

Formato: Poster apresentado em conferência

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Online Sexual Grooming: a cross-cultural perspective on online child grooming victimization

**20th World Congress for Sexual Health,
Glasgow, United Kingdom, June 12-16, 2011**

Language: English

Abstract

New technologies, particularly the Internet, are valuable educational, entertaining and connection resources but they also create a new and mostly unregulated environment that exposes children to a multiplicity of risks: violence, bullying, misinformation and sexual predators, amongst others. In fact, the unmonitored interface between children and adults has led to a growing concern about the Internet's role as a tool for adults wishing to sexual exploit and abuse young people. This research intends to examine the national prevalence and scale of online child sexual grooming, how it takes place and the core characteristics (behaviors, frequency, and duration) of the online grooming victimization. In order to accomplish a wider and more comprehensive view of this phenomenon, we have made a cross cultural comparison between Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom that are classified at a medium-high level of access to new technologies and exposure to online risks. To achieve our goals, we have developed a questionnaire (Online Victimization Assessment) that we have applied to a representative sample of youngsters from ten to eighteen years old, from Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, considering that we are still applying the mentioned questionnaire, we can't present its results at the moment of the abstract submission but will be able to do it in the event.

Keywords: Online Grooming; Victimization; Internet; Children

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

New technologies, particularly the Internet, are valuable educational, entertaining and connection resources but they also create a new and mostly unregulated environment that exposes children to a multiplicity of risks: violence, bullying, misinformation and sexual predators, amongst others. In fact, the unmonitored interface between children and adults has led to a growing concern about the Internet's role as a tool for adults wishing to sexual exploit and abuse young people.

This research intends to examine the prevalence and scale of online child sexual grooming, how it takes place and the core characteristics (behaviors, frequency, and duration) of the online grooming victimization.

METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

We have developed a questionnaire (Online Victimization Assessment) that evaluate cyberbullying; cyberstalking; sexual solicitations and grooming; giving personal information out; access to sites with inappropriate content and commercial Risks. This questionnaire was applied to a sample* of youngsters from ten to eighteen years old, from Portugal (986), Spain (756) and the United Kingdom (823) between the months of January and June.

* The initial sample purposed was of 6000 students total; unfortunately by the time of the event, the questionnaires were still in the application phase.

DISCUSSION

Online child grooming is a process designed to secure the trust and cooperation of children prior the engagement of sexual conduct (Kim_Kwang & Choo, 2009), using techniques like gradual sexualisation of the relationship by bringing up sexual matter, sending photos or videos with sexual content, asking to do something sexual, etc. (Elliot, Browne & Kilcoyne, 1995). Results show that the majority of youngsters who reported to have been victims of this type of online risk, also report the sexualisation of the relationship as the most common behaviors. Also, the aggressor is usually someone they've met online.

CONCLUSION

The results achieved allow us to comprehend that, although online grooming (when compared to cyberbullying, cyberstalking, amongst others) doesn't constitute one of the most frequent risk to which our youngsters are exposed, its impact can be classified as one of the most severe on their lives. We can also conclude that aggressors are mostly people children met online. Nevertheless, what can be worrying, can also be mitigated by the fact of youngsters appear to be protective about the information they give online.

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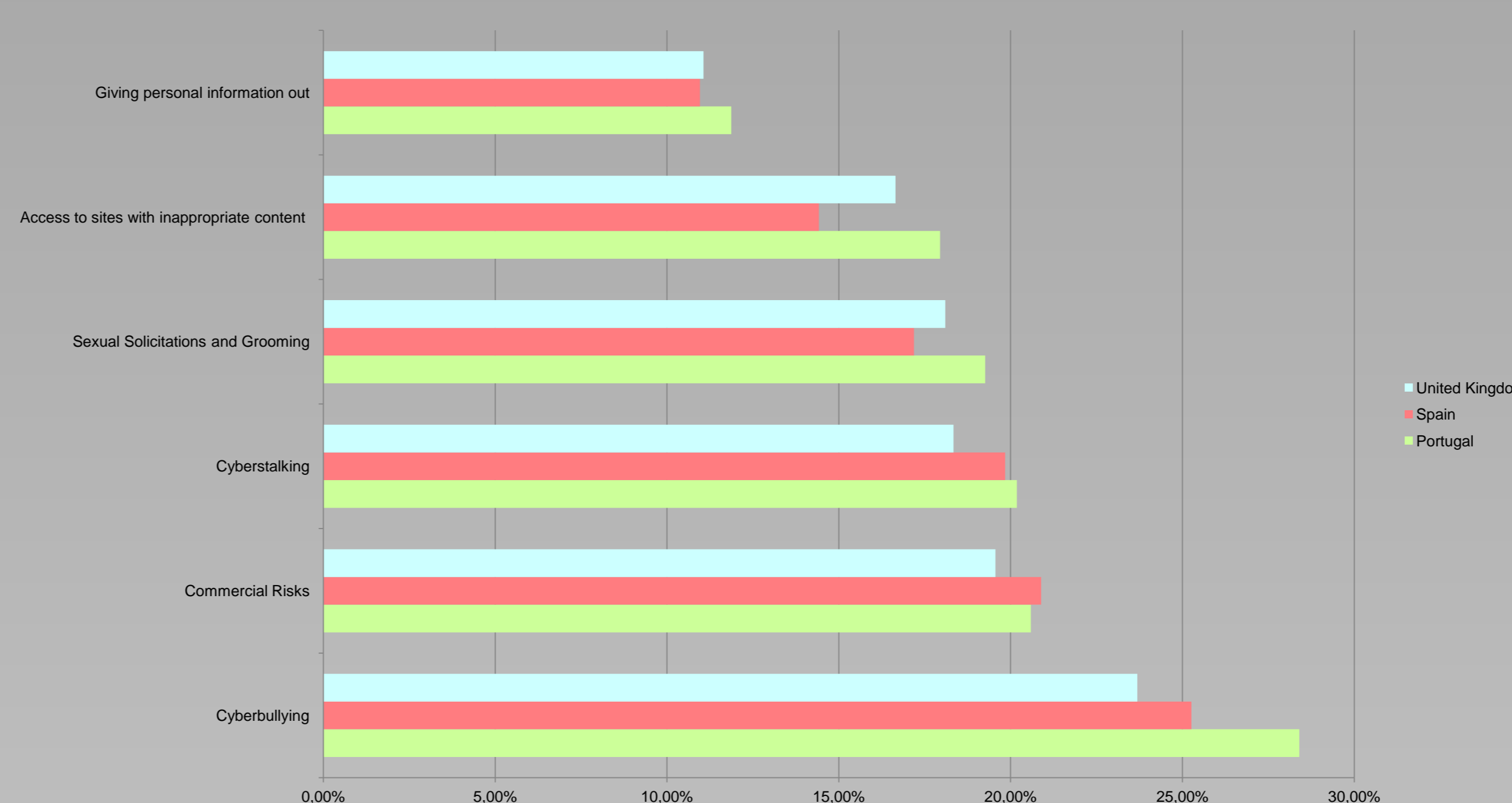
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RESULTS

Prevalence of Online Victimization



Sexual Solicitations and Online Grooming

Portugal – 19,26%

Portugal – 17,19%

Portugal – 18,10%

No significant differences between countries

Most common behaviors

- Someone who you knew on the Internet asked you to meet you personally
- T feel uncomfortable or threatened by someone online
- Receive e-mails or links to sites with sexual content
- Encouraged to talk about sex when they didn't want
- Encouraged to give sexual information online
- Being asked you to do something sexual online
- Receive photos or videos of sexual content

Less common behaviors

- Someone came to your house after you met online
- Someone you met online gave you gifts or money
- Someone you met online gave you a plane or train ticket to go meet him/her
- Have you ever been encouraged to flee your home in an online conversation?

Did you know personally who did this?

	Portugal	Spain	United Kingdom
Yes	7,89%	7,69%	12,75%
No	92,11%	92,31%	87,25%

	Portugal	Spain	United Kingdom
A person from your school	5,26%	2,32%	4,02%
A friend	2,64%	5,38%	8,72%
Someone you only met online	92,11%	92,31%	87,25%