

The Scope and Magnitude of Online Sexual Abuse of Children in Highly Affected Areas in the Philippines

I. Background of the study

Global trends of increasing access to the Internet are aggravating risks for children to be exploited and abused online. Uploading of child sexual content, children posing in front of web cameras in online chat rooms, and streaming of sexual acts involving children are among the modern ways that offenders are sexually abusing children online.

The European Commission estimated that in 2005, 1 million child sexual abuse images were found on the Internet, with at least 50,000 new child abuse images added each year. More than 70% of these reported images feature prepubescent children aged 10 years and under.¹

As the Internet evolves to be today's most powerful source of information, allowing for tasks and transactions to be performed simply and easily; this same technology platform is allowing criminals to broadcast obscene images and videos of children quickly across countries and jurisdictions, while exploiting the anonymity that the Internet provides. Unfortunately, the Internet has become a vehicle for the distribution and sale of pornographic materials, and the convenience offered by gadgets such as mobile phones, digital cameras and computer software paved the way for almost instant production and transmission of abhorrent images and videos of children online.

Many forms of sexual abuse happen online with children falling victim to offenders whose identities are not easily verifiable. Online sexual abuse come about as indecent images of children or live video streams of children performing sexual acts. Indecent images online are easily duplicated on webmail, social networking and file hosting sites. Peer to peer file sharing of these images also happen between offenders. And there are commercial sites that facilitate live access to children using a webcam, where children are made to engage in sexual activity or show sexual parts of their body in exchange for payment.

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<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/global-alliance-against-child-abuse/index.en.htm>

In the Philippines, several laws seek to protect children from various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse online. *Republic Act 9775* or the *Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009* defines **child pornography** as “any representation of a child engaged or involved in real or simulated explicit sexual activities, whether visual, an audio or written combination thereof, by electronic, mechanical, digital, optical, magnetic or other means.” This legislation guard against the use of children in pornographic performances and materials, including those hosted on an Internet address or through an Internet server or facility. The law seeks to regulate Internet Content Hosts (ICH), Internet Service Providers (ISP), and Internet Cafes or Kiosks against the transmission or broadcast of any form of child pornography, or the provision of a venue for the commission of pornographic acts.

Republic Act 10175 or the *Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012* includes child pornography committed through a computer system as a cybercrime offense. It defines **cybersex** as “the willful engagement, maintenance, control, or operation, directly or indirectly, of any lascivious exhibition of sexual organs or activity with the aid of a computer system.” Cybersex is classified as a content-related cybercrime offense and punishable under this law.

Republic Act 7610 or the *Special Protection of Children against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act* aims to protect children against sexual abuse including cases that exhibit them in lewd or **indecent shows**, whether live or in video, or model in **obscene publications** or pornographic materials.

Republic Act 9208 or the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003* qualifies as **trafficking** the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of **sexual exploitation** in the production of pornographic materials, through publication, exhibition, cinematography, indecent shows, information technology or other means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.

The *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC)* takes interest in the growing availability of **child pornography on the Internet**, calling for the worldwide criminalization of the production, distribution, exportation, transmission, importation, intentional possession and advertising of child pornography online. Key recommendations from the *Philippines Alternative NGO Report to the OPSC* include the coordination of advocacy campaigns in communities focused on online

pornography and cybersex involving children, including the protection of children in using the Internet and social media.

Several institutional bodies have been created to coordinate, monitor, and oversee the implementation of these legislations. These are the *Inter-Agency Council against Child Pornography (IACACP)*, the *Special Committee for the Protection of Children*, and the *Inter-Agency Council against Child Trafficking (IACAT)*. The creation of multi-membership councils recognizes that many agencies and organizations have a responsibility for tackling child sexual abuse, including those happening online.

While cases of online sexual abuse of children have been reported and filed, there is still a current lack of evidence on this clandestine issue, with the number of actual cases likely to be higher than what is currently documented. The book “Child Pornography in the Philippines” by Arnie C. Trinidad (UP CIDS, UNICEF 2005) is one among very few sources of information in the local context, apart from news reports and case reports from government agencies and non-government organizations.

“Cybersex” in the Philippines

Online sexual abuse of children has one recognizable face in the Philippines – “cybersex.” Widespread Internet access and a technically-literate young population have increased Filipino children’s vulnerability to cybersex. Technology facilitates the operation of cybersex crimes with a single click, and at the same time helps to conceal the identities of those people behind these crimes.

Cybersex dens proliferate in the country, in Internet cafes, private residences, commercial offices and establishments. All it takes is a computer, Internet connection and a web camera to operate. These are either part of large international syndicates or small local “family-run” or “community-run” operations. The fact that cybersex operations are organized and configured differently where they occur, makes them harder to discover, much less gather evidence against perpetrators.

Cybersex has largely operated under the radar in the past. It was only in 2011 that the Philippines successfully prosecuted its first case of cybersex trafficking against two Swedish nationals and three Filipinos. Recent years have witnessed the increase in the number of cybersex victims rescued and cases filed.²

This assessment sets out what is currently known about online sexual abuse of children in this country—“cybersex” is its principal manifestation in the local milieu. This study, therefore, tackles the issue of cybersex first hand, while providing glimpses into the occurrence of online pornography involving Filipino children.

2. Research objectives and methodology

This study on the Scope and Magnitude of Online Sexual Abuse of Children aims to investigate the phenomenon of cybersex and online child pornography in the Philippines.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1) Understand the current nature, magnitude and trends of online child sexual abuse in the country.

² <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/17/world/asia/philippines-cybersex-trafficking/index.html>

- 2) Attempt to assess how many children are approximately involved in cybersex in particular geographical areas.
- 3) Identify ongoing responses and interventions, as well as gaps in eradicating online child sexual abuse.
- 4) Develop recommendations for future programming and planning to address online abuse of children.

Preliminary data were gathered on incidences and cases of online child pornography and cybersex from news reports and other online sources. Based on aggregate information from these sources, five geographical areas were selected as the focus of this study. These are Angeles City and Taguig City in Luzon, Cebu City, and the municipalities of Cordova and Dalaguete in the Visayas.

From these five areas, individual cases of victims of cybersex were explored and documented. A total of 44 cases have been investigated for this study, which includes 15 cases in Angeles City, 13 cases in Cordova, 7 cases in Taguig City, 6 cases in Cebu City, and the remaining 3 cases in Dalaguete.

In-depth interviews with victims, their families, and community members were conducted, in order to shed light on the nature of online sexual abuse and the profile of cybersex victims, offenders, and operators. A total of 65 respondents served as key informants for this study, who include the victims themselves, their parents or relatives, law enforcement authorities such as police officers and barangay *tanods*, local government officials from the barangay level, and city or municipal social welfare and development offices, social workers, church leaders, NGO workers, and other community members from the 5 focus areas who are familiar to the cases or are responsible for protecting the children.

3. The geographic focus of the research

Angeles City, Pampanga

The city of Angeles in the province of Pampanga is an important growth hub in Central Luzon. It houses industrial economic zones, which include the Clark Freeport Zone and Angeles City Industrial Estate. Export investments are lured by the newfound accessibility what with the opening of the Clark International Airport and the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX).

Once a major U.S. Military base, Angeles City is infamously known as a red light district. Despite efforts of the local government to rebrand the Fields Avenue tourist belt as a high end destination of luxury hotels and casinos, it failed to extinguish rampant underage prostitution, drugs and corruption in the area.

Reported cases of cybersex

In 2004, a series of raids by operatives of the Philippine National Police-Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (PNP-CIDG) led to the arrest of Belgian suspect Roland F.L. Thys and American suspect Dean Punke Arthur. They were arrested together with a Filipino cohort Dimanlao Bonjoc from police foray into 5 separate houses where 15 young women and children were rescued. Thys and Arthur were believed to be financing cybersex operations employing young women and children who perform to web subscribers in the U.S., Britain, Hong Kong and Japan on three 8-hour shifts. They are running a website where clients pay about \$1.59 per minute to access the site.³

On a separate incident, another cybersex ring got busted, allegedly co-owned by a man known as Brett Johnson, who police believe to be Dublin-born Robert Johnsten. Detectives from the Anti-Cyber Crime Unit were able to seize 40 computer hard drives containing thousands of credit card details of customers from the U.K., Europe, U.S. and Asia. All of them logged on to a website called honeydoll.com and paid up to £50 at a time to watch young girls and boys perform sexual acts via Internet web cameras.⁴

In 2005, James Paul Kelley, an American and the alleged operator of a cyber sex den was arrested in his residence in Don Bonifacio Subdivision in Barangay Balibago, while 6 women and 2 minors working as “cyber models” were rescued. Police said they were looking for Kelley’s alleged partner, a certain David Fisher, who was believed to be Canadian.⁵

Ten cybersex models, mostly minors, were rescued from a cybersex den in Diamond Subdivision in Barangay Balibago. The alleged operator, a certain William “Bill”

³ http://trafficking.org.ph/v5/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1136&itemid=56

⁴ http://www.sundaymirror.co.uk/news/tm_obje...-name_page.html

⁵ <http://www.philstar.com/nation/293103/another-cybersex-den-busted-angeles>

Keith Baird, an American national, and his local cohort, Candy Tuazon escaped from the police raid of the residence. Confiscated from the house were 10 computer units complete with monitors, keyboards, webcams, scanners, dildos and other sex toys.⁶

In 2009, the Children and Women's Desk of the Pampanga Police arrested mother and daughter cybersex operators, Josephine and Segundinan Caliste. A raid in their cybersex den in Barangay Pandan led to the rescue of four minors, reportedly relatives of the suspects, with one caught in the act of having a live sex chat with a customer. Two sets of personal computers and one sex toy were seized during the raid.⁷

In 2010, PNP-CIDG rescued 5 children aged 14 to 16 years old, working as "show" girls in a cybersex den operating in a private residence close to the City Hall. There were two large rooms with as many as 10 computers linked to the Internet. In one room, young women performed sexual acts before a digital camera that was sending their images to customers in Europe, North America and Australia. In the other room, the minors were found talking to male customers and exposing their naked bodies in lascivious poses.⁸

In 2012, twelve minors, whose age ranges from 6 to 14, have been rescued during simultaneous raids on alleged cybersex dens in 3 residential houses inside Marisol Manor Subdivision in Barangay Ninoy Aquino in Angeles City. Computer gadgets used in the alleged cybersex den operations have also been seized.⁹

Earlier this year, James Mont, an American national believed to be involved in international child pornography, was arrested by PNP-CIDG inside an apartment in Barangay Balibago. There had been reports that Mont asks his young victims not only to pose in the nude but also to stimulate sexual acts, like with the use of vibrators, while he videotapes them, and later uploads these videos and photos of

⁶ <http://www.philstar.com/nation/296454/ten-cybersex-models-rescued>

⁷ <http://tcdno5.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/regions/07/23/09/cops-raid-pampanga-cybersex-den>

⁸ <http://www.preda.org/en/news/fr-shays-articles/the-good-news-we-were-waiting-for/>

⁹

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/pampanga/local-news/2012/10/30/12-minors-rescued-cybersex-dens-25057>

naked boys and girls to the Internet. Police seized several computers, a DVD player, webcams, mobile phones, Internet broadband tools, memory cards and sex gadgets.¹⁰

Taguig City, Metro Manila

The City of Taguig is a highly urbanized city in Metro Manila's southeast. What used to be a thriving fishing community benefiting from nearby Laguna Lake, is now an important residential and commercial center in the greater metropolis. The construction of the C-5 road and the acquisition of the Fort Bonifacio area paved the way for Taguig's cityhood and rapid development.

Still, the citizens of Taguig are ranked to be some of the poorest in Metro Manila. More than 5 percent of its population are impoverished, and more than 20,000 households in the area are considered informal settlers. Taguig also has a young and less well educated population. While a high percentage of its labor force is employed, these are mostly in unskilled or daily wage jobs.

Reported cases of cybersex

In 2006, Taguig City police arrested Regie Gonzales and his live-in partner, Anna Marie Gabato in their residence in Calzada Tipas. The police found a half-naked girl engaged in an online chat session with a foreigner when the alleged cybersex den was raided past midnight. Girls, including minors, allegedly come to this house in shifts. Seized from the couple were 2 computer units with broadband connection and a web camera.¹¹

In 2008, small-time cybersex operations in the slum areas of Taguig were featured in the television show BITAG ("The Trap"), hosted by Ben Tulfo. The involvement of young children in cybersex piqued the interest of BITAG. What they found even more interesting was that the parents of these children victims actually consent to this because of the large income derived from cybersex.¹²

In 2010, another local television show IMBESTIGADOR ("The Investigator") aired "CYBERKIDS: A Special Report on Children Forced into Cybersex Operations."

¹⁰ <http://www.journal.com.ph/index.php/news/provincial/45369-american-in-fbi-watchlist-arrested>

¹¹ <http://www.philstar.com/metro/359158/cybersex-den-raided-taguig>

¹² BST Tri-Media Productions

IMBESTIGADOR together with NBI Cyber-Crimes Division and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) devised a plan for the arrest of the operators and the rescue of children, as young as 6 years old, who are being exploited as cybersex performers. IMBESTIGADOR found out that some parents even coerced their children to perform sexual acts for an international audience. After the arrest, more shocking evidence were discovered from the computers of the alleged cybersex operators.¹³

In 2012, police arrested Leny Dogayo, already wanted for Internet child pornography, at her residence in Calzada Tipas. The suspect allegedly established a web-based pornography chat room with her 15-year old daughter who serves as one of the models.¹⁴

Cebu City

The City of Cebu is the capital city of the province of Cebu. The city is a significant center of commerce, trade and education in the Visayas and in Metro Cebu, the second most populous metropolitan area in the Philippines after Metro Manila. Its proximity to many islands, beaches, diving locations and heritage sites, and the presence of world-class hotels and resorts, fueled the city's tourism industry. Cebu is also the country's main domestic shipping port and is home to majority of the domestic shipping companies. Hence, it has become the shipping and tourist gateway to Central and Southern Philippines.

Cebu City is also a major hub for the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. The city registered a nearly US\$ 500 million growth in BPO revenues in 2012. More and more foreign companies are locating their BPO operations in the city, and even ranked 8th worldwide in the "Top 100 BPO Destinations Report 2013."

Reported case of cybersex

On April 2013, Drew Frederick Shobbrook, an Australian national, was accused of operating a cybersex den in Barangay Labangon. Shobbrook was arrested after a raid at his apartment where 15 women, including 4 minors, were rescued. Laptop computers, desktop computers, computer parts, an iPad tablet, hard disks allegedly

¹³ GMA Network, Inc.

¹⁴ <http://www.tempo.com.ph/2012/10/pornographer-nabbed/>

containing explicit and lewd photographs, sex toys, and an unlicensed .45 caliber pistol and .38 caliber revolver were confiscated by NBI agents.

Municipality of Cordova

The Municipality of Cordova is a 3rd class municipality in the 6th district of the province of Cebu. Cordova is situated on an island and is separated from mainland Cebu by the Cebu Channel. The municipality consists of 10 coastal, 2 inland and 1 island barangays.

Located on an island, fishing is the major economic activity in the area, with majority of the population dependent on fishing for livelihood by more or less 1,500 fishermen. Other economic activities include stone extracting, shell gleaning and gathering and other services provision.

Due to the lack of direct access to Cebu City and nearby Bohol Province, the number of investments coming in to Cordova is low. Only 2 trading centers exist within the municipality, the public market and the market in Barangay Pilipog where fishers sell their catch.

The population in Cordova is young and with a large potential labor force, more than 60% of the population is in the working age category. Due to the lack of economic opportunities, more than 40% of the population falls below the poverty threshold.

Reported cases of cybersex

In 2011, a woman and her husband were arrested in Barangay Ibabao because she forced her own daughter to perform lewd acts online. The couple's 13-year old daughter, 14-year old niece and a 17-year old boy were rescued during the police operation, who were allegedly exploited in the woman's cybersex business. A computer was also seized.

The 13-year old daughter admitted that cybersex is their family's sole source of income after her mother quit her job as data encoder in Mactan Economic Processing Zone, while her father stopped fishing when he got sick 3 years ago.¹⁵

¹⁵

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2013/05/29/cybersex-turns-3-cordova-kids-orphans-2847>

On a separate incident, another couple was arrested inside their home for allegedly operating a cybersex den in Barangay Ibabao. Their 3 children, aged 11, 9 and 3 years, were rescued and brought to DSWD 7 Office. Prior to this, the police received a report that the couple allegedly earned at least US\$100 per client, and had been operating cybersex for almost a year. Three days later, undercover police officers, through a broken jalousie window, saw 2 minors posed naked in front of the computer inside the house. While police failed to catch children in the act during the raid, the couple's personal computer was left logged on to a porn site. A chat box revealed one of the couple's alleged clients asking the children to undress in front of the computer.¹⁶

Based from the testimony of a U.S. computer forensic expert who examined the hard drive from the acquired personal computer, the couple was said to have been operating the cybersex business for several months. There was an image showing a screen shot of a Caucasian having a Yahoo! messenger conversation with a teenage girl wearing only a white bra. The digital information on the hard drive also indicated that cybersex chat messages started in December 2010 to the day the arrest was made.¹⁷

In the same year, three women were arrested in another cybersex operation in Barangay Cogon, and 3 minors were rescued aged 17, 12 and 9 years old. The 3 women were caught coaching the children to perform sexual actions while naked in front of the computer with a camera. Two other suspects, Marilou Tabada, the owner of the house, was not around during the arrest, while Salome Ligan, who is said to be operating the computer was able to escape.

The police alleged that Tabada's residence was intentionally built for cybersex. It is located farm from other houses in the barangay and has wireless internet connection used by a single set of computer with a webcam. The police said that young girls

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<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2013/09/11/couple-cordova-charged-operating-cybersex-den-302618>

¹⁷

<http://cebudailynews.wordpress.com/2012/06/22/us-expert-testifies-in-cordova-cybersex-case-mother-offered-for-24-an-hour/>

would go to this house every afternoon while the supervising adults would close all doors and windows.^{18,19}

On September 2013, twelve girls and a boy were rescued in another anti-cybersex operation by the NBI and IACAT. The youngest victim was believed to be 7 years old while the oldest is 17. Along with the minors, three adult women were also held for questioning.

Apparently, the NBI obtained photos of the victims during their surveillance of the area, but refused to reveal the exact places where the minors were rescued. They were claimed to come from 10 to 11 households. Social workers have still not determined all the names of the children's parents.

In Lapu-Lapu City, officials were surprised to learn that the same operation went into a local high school in search of cybersex victims, without coordinating with the local social welfare and development office. Two students from Lapu-Lapu City were taken into custody, to be later released as they turned out not to be victims of cybersex.²⁰

Municipality of Dalaguete

The Municipality of Dalaguete is a 1st class municipality located south of Cebu City. Known as the “vegetable basket of Cebu,” agriculture is the most important economic activity in the municipality. Aside from vegetable production, major agricultural products include coconuts, rice, fish and corn. It has a total population of 63,000 comprising nearly 12,000 households.

Reported case of cybersex

In 2012, a Swedish court found a 76-year old pedophile guilty for sexually abusing 3 minors from Dalaguete. The Swedish national, Bobby Herranen, was charged with sexual abuse of minors and child pornography. The abuses reportedly happened in separate occasions, two of which happened inside an informal classroom where Herranen offer free English lessons but were kept secret by the victims.²¹

¹⁸ <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/regions/07/12/11/3-children-rescued-cybersex-cebu>

¹⁹ http://trafficking.org.ph/v5/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3926&itemid=56

²⁰ <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2013/09/07/13-cybersex-victims-rescued-301949>

²¹ <http://philstar.com/cebu-news/811912/swedish-pedophile-found-guilty-molesting-3-minors>

Related to this, officials of the Swedish National Criminal Police sought assistance from local authorities to find out more about Herranen's victims in Cebu. They suspect that the Swedish national could also be involved in the cybersex problem in Cordova.²²

4. Results and Discussion

The conduct of in-depth personal interviews for purposes of this study yields valuable information on three emerging themes. First, is the characterization of the nature and extent of cybersex operations in the five focus areas. This study sheds light on how the phenomenon of cybersex occurs, in greater detail; the modus and strategies of the operators; and the role that victims play in each scenario. It is worth noting that cybersex operations are inherently diverse in their structure and mechanics, which are at times influenced by the economic and social circumstances of the locality where they occur.

Second, is the profiling of victims, operators and offenders, to the extent that researchers are able to get hold of information about them. Results will show the characteristics of victims, the extent to which their families are involved or affected, and the dynamics by which they interact with cybersex operators and offenders. The study, however, is limited in terms of assessing the psycho-emotional impact of cybersex involvement to victims, as such level of understanding of children's behavior takes time, and was therefore not possible within the confines of this research.

Third, the study looks at how communities perceive, accept and act on the presence of cybersex operations in their locality. It tries to measure the current level of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of cybersex by the actors in the community, and whether sufficient action and intervention is being done to address this.

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<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2011/07/15/five-persons-charged-cyberporn-venture-1669>

Characterization of cybersex operations

This study has looked into 44 cases of children victimized through cybersex. A comprehensive understanding of the nature of cybersex operations has been developed through the analysis of these cases, from the beginning that children are engaged in cybersex, to the modus operandi of offenders and operators, to a graphic description of what transpires in a so-called “cybersex session”, as well as the methods by which cybersex services are paid.

Recruitment strategy

Children are often cajoled into cybersex by someone they already know—a family member, close friend, neighbor, or another member of the community who is operating or working in cybersex. This happens conveniently in many cases like in Cordova, where cybersex operations are already located within their community, either in their own homes, at a neighbor’s house, or at a local Internet café.

Because they are already acquainted, victims are calmly approached and invited by cybersex operators and is given the assurance that what the child will do is going to be very easy, even child’s play. Others are enticed by the offer of free use of the computer and Internet, and there is even a case where the operator offered to pay for the installation and subscription fees of a broadband Internet connection for the victim.

There are also cases when the person recruiting is a peer or within the same age range as the victim. The recruiter offers to teach the victim to chat online, or invites him to “fun” activities using the computer, like chatting, playing games like Y8 or Plants vs. Zombies, or watching pornographic sites unsupervised.

Other times, a complete stranger initiates contact with a victim through the Internet, using social networking sites like Facebook or Yahoo! Messenger, or through text messages or calls to victims’ mobile phones. A number of victims have been recruited this way and were lured by the offer of employment, money, or an easy way to make money. Some were promised expensive gifts, good food, shopping allowance, and even payment for educational expenses.

Because the recruiters are complete strangers, they provide instructions to victims on where they're supposed to meet or how they're supposed to travel to another area. Victims are sent money by the recruiters to spend on transportation.

There are times when instead of getting a legitimate job, such as an encoder or computer shop attendant, victims find out that they will be working in cybersex. Even when they disfavor this type of work, some find that they have no choice because of a pressing economic need. Those who try to refuse are either forced to work in cybersex or locked up.

In Dalaguete, the offender gained the trust of the victims and their families by offering to teach English lessons to the children for free.

Modus operandi

Cybersex dens are not necessarily restricted to any particular geographic or economic region. This study tracked down cybersex operations in busy technology hubs in large cities, red-light districts that have a long history of sex tourism, and even in sleepy coastal towns.

Private residences, in many instances documented by this study, are often used as cybersex dens. These could be the victims' own houses or their neighbors' houses, with one room in the house or an upstairs floor as a devoted venue for cybersex activities. Others occur in rented apartments, with larger operations occupying several units in one or in a number of different locations.

In Cebu, it is believed that cybersex started in Internet cafés. Victims started chatting and dating online, sometimes even getting married to cybersex operators or offenders. Customers then sent money to buy computers or packages containing high-end laptops, which was how the location moved to residences. Still, there are a few cases that happen in computer shops and Internet cafés, with some establishments having a hidden basement rented out just for this purpose.

Other operations circulating nude photos of children use places like the beach, a hotel, or other secluded outdoor areas as the backdrop for where to take victims' pictures.

Cybersex dens are normally equipped with personal computers or laptops with built-in webcams, camera-equipped mobile phones or tablets, and digital cameras with video recording functions. File storage and transfer devices such as memory cards, CDs, DVDs, and computer hard drives are also common. It is also not exceptional to find sex toys such as dildos and vibrators.

Depending on the scale of operations, Internet connectivity may range from high-speed DSL to wireless broadband subscriptions. It is difficult to determine, however, the type of online medium these cybersex operations are using: whether they are hosting pornographic sites or Internet chat rooms that can be accessed from any part of the world, or merely uploading images and streaming live videos to a dedicated server located elsewhere.

Cybersex operations are classified into three: individual or self-run, family operations, and syndicated operations. **Individual operations** occur in private residences or Internet shops with the victim himself/herself searching for clients online in cybersex chat rooms. There are also individual cybersex operations where an adult directs the interaction with the client through chatting, and orders a recruited child victim how to pose or act in front of a webcam that is connected to a computer. There is another case where a man instructs his live-in partner to engage in cybersex with a web client.

Family-run operations involve a parent, usually the mother, asking her own children to pose for cybersex clients, or using them to recruit other child victims. Sometimes, it is an elder sibling running a home-based cybersex business and instructing his/her younger siblings on what to do depending on client requests.

The syndicated operation, for the purpose of this research, is defined as cybersex activities carried out by a group of three or more persons conspiring or confederating with one another. The study uncovered a diverse mix of syndicated cybersex operations, from neighborhood-based operations with known children used as victims, to highly organized cybersex syndicates with closed, brothel-type operations or large-scale operations involving multiple locations and hiding behind legitimate I.T. businesses.

Nature of cybersex activity

Cybersex, sometimes called computer sex or Internet sex, is a virtual sex encounter in which two or more people connected remotely through the Internet send each other sexually explicit messages, images, or videos. Cybersex often occurs among individuals who have no prior knowledge of one another and only meet in virtual spaces. In the case of children being used for cybersex, the majority of the clients or offenders remain anonymous to the victims, and sometimes vice versa.

From the cases documented for this study, there emerge five types of cybersex activities. The first type involves one person, usually an adult, chatting with a foreign client, and another person, usually a child, situated in front of a webcam. The adult here is the one who uses the computer, operates the webcam, types messages into the keyboard, and reads the requests from the client. The adult conveys the request to the child victim, who is either illiterate or cannot understand English, and gives specific instructions on what the child is supposed to do, like taking off clothes, dancing naked, or lying down with the private parts facing the camera.

The second type involves holding a “show” for the customer. The victim is asked to remove his/her clothes, sometimes just the shirt, sometimes including shorts, bras, briefs, or panties. The offender may give various instructions, like “show your boobs,” “show pussy,” “use a toy,” or “put the toy in ass or pussy.” Boys are asked to show their penis or masturbate in front of the camera. Girls are asked to show their breasts or pose in dog style position with their private parts exposed. Each show typically lasts for 15 minutes. Young victims who are not well-versed in English use tools such as Google Translate when chatting with foreign clients.

The third type involves a show or performance by a “couple.” It is mostly girls who do these kinds of shows. They are told to remove their clothes and kiss and touch each other’s private parts. Sometimes they are asked to dance naked or use dildos during the show.

The fourth type involves live sexual acts that are taped on video or photographed. This time, the offenders have physical and sexual contact with the victims. This can take place in a room where cameras have been installed, or with the offender himself taking photos during the sexual act. Photos of men’s penises penetrating girls’ vaginas and anuses, or videos of masturbation and sexual intercourse are uploaded to the computer and distributed online.

The last type involves taking photos of nude bodies of child victims and their private parts. Using digital cameras or cellphone cameras, photos of minors are broadcasted and sold using the Internet.

In terms of frequency, the majority of the victims interviewed admitted to having performed cybersex activities more than once, some up to several times a week. Only a few mentioned that they were involved in cybersex only once, while others said their work in cybersex follows a regular and regimented schedule.

Methods of payment

Cybersex, at least for the purposes of this study, does not take place between mutually consenting individuals. In the context of online sexual abuse of children, cybersex is a form of “service” provided in exchange for payment. Payment for cybersex services could be a motivation for some victims, and for the case of operators, cybersex would mean big business.

Cybersex victims normally receive from P100 to P500 per transaction. There are cases when victims are paid as little as P10 or P20, while some received no payment at all. There was one victim who could not really say how much was earned from cybersex as the victim was too young to be familiar with money. One respondent commented that paying a child P100 pesos for engaging in cybersex is a large enough sum of money. There are cases when taking a child to a fast food restaurant would be enough compensation.

Still, this seems to be a small fraction of the amount that local cybersex operators receive. According to interviewees, local operators get US\$30 to US\$50 per transaction. Other operators who get paid in local currency receive amounts from P1,500 to P2,500 per transaction.

In Taguig City, operators earn US\$1 to US\$2 per minute when clients enter private chat rooms, while they can get US\$5 to US\$15 per minute when clients download pornographic content. Some victims claim they earn P11 to P18 commission for every minute of cybersex transaction recorded by operators.

For cases such as in Cebu or Angeles City, victims and/or local cohorts receive fixed remuneration of P6,000 per month or P3,000 per week for rendering cybersex services or for maintaining cybersex dens.

In Angeles City where a syndicate operates a brothel-type cybersex den, female victims have an individual quota of US\$100 worth of cybersex transactions per week. They are then entitled to 25% of the total amount earned from these transactions.

Payments are normally handed to the victims in cash. Operators receive payment from clients through money transfer services such as Western Union, because these are present even in remote communities. Other operators get paid through bank transfers to their ATM accounts. Some offenders were found to have made payments for cybersex services via credit cards.

Victims, offenders and facilitators

The extent of cybersex operations in the Philippines is also manifest in the number and involvement of individuals, whether they are victims, local operators, foreign offenders, family, or community members.

Child victims

Victims of cybersex cases studied have ages that range from 7 to 17 years. The majority of child victims are female, and less than 20% are male. Cases with male victims occurred in Angeles City and not elsewhere. There are at least 20 cases documented where the victim is aware of other cybersex victims in his/her family or community.

There were many child victims who said they were forced into cybersex by someone they know or because it is already happening right in their own household. Then they would find out that what was required of them to engage in cybersex was not all that difficult in exchange for the money that they would receive. Similarly, the pretext that they remain anonymous and have a different identity online is likewise appealing.

For others, it is the prospect of earning money or having a source of income that is the motivation for their involvement in cybersex. Still, few would think that offenders are actually being helpful to them.

Child victims were found to feel strongly about their involvement in cybersex. Many are angered or confused because they do not understand why they were asked to strip naked or act a certain way in front of a camera. Some are teary-eyed during the conduct of the interviews and are reluctant to answer some of the questions.

There were some victims who said they were afraid of being called upon by the police or by local officials. But a lot of them are ashamed, especially if other people from their school would find out, while others are disinclined to talk about the issue.

A number of victims, who initially refused to participate in cybersex, felt that they are in greater need of money and that there aren't too many options left for them. They decide to stay and continue working in cybersex, because they think that the perpetrators are helping them financially.

Majority of the victims interviewed have no particular knowledge about cybersex offenders or their nationalities. With the exception of Cebu where victims were in physical contact with their offenders, and a particular case in Angeles City where the victim knows his offenders by name.

Cybersex operators

It appears that most cases documented for this study have been initiated by foreigners but with Filipino cohorts or accomplices who manage and oversee cybersex dens. The role of these local cohorts encompass a series of steps within the cybersex scheme.

Operators have the responsibility of recruiting or finding children to lure into cybersex. They are also the ones who communicate with foreign clients online and operate the computer or webcam used in cybersex. Some also take charge of taking photos or videos, uploading them to the Internet and broadcasting them online to a network of foreign offenders. At times, they instruct victims on how to act in front of the camera, choreograph sexual poses, provide costumes to the victims as a way to entice more clients, or even motivate victims prior to the cybersex activity by showing them pornographic material.

They likewise attend to logistical requirements of running the cybersex operation, including, but not limited to, finding a venue for cybersex activities such as a house or space to rent, or setting up payment methods and handing out payments to victims.

Operators of syndicated cybersex find themselves with highly differentiated roles. One could be in charge of security of the location and victims, while another could attend to day-to-day requirements such as food or utility payments. There is always a person tasked with computer maintenance and troubleshooting, who is often responsible for monitoring victims while doing cybersex online, or creating login accounts for victims to gain access to cybersex websites and chat rooms.

However, the research is unable to provide greater detail on these websites or other online transactions related to cybersex for the lack of information gathered from operators themselves.

Offenders

To a great extent, cybersex, and potentially online sexual abuse of children, suffer from the lack of reporting by victims themselves and other responsible parties. It is very difficult to identify the size of the offending population, their characteristics, their nationalities, and the extent of their involvement with organized international cybersex rings.

In nearly all cases documented, victims are only able to describe their offender as a foreign national, usually Caucasian, usually advanced in age, but no further detail could be provided. Indeed, the seemingly anonymous online environment created by Internet-based operations proves advantageous to a great number of cybersex offenders.

Except for Cebu City and Dalaguete, where charges had been filed against Australian national Drew Frederick Shobbrook and Swedish national Bobby Herranen, there was only one other victim from Angeles City who positively identified his offenders and their nationalities. The victim stated his offenders were from Australia, Switzerland, and the U.K.

Based on cases reported online, there were arrests made or warrants issued against four American nationals allegedly involved in cybersex operations. There was also one offender each originating from Belgium, Ireland, and Canada. All of them were believed to be operating in Angeles City.

Families

Forty percent of victims have family members who themselves are involved in cybersex operations, or who are aware of the child's involvement in cybersex. In areas like Cordova and Taguig, cybersex operations have become rampant and family members are aware that there is a lot of money to be earned from it. Victims claim that their parents or family members have knowledge of their involvement in cybersex because they hand them all the money they receive from cybersex. The role of other parents is to claim payments from money transfer services like Western Union because children do not have the proper documentation requirements. For some families, children's involvement in cybersex is their household's major income source.

Other victims said they were not sure if their families knew about their cybersex activities, but that their parents consented when cybersex operators approached them and invited them to their residences.

Two respondents were surprised to learn from another neighbor or relative that obscene photos of their child can be seen on the Internet. There were a couple of cases when the child, after being victimized, recount to one of their parents how they were abused. When this happened, the parent either decides to file a case against the operator, consult with authorities or move the child to another school or place of residence.

Many parents and family members fail to comprehend why a child should be involved in an abusive and shameful activity such as cybersex. Worse, they do not recognize the implications of these activities on the emotional well-being of victims. Many believe that cybersex is mere images or videos and that the fact that there is no risk of physical or sexual contact with their children, shields children from negative outcomes.

Community perceptions, interventions, and recommendations

There is overwhelming recognition from community respondents of the prevalence of cybersex in the 5 focus areas of this research. Many are aware that cybersex has been going on for a long, from the time that it started with isolated cases happening in Internet cafés, to the point that the use of webcams and live videos has become mainstream. Respondents note that it is also more recently that children are increasingly being victimized, as it used to be adult women looking for foreign partners who engage in cybersex. Slowly, cybersex operations grew into something in the league of a backyard or cottage industry in many of these areas, and found a niche market among offenders with a preference for children and younger people.

There are some members of the community who observe that the phenomenon of cybersex is real but that plenty of cases are happening very discreetly. Still, there are those who deny the existence of massive cybersex operations owing to the small number of cases reported to authorities. There are even local officials who discredit prostitution, pornography, and trafficking cases filed in court, maintaining that nobody ever gets convicted of these violations.

Concerned members of the community regard cybersex as a big problem, especially for children and youth. Because of the convenience offered by technology, and the inherent difficulty of monitoring the use of this technology, cybersex remains an issue that is not easy to resolve or control.

Some respondents consider cybersex activities immoral and shameful. The phenomenon has created a culture among children and youth where sex or sex toys have become mundane or ordinary. Social workers observe that children who fall victim to cybersex do not have any recognition that they had been violated. They are quick to deny accusations and do not seem to feel any trauma despite being cybersex victims.

Many people in the community are cognizant of the fact that cybersex operations can earn local people a very good income. They have seen operators build new houses and buy expensive jewelry solely from what they earn from cybersex transactions. A lot of people are being encouraged by this – having the ability to earn in a few hours what one would normally earn with a full day's worth of hard labor.

Motivations

Research respondents point to poverty as the main reason why children get involved in cybersex. They need to earn money to pay for their family's expenses and put food on the table to feed themselves and their siblings. Some say they need to pay for children's education. Others want to have money to be able to buy things they don't have, high-tech gadgets, fancy clothes, etc.

There are members of the community who look to the parents as the ones that force their children into cybersex. Other parents claim that they do not force their children into this practice, but merely encourage them so they can have a shot at a better life. Many are convinced that engaging in cybersex leaves children unharmed, because there is no physical or sexual contact, and because these happen in a short amount of time. There is no risk of the victim acquiring an STD or being abused physically. They may be ashamed to admit this in public but otherwise, cybersex is considered innocuous.

Community respondents also refer to the lack of information or awareness of the laws pertaining to cybersex as a reason why they allow their children to be involved in these operations. Some feel that the negligence of parents regarding the situation of their own children is part of what causes this phenomenon to proliferate in their communities.

Interventions

The majority of respondents said that actions were being taken to address the problem of cybersex in their respective localities. Less than 20 percent responded that there were no programs implemented regarding cybersex.

The common intervention cited was advocacy and information dissemination. The DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) was consistently mentioned by the respondents for the inclusion of orientations on cyber pornography and RA 9775 in the conduct of Family Development Sessions, especially when NGOs are invited to serve as resource persons for the topic. There are also separate advocacy efforts conducted by local government units for their constituents and also for children who are in school.

The organization of a "Bantay Bayan" or volunteer support group at the barangay level served as a means to conduct regular monitoring in some areas. Police action on cybersex operations includes validation and monitoring activities as well as arresting perpetrators when there are reported cases.

Recommendations

Victims and their families should step out and report incidents of online sexual abuse to the proper authorities. Linked to this is the need to provide security to these people when they report cybersex cases. There was one occasion cited by the respondents when the child who reported a cybersex case was confronted by the people from the community. It is very important to ensure the confidentiality of cases reported as well as the protection of the person reporting.

Another issue when reporting cybersex cases is when the child is taken into DSWD custody. DSWD has a policy that victims should be reintegrated back into the community after staying for 1 year with the institution, or after the child reaches 18 years old. Respondents think it would be beneficial to consider an alternative shelter for a possible referral once the first year with DSWD has lapsed.

Members of the community who observe suspicious activities should also report these to local officials so appropriate action can be taken. The community should be vigilant in monitoring activities and foreign individuals entering their locality.

Information dissemination activities should be conducted in the community. Parents should be educated about the laws related to cybersex and the formation of family values. Teachers and educators should be included in advocacy sessions so they could create awareness in educational institutions at the elementary and secondary levels. Religious formation activities can also be helpful in changing people's attitudes and outlooks.

Children should be aware of their rights. Through education, sports, and other capacity-building activities, children and youth should develop an understanding of the issue of cybersex, and learn how they can protect themselves from abuse.

There should be strict implementation and enforcement of laws related to cybersex. Authorities must be firm in the enforcement of laws such as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (RA 9208) and the Anti-Child Pornography Act (RA 9775), but they should also be sensitive in handling reported cases, especially during raid and rescue operations.

Capacity building in the form of training, seminars, and orientations must be provided to law enforcement officers and other local officials. Respondents

emphasized the need for barangay officials to have good knowledge of the issue of cybersex and to know what actions to take in specific circumstances. There was a suggestion of having a list of offenders as a way to inform and regulate foreign nationals coming to the Philippines.

There is a need to strengthen inter-agency effort and coordination at the local level. Agencies and organizations at the local level must collaborate to combat the problem of cybersex in the community. Councils such as the Local Council for the Protection of Children should be strengthened.

Necessary legal support should be provided to victims. Victims and witnesses should receive support from government prosecution and protection from operators and offenders. The legal process for cybersex cases needs to be quick and should lead to the conviction of perpetrators in order to be effective in curbing the problem. If possible, there should be a special court that will focus on cases involving trafficking and pornography.

Livelihood and employment support should be provided to families. While it is important to focus on addressing the issue of cybersex and online pornography, it is equally important to address poverty and provide a legitimate means of livelihood to vulnerable families.