) psychiatric treatment and therapy for the child. By means of these four functions the interests of the child and next of kin are taken care of in a comprehensive, child-friendly and professionally appropriate manner in a single location. The legal system is also provided with a system which ensures a quality-orientated and legally correct procedure.

⁴ *Child Abuse and Adult Justice, 2002 Save the Children Europe Group*

In Save the Children's experience, there are four main reasons why current investigations fail to identify victims:

- Law enforcement officers lack the mandate, support and technical resources to take effective ownership of identification of victims on child abuse images circulated on the Internet or in other electronic media;
- There is a lack of inter-agency cooperation;
- Very few children disclose the abuse;
- There is limited knowledge about child abuse images among child welfare professionals and law enforcement officers;

Moreover, Save the Children believes that the failure of investigations to take the starting point in the best interests of the child and child protection principles prevents positive outcomes for the victims.

The next section looks at these obstacles in more detail and puts forward recommendations on how they can be addressed.

Making it happen – ensuring resources and formalised structures

“It appears that the level of response or rather engagement in victim identification relies heavily on the interest taken by those working in the local and national units etc.... Strategies developed at an international level are required. They must originate at and filter down from the highest level to ensure that the response is comprehensive, cohesive and inclusive at both national and international level.”

Holland, G (2005)⁵ p.5

Action taken to identify victims often relies on the interest taken by those working on the issue rather than being a result of national strategies. The lack of political commitment and prioritisation has resulted in the absence of national structures and clear mandates, possibilities of taking ownership of investigations and a lack of resources to identify victims.

Moreover, the exchange of information that could lead to a child being identified and protected is currently not taking place at national or international levels. This means that victims will continue to live with the secret of their abuse and many will continue to be abused, even though there is documented primary evidence of the abuse in the form of child abuse images.

Successful strategies to victim identification can be characterised by three themes⁶.

- Pre-identification phase – how the case is initiated
- Identification phase – the investigative methods employed which result in the child being identified
- Post-identification phase – support to the victims after identification

⁵ in Quayle, E., and Taylor, M. *Viewing child pornography on the internet. Understanding the offender, helping the victims*, Lyme House Press, Russel House Publishing, 2005

⁶ Holland, G. *Identifying children who are victims of child abuse images. An analysis of successful identifications in Quayle, E., and Taylor, M. in Quayle, E., and Taylor, M. Viewing Child Pornography on the internet: Understanding the offence, managing the offender, helping the victims*. Lyme House Press, Russel House Publishing, 2005

However, studies show that victim identification often is done in an ad-hoc manner without a base in national and international strategies that incorporate these elements. Law enforcement agencies that have focussed on victim identification have been left to make their own decisions and terms of references (Holland, G page 47). This state of affairs can lead to inconsistent investigative methods under the identification phase. The police often lack the appropriate mandate, support and technical resources to carry out victim identification. Moreover, the links between agencies that are necessary to implement the three-pronged approach to victim identification described above, are not in place.

Identifying and locating the children who are abused for the production of child abuse images are major challenges for law enforcement and other child protection agencies. It is an area that requires technical expertise, combined with painstaking assessment of the information within the image that can lead to the identification of an abused child.

Pictures can provide considerable evidence about such issues as location, and there have been a number of notable cases where children have been identified from evidence contained in, or related to, pornographic images. This is much less high-profile work than breaking up networks of traders, and does not yield immediate results that can be publicly characterised as 'fighting child pornography' or 'waging war on child pornographers'... But the identification of children involved seems to be a much more important primary activity than disrupting trading networks. It is also much more difficult, much more resources-intensive, and much more challenging.

Taylor & Quayle 2003, Child pornography: An Internet Crime p. 205

Interpol has been at the forefront of putting victim identification on the law enforcement agenda. Since 2003 it has facilitated the International Victim Identification Group which consists of 20 investigators. This structure allows dedicated officers to work together towards agreed goals through a virtual network, a collaboration which appears to account for the increases of children being identified in recent years. Workshops for police investigators are organised to discuss investigative methods and particular series of images found on the Internet. The goal is to share good practice as well as being able to draw on local expertise when it comes to images related to particular geographical areas.

A considerable amount of resources and efforts should be focussed on establishing inter-agency cooperation working towards the following goals:

- a. A genuine partnership between all those involved in the identification, protection and therapeutic aftercare of victims. This includes police, social workers, IT technical services, academics and NGO's working on this issue. The Children's House model developed in Iceland is an example of how such partnerships can be developed in the best interest of the child (see box).
- b. A child protection approach which involves police, social service departments and other child protection agencies working together. This includes allocating resources and establishing procedures which allow trained social workers to support the abused child and his/her family when he/she is identified. Some victims are abandoned post-identification once the abuser is convicted. Children often become "lost" in the legal process.

⁷ in Quayle, E., and Taylor, M. in Quayle, E., and Taylor, M. *Viewing Child Pornography on the Internet: Understanding the offence, managing the offender, helping the victims.* Lyme House Press, Russel House Publishing, 2005

- c. A system that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and good practice in the field at local, national and international levels.
- d. More research and better collection of data to grasp the seriousness and extent of these crimes including how Internet and other new technologies contribute to the wide spread and access to child abuse images. Research should be directed towards creating a better understanding of the consequences of the abuse and distribution of the abuse images produced has on the victims.
- e. Ensuring that national law enforcement agencies take ownership of cases within their jurisdiction as well as cases where the nationality of the perpetrator or the victim is unknown.

Save the Children makes the following recommendations to ensure resources and formalised structures for victim identification:

- 1. Ensure political commitment and priority to identification of victims on child abuse images distributed through electronic media such as the Internet**
- 2. Ensure well coordinated international and national policies on victim identification through improved Inter-agency cooperation**
- 3. Allocate resources and staff for victim identification**
- 4. Ensure clear mandates, structures and ownership of investigations at national and international level including cases where geographical origin/location of the crime, perpetrator and/or victim cannot be determined**

Operation Deep Water – placing ownership at the centre of investigation

During the late 1990's the COPINE project at the University College Cork, Ireland became aware of a series of abusive images. It consisted of thousands of images of at least 36 young girls. The series was released over a period of three years from 1997-2000 and was a major cause of concern because it was apparent the abuse was ongoing. The girls physically matured in the images which meant that they must have been taken over a period of a few years. COPINE contacted various police forces who were aware of the series but were unable to take ownership of the case as there were no "identifiers" in the case which suggested a country of origin. Therefore no law enforcement agency was prepared to conduct an investigation. However, COPINE believed that there was enough evidence in the pictures to lead to identification of the victims. In June 2001, they presented an analysis to the Interpol Specialist Group on Crimes against Minors and made a plea for a police force to investigate the images to identify the children in the images.

In 2001, an investigation was initiated by the Norwegian police (Kripos) on behalf of Interpol. It had taken four years from the discovery of the images by COPINE for a national police force to take ownership of the case. The long complex investigation that ensued, involved many experts such as geologists examining rock formations, meteorologists examining weather patterns and biologists looking at vegetation etc in the images. Many other police forces around the world were contacted in relation to the images to see if they had any relevant information. This complex detective work finally resulted in the identification and arrest of the offender. He was the father of the girl who was pictured in most of the abusive images and had used his daughter to make contact with the other victims who were all girls of a similar age. He was later convicted for the production of child abuse images and the sexual abuse of 8 of the children in the images.

Breaking the silence – ensuring a focus on the victims

The victim's silence is often prolonged as a result of the limited knowledge about child abuse images and the circumstances under which they are produced.

Holland, G. (2005)

Research suggests that very few children who are abused within the process of producing child abuse images will disclose their abuse. This, combined with limited knowledge of the problem and the failure of society to coordinate effective mechanisms to tackle it, present fundamental obstacles to victim identification and implementation of measures to protect and support children in the post-identification phase.

Child sexual abuse is a global problem which is shrouded in secrecy and societal denial. Most victims are abused by a person they know, which often includes primary caregivers. They are manipulated to silence and a sense of complicity through “grooming”⁸.

Sexually abused children will feel shame and bewilderment at what has happened to them – these feelings can be exacerbated by the process of being photographed or filmed. Evidence suggests that the recording of sexual abuse in child pornographic images aggravates and prolongs victimisation of the child and can increase the child's sense of complicity.

Child sexual abuse investigations should always consider if the abuse was filmed or photographed, yet social workers engaged in child protection work might never even ask victims if they were photographed when the sexual abuse occurred. (Holland, G. 2005). This can be addressed by educating professionals in new technologies and how it is being used by perpetrators.

"The fact that the camera is there changes the abusive behaviour of the abuser. A certain script is followed; a script that often seems to increase the violence of the abuse. The presence of a camera enhances the powerlessness of the child in the abusive situation, diminishing the child's ability to interact or to say 'No' or 'Stop'. The child is performing for an audience, is given orders to smile etc., thus increasing the child's sense of complicity..."

Anders Nyman at a speech held at the VIP expert's meeting in London, 2001

In order to support disclosure, it is essential that the victim is provided with a secure and child-friendly environment and is supported by qualified child protection professionals.

It is also important to ensure that victims are given qualified professional help in coming to terms not only with the sexual abuse as such, but also the fact that images of their abuse will be in continuous circulation on the Internet. Once on the Internet, a single image of sexual assault of a child will circulate in cyber-space fore-

⁸ *The Grooming Process is the strategy used by sexual abusers to manipulate the child, and potentially protective adults, so the abuse can take place in a situation where the abuser has total control over the victim. It is a process where the abuser gradually overcomes the child's resistance through a sequence of psychologically manipulative acts. It is also used to silence the child after the abuse has taken place.*

ver. The implications of this are that the child's image could be downloaded and copied onto a computer many times with many people having the possibility to see the child being sexually abused. This knowledge will follow the victim into his/her adult life and make it more difficult for them to come to terms with the abuse.

However, there is very little research to inform psychologists and social workers who are working with victims of this form of abuse. There is also very little scientific data on this issue that can be used to assess the problem and offer solutions. This needs to be addressed by research institutions and funded accordingly. Universities and other research bodies should be encouraged to enter this field of study.

The COPINE Victim Identification Project (VIP) based at University College Cork, Ireland, was one of the few projects to explore the processes involved in the identification of victims of child abuse images. It also addressed issues relating to the responses of social welfare and other agencies to children and their families. The projects' conclusions were that current work is fragmented and lacks a clear child protection focus. An important element of the study was the trans-national data it generated and the subsequent analysis of it. This contributed to the development of a comparative model of victim identification as well as methods of intervention and support. The project drew extensively on the COPINE archive of child abuse images kept for research purposes. The COPINE VIP project has been completed but has been fundamental in helping others find answers to this extremely complex social problem.

Save the Children makes the following recommendations to ensure a focus on the victims in all investigations:

- 5. Ensure focus on child protection and improve support services for children who have been identified**
- 6. Provide training for child protection professionals on victim identification and the consequences of being abused for the production of child abuse images**
- 7. Update statistics and ensure academic research is undertaken on the extent and consequences of Internet-related sexual abuse of children**

Operation Deep Water – placing child protection at the centre of the investigation

The abuse images discovered in the operation Deep Water included 43 individual children: 37 of these were identified and offered support by the local support services and Save the Children Sweden. Many of the victims were school friends and were identified from a school photograph. None of the 37 victims in the Deep Water case had disclosed the abuse before they were identified.

While successfully identifying and locating the offender, this operation maintained the child protection principle that the identification of the victims and interests of the children was the primary goal of the investigation. The following positive aspects in relation to professional child protection practice were apparent in Operation Deep Water and should be highlighted:

- The Norwegian police took ownership of the case at the request of the COPINE project and Interpol. They used major resources and time to identify the children by carefully examining every aspect of the information available in the images*
- There was effective international cooperation between law enforcement agencies*
- The case was transferred to the Swedish national police when the abuser was thought to be Swedish.*
- The Swedish police invited Social Services, Mental Health Teams and Save the Children Sweden to a strategy meeting before the suspect was arrested. The police contacted senior managers in all the relevant agencies prior to the arrest of the suspect to make sure resources were made available. They also made contact with the social workers who would be responsible for providing direct support services for the children and their families after the arrest of the perpetrator.*
- Save the Children Sweden, with experience of supporting victims and their families took responsibility for co-ordinating help for the children who were abused. The immediate needs of the children were separated from the needs of the parents to prevent the children being traumatised by their parent's reactions to the disclosure.*
- A national hotline was established so all concerned citizens could get help and information from qualified professionals.*
- Supervision was offered to all professionals working on the case to prevent professional burnout and trauma related to the case.*
- A media strategy was put into place so that journalists covered the event without further traumatising the children and their families.*
- Prosecutors with knowledge about child sexual abuse and offences committed in relation to the internet were seconded to the investigation.*

Conclusion

This paper is presented by the Save the Children Europe group in response to the fact that very few children abused for the production of child abuse images are being identified, protected and offered support.

The major obstacles to victim identification are identified and proposals are made as to how these can be addressed. The recommendations and examples of good practice in this paper provide a framework for action to ensure that more victims are identified, protected and offered the support that they need.

Save the Children calls on all relevant stakeholders to take immediate steps to create and implement the framework for action recommended in this report to ensure effective identification and protection of children abused for the production of child abuse images.

To this end, Save the Children calls on the European Union institutions and Members States in collaboration with relevant international and national authorities to ensure the political support and resources necessary to make such frameworks for action a reality.

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