



The European Online Grooming Project_

Prof Antonia Bifulco, PhD
Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies
Kingston University, UK

antonia.bifulco@kingston.ac.uk

European Consortium

§ UK

- Stephen Webster, National Centre for Social Research, London
- Professor Antonia Bifulco & Professor Julia Davidson, Kingston University, London

§ Italy

- Professor Vincenzo Caretti, Università degli Studi di Palermo

§ Belgium

- Professor Thierry Pham, University de Mons, Belgium

§ Norway

- Professor Petter Gottschalk Norwegian School of Management, Oslo



The European Online Grooming Project_

§ Largest study of online grooming to date. Funded by the European Union, through the Safer Internet Plus Programme. Running from June 2009 to March 2012

§ Aims:

- understand the different ways sexual offenders approach, communicate and ‘groom’ young people online
- *Grooming: ‘seducing’, ‘luring’ or ‘enticing’ children and young people for purposes of sexual abuse using the internet and mobile phone for online or offline abusive contact with the child;*
- Inform policy makers, front line professionals, teachers, carers and young people to effectively manage online risks



Issue

- § Sexual offenders now have access to children/ young people through the internet. They can meet young people, produce and collect indecent images, network with other offenders
- § We need to understand how such offenders can reach their victims, meet them and sexually abuse.
- § We need to know which children are vulnerable and how preventative action can be taken.
- § Importance of preventative messages – disseminated to public, psychologists and other professionals working with vulnerable children.



Internet use by children/young people

- § 93% of 9-16 year old users going online at least weekly; 60% going online every day or almost every day.
- § Teenage use most common. Age at first going online is now getting younger, (e.g. age 7-8 in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and UK).
- § Excessive internet use is identified as high in Belgium, Ireland and the UK (around 43%).



(EU Kids Online, Livingstone et al, 2011).

- In Italy, have more Contacts, public Profile and less Parental restriction

Scale of risk of online grooming

- § 2,660 incidents of inappropriate approaches and grooming reported by CEOP*, UK.
- § 1 in 4 youngsters using internet have unwanted access to explicit pictures
- § 1 in 5 receive a sexual solicitation or approach
- § 1 in 17 are threatened or harassed
- § 1 in 33 receive aggressive sexual solicitation
- § Most occur while young person is at the computer at home; 2 in 3 using internet are unsupervised (Davidson & Martellozzo, 2008).

**Child Exploitation and Online Protection unit*

Legislation



- § Lisbon Treaty - new EU Directive to harmonise legislation.
- § EC advocates blocking indecent child images from internet; maximum sentences for human traffickers; punish online grooming and seek that offenders cannot re-offend in another EU country.
- § UK Sexual Offences Act s15 includes the new offence of 'meeting a child following sexual grooming'. This includes Internet & texting.
- § 2 other EU countries have the legislation (Norway and Sweden)
- § No online grooming legislation in Belgium or Italy

Research Design – Online groomer project

§ Three interlinked phases:

- Scoping interviews with stakeholders (police officers, treatment providers, industry staff), case-file review; development of theoretical model; literature review.
 - In-depth interviews with 33 online groomers in the UK, Norway, & Belgium
 - Two chat-logs from Italy of offenders convicted of sexual abuse.
 - Workshops with parents, teachers & young people.
- Framework analysis - case & theme based approach.

Sample (n=31)

		N
Age	18-24	4
	25-34	5
	35-44	11
	45-54	7
	55+	4
IQ Score	Low (<=90)	4
	Average (91-109)	7
	High (110+)	14
	Not known	6
Pre-cons	None	15
	Non-sexual	5
	Sexual children	
	Off-line	6
	On-line	5

		N
Victim age	5-9	1
	10-12	5
	13-15	25
Victim gender	Male	5
	Female	26
Offence	Online grooming no meeting	1
	Online grooming meeting	8
	Images & online grooming – no meet	5
	Images & online grooming – meet	17

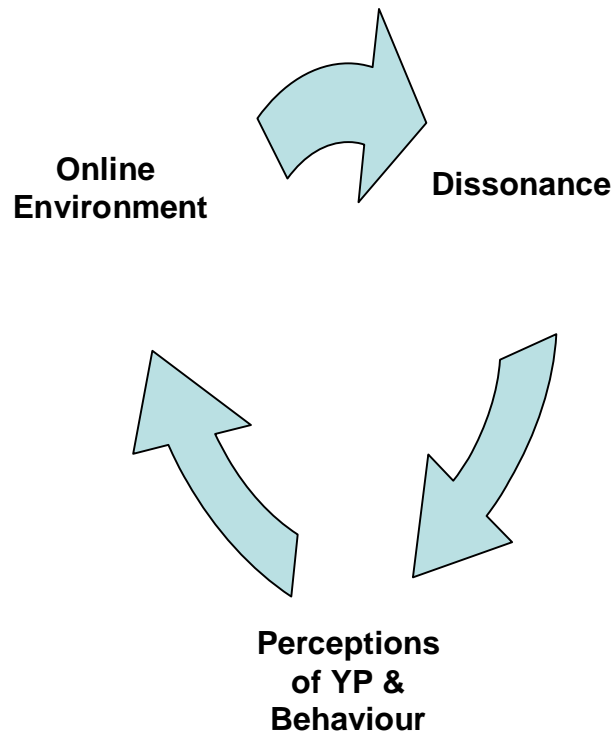


Who are the Online Groomers studied?

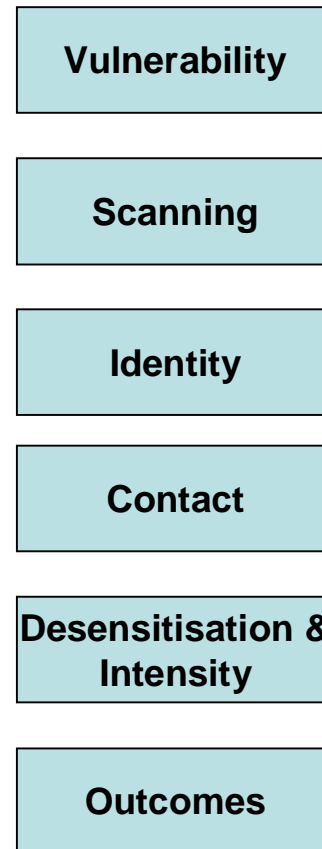
- § Not a homogeneous group. Most first offenders. Most collected indecent images in addition to grooming. Most selected victims age 13-15.
- § Where differ from other contact sex offenders:
 - high IQ but not particularly high educational attainment
 - IT competence seems to be primarily self taught, via workplace, observing family and online research
- § Using full range of ICT hardware, chatrooms, social networking sites, file-sharing sites and game platforms to contact young people
 - *‘I would spend lots of time on XBOX. Would play online and boys would talk to me’.*
 - *Would move from XBOX to private messenger for security and privacy*

Features of Online Grooming

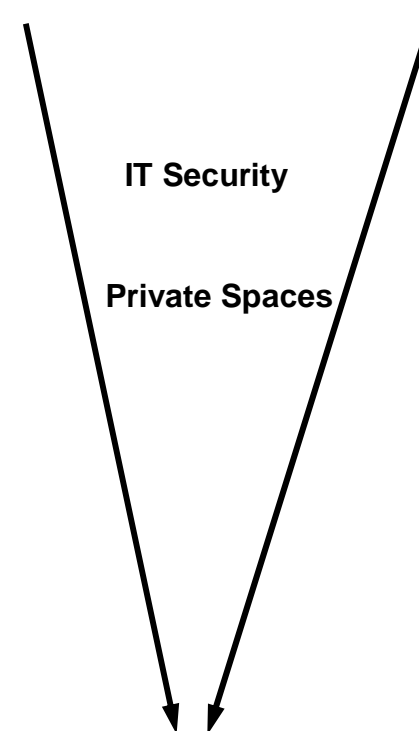
1. Maintenance



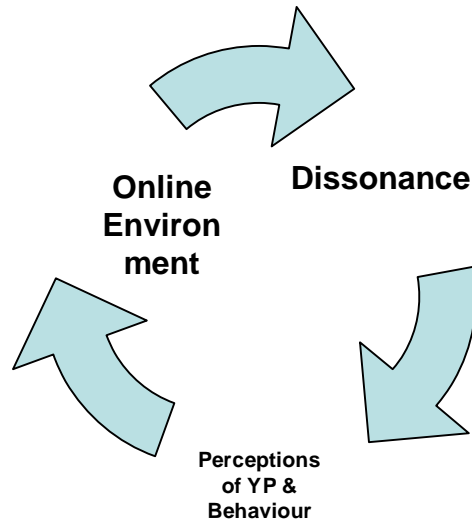
2. Features



3. Risk Management



1. Maintenance Online environment



The Internet

Confidence *'it allowed me to meet friends. I was shy – it became a substitute for the youth I never had'*

Stimulation: *'Bored, needed someone to talk to' Going on line was a thrill'*

Scale: *'plenty of fish in the sea, you'll catch one eventually' .. 'Girls on the web, there's no shortage'*

Addiction: *Tense if not online: I'd chat 7 days a week – I just sleep about 3 hours.*

Disinhibition

Anonymity (on both sides): *'Its really very easy to manipulate someone, especially from behind a PC.' Easier to say something written not spoken; Easier to talk to people than in real life'*

Normalising explicit sexual conduct: *'I didn't consider it illegal – just a game'*

1. Maintenance cont...



Dissonance

Adult & Child Images & Chat

Justifies abuse *'Everyone else does it'. Talking to paedophiles made him feel accepted*

Fuels fantasy: *'the images helped make real what was inside my head – great'*

Escalates some behaviours: *'images encourage me to contact young people on line'... 'looked at harder images over time to stay satisfied'.*

Offence Supportive Beliefs

Harm reduction views *'I'm not hurting them, its just chat' Only wanted to look, not touch*

Socio-affective reasons: *'I get on better with young people. I am young at heart'.*

External locus of control: Blames second offence on first offence not being addressed

Perceptions, Behaviour of YP

Sexual screen names; Sexual chat

'There are girls who are horny, they are small adults nowadays.'

2. Grooming Features



Vulnerability

Vulnerability

Situational – redundancy, lost home

Scanning

Interpersonal: Relationship breakdown, partner died
to relieve loneliness; it allowed me to meet friends

Identity

Low self-esteem: made me feel good and wanted

Contact

Scanning

Mapping: *‘chatted with thousands of people’*

Desensitisation & Intensity

Random: *‘I’d always aim for someone with a sexy name, because they’d be into sex.’*

Outcomes

Virtual presentation:

‘It took time to learn about their lives and it was important to them. Then the common denominator became sex.’

Identity

As self: *‘I wanted to be liked for who I was’*

Minor changes: *Sometimes create a new identity and would speak to victim both as me and as fake me. That way could transfer information through two channels. Typically pretend to be a younger girl.*

Other: *‘I never used my own identity, you change names, you lay it on..’ All the real contact happened when I presented as a boy age 15-20. I would then switch to real identity after building a rapport. Then could start using webcams.’*



Getting personal information – 47 year old groomer and 13 year old female victim

Groomer: I wish you a happy Easter!

M: Tell me who u r?

*G: My name's A***** what's your name?*

*M: L****, what's your surname?*

G: Why do you want to know my surname.. you don't know me?

M: Just curious.. How old are you?

G: 20 and you?

M: 13...

G: Do you mind if we know each other better, ..you have a beautiful name and I want to know more about you. Can you tell me where are you from?

*M: I'm from A***, and you?*

*G: R***** but what school do you attend and where?*

*B: Commercial School at R******

2. Grooming Features cont...



Vulnerability

Scanning

Identity

Contact

Desensitisation
& Intensity

Outcomes

Contact

Single & multiple encounters: keeping detailed logs of encounters. *'I could then keep track, especially when I was communicating with so many at a time.'*

Varied timescales

Diverse styles: *'I'd get on their side and talk about music. So I was well up to date with all the teen chart stuff.'*

I influenced them by giving complements... I kept them warm by showing I cared.

Desensitisation & Intensity

Sex request: *'You test them by saying are you this or that and see if receptive..'*

Incentives: Offer CDs of favourite bands

Threats: *'I threatened to show naked pictures and videos of her if she refused to meet me.'*

Outcomes

- Collect image
- Meet young person



Desensitisation:

G: Just take advantage, you're talking to a grown-up. Try to be more... you know... open-minded. Why not? ...Now that I told you how to take full figure or naked pictures, you can practice.

M: No, no, never.

G: I didn't mean you have to send them. You can practice. You can take some and then cancel them. It's not that bad....

Threats:

G: have you received my MMS? (of male genitalia) How is it?

M: Oh... I don't know... fine?

G: But aren't you going to send me a picture of your xxxxx (female genitalia)?

M: No I don't want...

G: I THOUGHT YOU TRUSTED ME.. THEN PREPARE YOURSELF TO SEE YOUR PICTURE ON INTERNET.. YOU'LL REGRET IT!!!

3. Risk Management



§ Personal logistics online

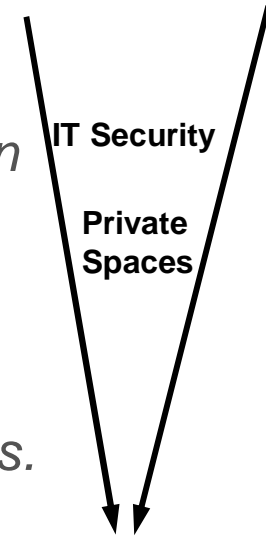
- Proxy servers *‘I was using a different internet connection than the main computer...obviously for cover up.’*
- Hiding images/chat
- Multiple hardware & phones
- *‘I would block out my number, so it didn’t show up on theirs.’*
- *If they wanted proof of how old I was, if I had a webcam I would click on to it, connect and then switch it off, as though it wasn’t working properly.’*

§ Personal spaces

- Private forums
- Switch to phone

§ Geography

- Different victim location from home





Ensuring privacy - 62 year old groomer, 14 year old female victim

G: You ready?

M: Maybe.

G: Maybe or maybe not? Can someone come into your bedroom suddenly? Can it happen?

M: Not if I close the door, no.

G: Are you allowed to keep your door closed? To lock yourself in?

M: Yes.

G: Ah, nice... not a lot of girls are allowed to. Ok, close it please.....Perfect, but be careful, when I text you on the phone...

M: Yes, ok

G: Don't forget to delete it when we share wicked phrases, right?

M: Yes. Yes.



Classifying Online Offenders

Distorted Attachment

- § Believe in mutual consent/love –sees it as relationship
- § No indecent images or group contact
- § Longer contact process
- § Uses own identity
- § All have physical meeting

Adaptable Offender

- § Own needs focus
- § Believes YP mature/provocative
- § Minimal image collections, if any
- § Tailored contact /mirroring victim
- § Own & tailored identity

Hyper-Sexual

- § Dehumanise YP
- § Extensive image collections
- § Contact with other offenders
- § Tailored/sexual identity
- § Fast, impersonal contact methods –
- § Not phone

Speculative model of grooming styles



Grooming Style	Target acquisition	Method	Identity	Timing Of contact	Desensitisation	Image collection	Risk Taking	Mental functioning
Distorted Attachment	Focused	Planning	Own id	Longer period	Yes	No	Medium	Obsessive
Adaptable/opportunist	Approach by Young person	Waiting	Own & 'tailored'	Variable	Some	Minimal	Medium /Low	Immature
Hypersexual	Random	Scanning	Fake: Tailored/sexual id	Short period	No	Extensive	High	Impulsiv Aggressive

Caretti V., Schimmenti A., Ciulla S., Craparo G. (*in press*)

Victims of online grooming - Context

- § Project focused on interviewing online groomers only. No direct contact with victims.
- § Themes included in offender topic guide regarding age, choice of victims, type of grooming approach & victims' response.
- § Although not a statistically drawn sample, victims described by the online groomers in this research tended to be female teenagers (age 13-15).



Young people's risk – new categorisation

Vulnerable

- § high need for affection, attention,
- § have difficult relationships with parents and difficult home lives.
- § Seeking 'love' on the internet. Believe they have a true relationship.
- § Resist disclosure because want to continue the 'relationship'.

Risk takers

- § young people – seeking adventure, disinhibited,
- § feel in control.
- § less known about family risks.
- § Open to 'blackmail' not to disclose because their own behaviour is used as evidence by groomer of cooperation or seduction.

Resilient

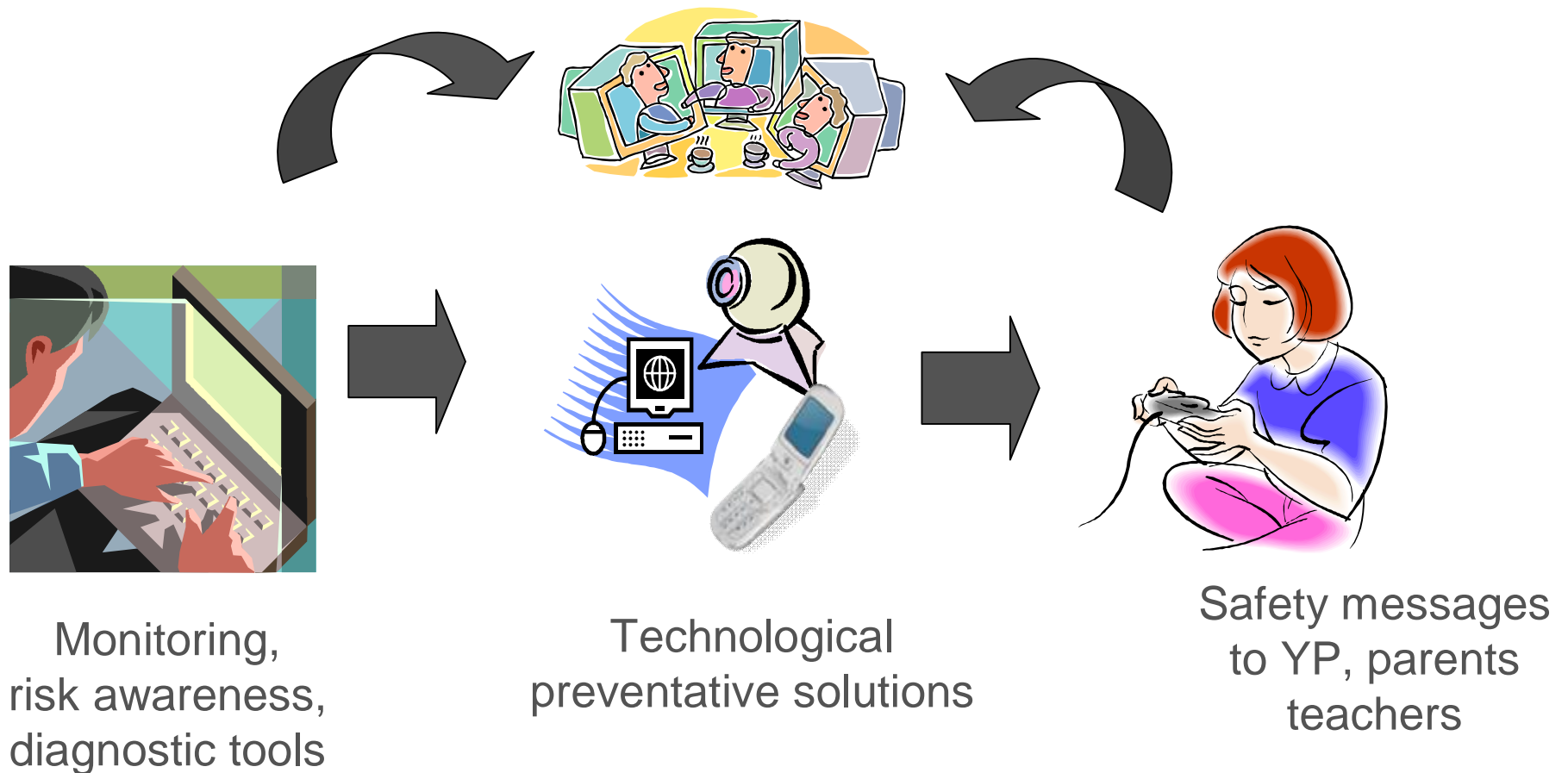
- § Recognise risk and fend off any approach they consider 'weird'.
- § take on board safety messages.
- § Come from more secure family backgrounds.



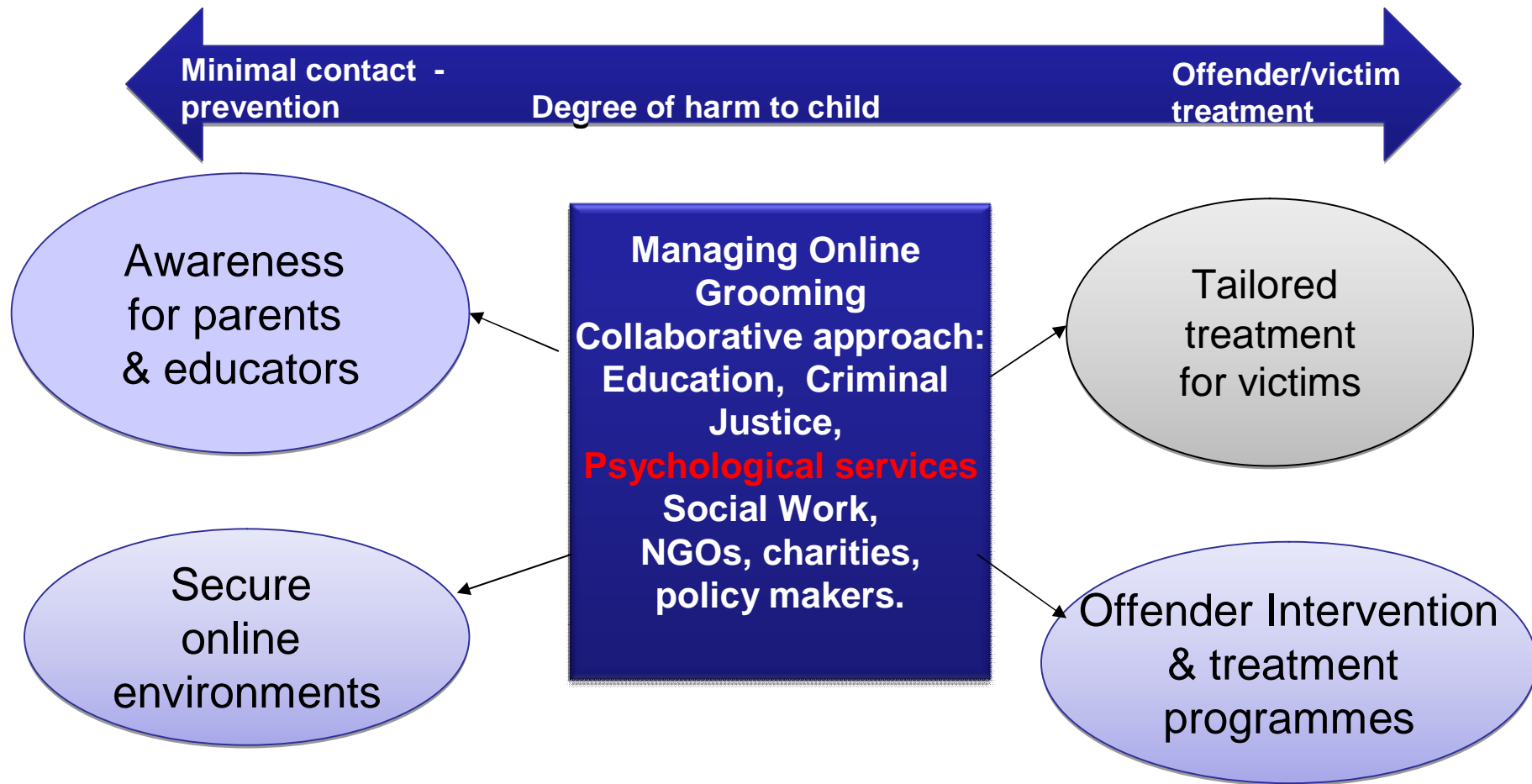
Explanatory Frameworks for Offender & Victim

- § **Self-regulation:** under-regulation, mis-regulation, disinhibition.
- § **Cognitive-affective processes:** defensive patterns, lack of mentalisation, lack of self-awareness, denial.
- § **Attachment patterns:** social approach/avoidance – loneliness, lack of social confidence, anonymity to mask fear of rejection, lack of empathy.
- § **Contextual social factors:** opportunity, access, desensitisation, internet availability young people.

Prevention, Intervention & Treatment



Public Health Problem



Thank you for your attention!
Further Information

§ www.european-online-grooming-project.com

§ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm

Project Contacts:

antonia.bifulco@kingston.ac.uk;

vincenzocaretti@tiscali.it;

s.webster@natcen.ac.uk; j.davidson@kingston.ac.uk;

petter.gottschalk@bi.no; thierrypham@yahoo.fr