

Beat: Business

Children's rights group ID's 1,000 pedophiles in child sex webcam

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USPA News - The identities of 1,000 people from 71 countries who sought out young girls to perform sex acts on webcam have been identified by an international children's rights group during a 10-week sting operation, the group announced on Monday. The Dutch wing of Terre des Hommes, which focuses on children's rights, said four researchers spent 1,600 hours interacting with 20,172 alleged predators seeking to engage in webcam sex with young children.

Of those looking for children, the organization was able to identify 999 men and 1 woman from 71 countries. "Webcam Child Sex Tourism (WCST) is a new phenomenon that's spreading like an epidemic," the organization said. "Men from rich countries pay children in poor countries to perform sexual acts in front of webcams. These crimes happen tens of thousands of times a day." Nineteen public English-language chat rooms were used during the operation, which took place between April 17 and June 12. They used information provided during the chats to search Google and social networking websites such as Facebook to uncover the real identities of the people they were talking to, and used their faces captured on cam to compare with photographs from social networking sites. "The moment that you log in and you identify yourself as a young girl from the Philippines, they swarm at you. It happens extremely fast," said one researcher, whose name was withheld. "We have men who are going online, finding these girls, virtually raping them, and then turn off their computer again and they go to work as if nothing happened." At least 254 of the alleged predators were from the United States, 110 from the United Kingdom, and 103 from India, making these the top countries of origin for adults identified during the operation. Other countries include Canada (54), Australia (46), Germany (44), Italy (22), Egypt (21), the Netherlands (20), Pakistan (20), Belgium (13), France (11), Saudi Arabia (10), Iran (10), Norway (9), Denmark (9), and Romania (6). The children's rights group handed over the files on the 1,000 alleged predators to the international police agency Interpol on Sunday, but it remains to be seen how many will be prosecuted. Only a small number of people have been convicted for engaging in webcam child sex tourism, despite it being illegal in nearly every country in the world. "The biggest program is that the police don't take action until child victims file reports, but children almost never report these crimes," said Hans Guyt, director of campaigns at Terre des Hommes Netherlands. "We want governments to adopt proactive investigation policies that give law enforcement agencies the mandate to actively patrol public Internet hotspots where this child abuse is taking place every day." During the sting operation, which took place from a remote location in the Dutch capital of Amsterdam, the researchers would use usernames such as "10 f Philippines" to indicate they were young Filipino girls. They then waited for predators to contact them and repeated their claimed age to ensure the men or women knew they were chatting with a child. Researchers claimed to be 12 years old in 47 cases in which the adult was identified, 10 years old in 920 cases, and 9 years old in 33 of the cases. In 290 of all cases, the researchers claimed to be accompanied by their 8-year-old sister and asked adults if they wanted her to participate in sex acts. To make sure adults would believe they were talking to a young girl, the researchers had previously observed chat rooms to copy the style and tone of writing that would be used by a preteen Filipino girl who provides webcam sex shows to men who pay. They also consciously misspelled and omitted words whenever possible, as it is unlikely a young Filipino child would write with perfect English grammar and spelling. In 20 of the cases in which the adult was identified, the researchers used the assistance of a custom designed and programmed computer model called Sweetie_1000. The computer model looks and moves as a 10-year-old Filipino girl sitting behind a webcam, and this technique was used when predators were reluctant to show their faces on webcam without first seeing the girl. "Sweetie proved to be extremely successful in gaining trust," the organization said. "With researchers controlling her facial expressions and motions, she quickly convinced predators that she was exactly the target that they were seeking to abuse. While predators tried to coerce Sweetie to remove her clothes and perform sexual acts for money, Sweetie and the researchers asked the predators to provide personally identifying information, including their names, e-mail addresses, locations, phone numbers, etc." Terre des Hommes said it received an average of 12.6 requests for conversations per hour, but researchers were only able to talk with some of them due to a lack of manpower and resources. The nature of requests varied between predators, but they most commonly asked to watch children masturbate or have sex with someone else. Other predators requested sex acts involving bondage, smoking and feces. "The children we are dealing with, they suffer from depression, they suffer from anxiety, they suffer from aggression," Guyt explained. "They have no idea about normal relations, they have no idea about sexuality, and what makes it worse is that it is on the increase and therefore we have shifted our attention to the demand side. If nothing is being done about the source of the problem, this phenomenon will only increase even further."

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