



The European Online Grooming Project_

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- § **Italy** - Professor Vincenzo Caretti, University of Palermo
- § **Norway** - Professor Petter Gottschalk, Oslo Business School

Issue

- § Sexual offenders now have access to children/ young people through the internet.
- § 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.
- § Preventative messages need to get to the public, but also to psychologists and other professionals working with vulnerable children.



Technology-related sexual abuse

§ Includes:

- Internet and mobile phone use for stranger 'grooming' ('seduction' or 'luring') for online or offline abusive contact with the child;
- Creation and distribution of child abuse images, often created by known adults/peers as currency in paedophile rings, or to aid with grooming and 'normalising' of coercive compliance process;
- Use of cameras/webcams for recording abusive acts as part of abuse ritual but also for distribution and to humiliate and control the child (ECPAT international report, 2005).

Scale of risk of online grooming

- § 30 million US children used the Web in 2000 (Gottschalk, 2010);
- § 2,660 incidents of inappropriate approaches and grooming reported by CEOP*, UK.
 - 66% reported (total 6,291 in 2009) via the ‘panic button’ related to online grooming
 - Increase in young people’s self-taken images in offender collections (CEOP data, 11/2010) .
- § 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*

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%), lower in Romania (33%) with the lowest rate in Italy (17%).

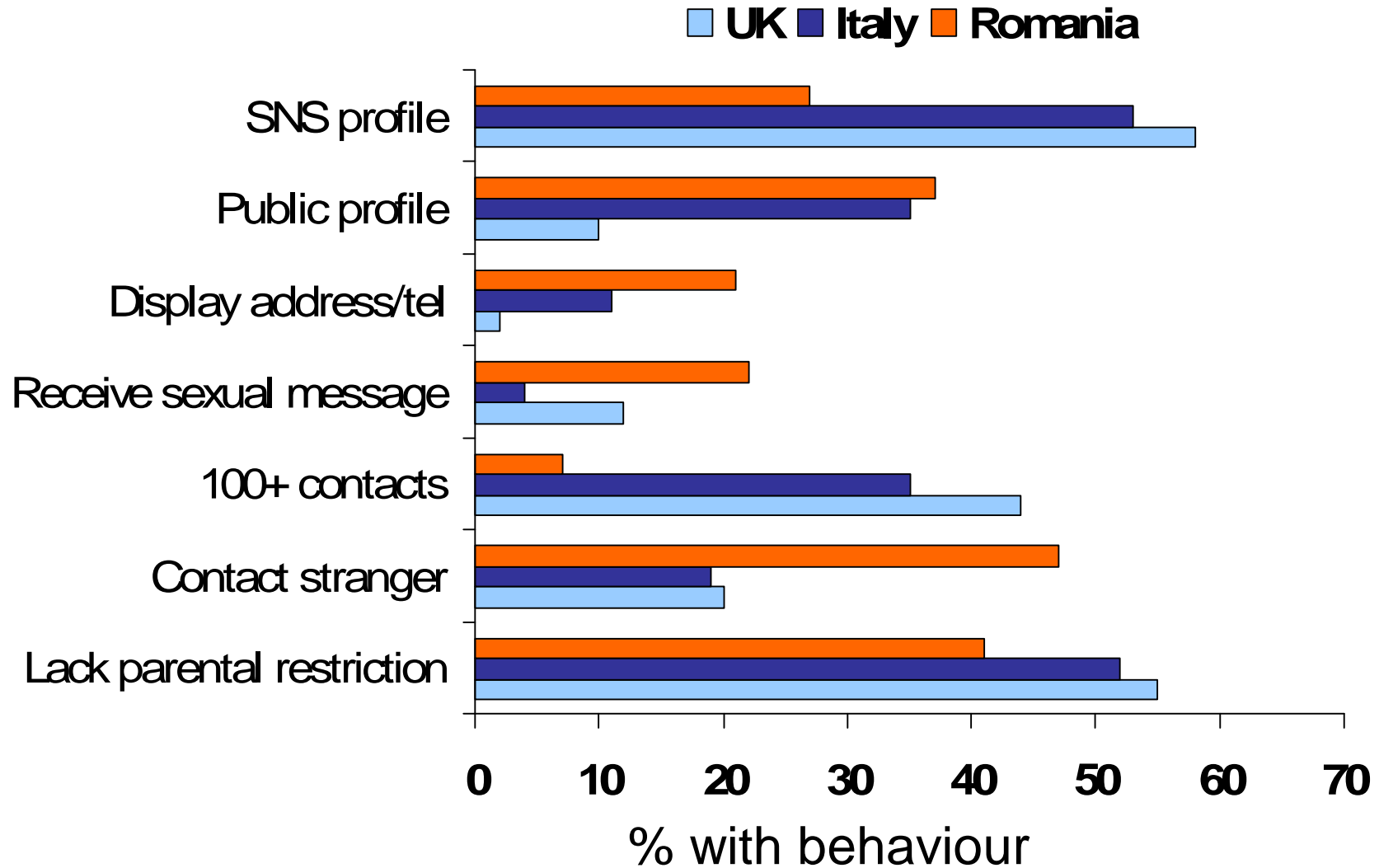
(Livingstone et al, 2011).

Risky activity on line

- § 30% of EU children aged 9-16 communicate online with new people not met face-to-face.
- § 38% of 9-12 year olds and 77% of 13-16 year olds having an SNS* profile online, age restrictions only partially effective.
- § Parental rules for SNS use are only partly effective,
- § 2 in 10 children have a profile which is public, display their address or phone number. Younger children do not understand safety features to protect them on SNS.
- § 15% of 11-16 year olds say they have seen or received sexual messages on the internet in the last year. Higher in 15-16 year olds (22%). Nearly half of those receiving such messages felt upset, and this was higher in girls.

* *Social networking site eg facebook*

SNS use by 9-16 year olds in 3 EU countries



Risk factors for online sexual approaches

- § Girls at higher risk than boys, more likely to have had a ‘threatening’ experience online and more likely to meet strangers online,
 - Boys are half as likely to tell someone and get help (Davidson, Lorenz , Martellozo & Grove- Hills, 2009).
- § Girls more often use social aspects of the Internet and appear more willing to share personal information and to interact with strangers.
- § Research review of risk predictors of unwanted exposure to sexual material online includes
 - offline interpersonal victimization, depressive symptoms, behavioural problems, parental conflicts, and a history of physical or sexual abuse (Ospina, Harstall and Dennett, 2009).
- § Less is known of specific risk profiles whereby the prior existence of family difficulties, abuse or disorder create additional risk for cyberharm.

Impact of sexual abuse on victims

- § Emotional disorder, suicide and self-harm, PTSD, dissociation, disturbed attachment and relationships extending into adulthood.
- § Preoccupation with shame and guilt and damaged self-esteem. Effects of apparent 'complicity'.
- § Psychological abuse elements of grooming and public distribution of abuse images – humiliation, emotional blackmail, exploitation, abuse of trust, terrorising (Palmer & Stacy, 2004).
- § *Exact impact of internet aspects of abuse unknown.*



The European Online Grooming Project_

- § Largest study of online grooming to date focusing on offenders
- § Aims:
 - to understand the different ways sexual offenders approach, communicate and ‘groom’ young people online
 - To identify vulnerable children and young people from the offender accounts
 - to empower policy makers, front line professionals, teachers, carers and young people to effectively manage online risks



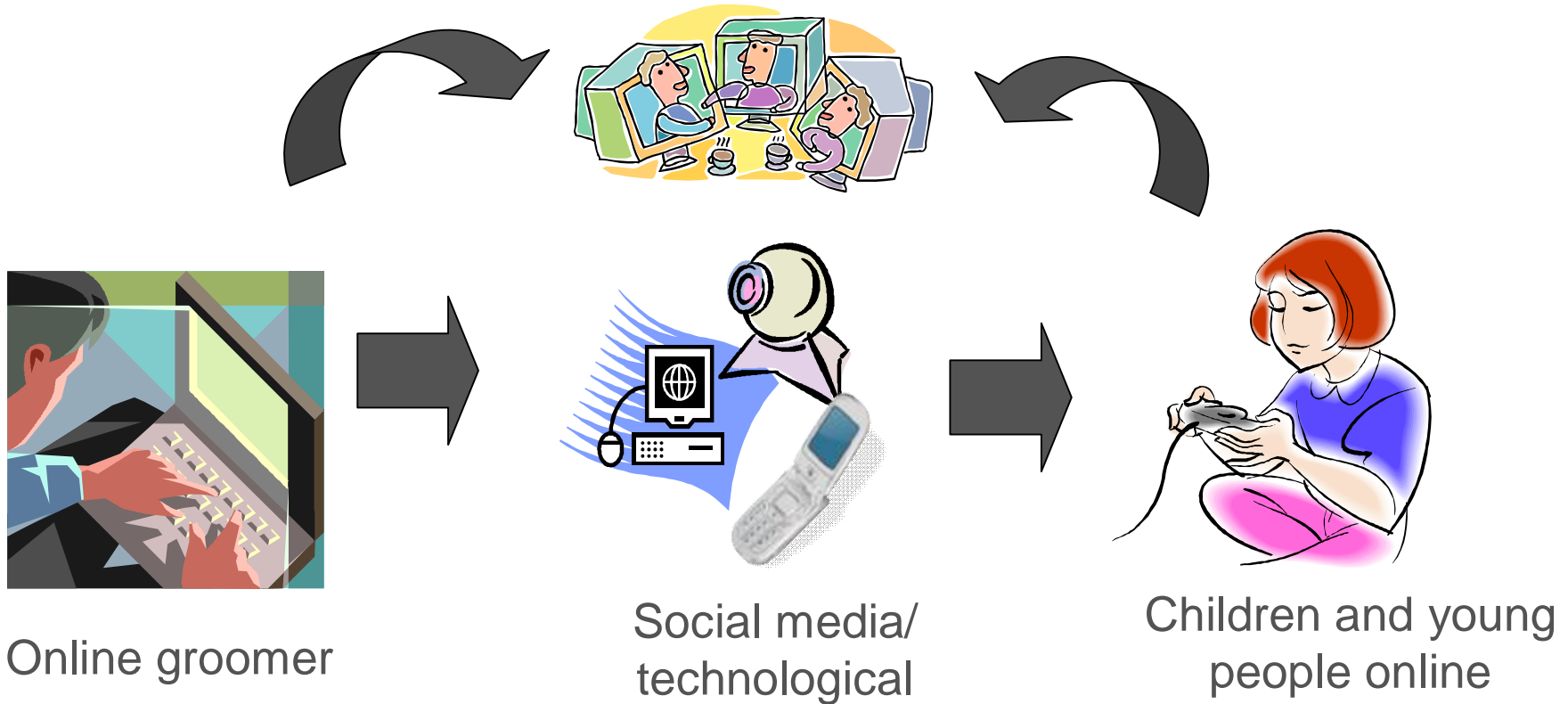
Research Context of offenders

- § A difficult group to study, since online grooming not illegal in many countries, and difficult to apprehend.
- § Most evidence is about distribution of indecent images (Seto & Eke 2005; O'Brien & Webster 2007).
- § Ratio of online groomers (or indecent image offenders) and sexual contact with child unknown (Wolak et al, 2005; Seto et al, 2006; Hernandez, 2000).
- § Fantasists versus predators?

Online grooming elements

offender – computer – young person interaction

Groomer networks,
Use of child abuse images





Research Design

- § Three interlinked research phases:
 - Scoping interviews with stakeholders (police officers, treatment providers, industry specialists), analysis of police case-files and chatlogs ; development of theoretical model, literature review
 - In-depth qualitative interviews with online groomers in the UK, Norway, & Belgium – chat-logs from Italy
 - *Workshops with young people, parents and teachers (currently underway).*
- § Qualitative data analysed using Framework, case and theme based approach to analysis.

Sample (n=31 in depth interviews)



		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-convictions	None	15
	Non-sexual	5
	Sexual children	
	Off-line	6
	On-line	5

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



Findings – the groomers



- § Like contact sexual offenders, not a homogeneous group. Where they do seem to differ:
 - high IQ but not a particularly high level of educational attainment
 - IT competence seems to be primarily self taught, via workplace, observing family and online research
- § They use full range of ICT hardware, chatrooms, social networking sites, file-sharing sites and game platforms to contact young people



The role of the Internet – wide availability

§ Victim scope, choice & access

- *‘plenty of fish in the sea, you’ll catch one eventually’*

§ Addiction to internet

- Tense if not online
- 7 hour per day chat
- Need to collect and classify more images

§ Justification

- *‘I’m not hurting them, its just chat’*
- *‘Everyone else is doing it’*
- File-sharing sites advertise indecent image

§ Disinhibition

- Confidence
- Anonymity (on both sides)
- Gaining friends
- Normalising explicit sexual conduct

§ Escalation

- Movement from images to webcams
- *‘Images helped make real what was going on in my head’*

Grooming Features

§ Scanning for victims

- Mapping
- Random

§ Identity- approach as

- Self
- Minor changes to self
- Other -*I never used my own identity, you change names, you lay it on*

§ Contact

- Single & multiple encounters
- Varied timescale
- Diverse styles

§ Desensitisation & Intensity

- Sex request
 - *You test them by saying are you this or that, if she's receptive you can go further*
- Incentives
- Threats
- Outcomes
 - Collect image
 - Meet young person

Online Grooming: Preparation & Identity

Preparation & Scanning

'I'd always aim for someone with a sexy name because obviously, they'd be into sex'.

'I took time to learn about their lives and it was important to them. Then the common denominator became sex'.

Identity

'told to piss off by YP when presented as self. I changed my profile to that of a 7yr old boy-- stole a picture of a boy and used that'

'Sometimes it was trial and error. All real contact happened when I presented as a boy age 15-20. I would then switch to real identity after built up a rapport. Then could start using webcams'.

Online Grooming: Initial Contact & Risk Management

Initial Contact

- § *'When first met a new contact would write everything down, the fact about her, a kind of log. I could then keep track, especially when I was communicating with so many at the same time'*
- § *'I'd get on their side and talk about music. So I was well up-to-date with all the teen, the chart stuff. So I knew all the names --- and groups and songs, and that was always a, a good progression'*

Risk Management

- 'basically what I'd do if, if they wanted proof of how old I was, if I had a webcam I'd click on it to connect and when it started to connect, I went [clicks fingers], switched it off. So, as if 'it was playing up''.*
- 'gave phone number when trusted or knew the young person'*
- 'I'd always just block out my number as well, obviously, so it didn't show up on theirs'*

§

Online Grooming: Networking

'I spoke to another sexual offender online for three months. Exchanged images and gave him things from the girls he was talking to'.

'Came across other men. They said 'there were enough fish' so you will find someone in the end'.

New classification of online offenders from data

Distorted 'Relationship'

- § Believe in mutual consent/love
- § No images or network contact
- § Longer contact process
- § Use own identity
- § Physical meeting
- § Ongoing abuse/multiple meetings

Adaptable Offender

- § Focus on own need and belief YP is mature
- § Minimal image collections, if any
- § Tailored contact process to victim
- § Use of both own & tailored identities

Hyper-Sexual

- § Dehumanise YP
- § Extensive image collections
- § Extensive contact with other offenders
- § Tailored/sexual identity to trap victim
- § Impersonal contact methods

Victims

§The project was focused on interviewing online groomers and there was no direct measurement or contact with victims.



§Themes were included in the offender topic guide on the age and choice of victims, type of grooming approach, and victims' response

§Approximately 70% of the victims described were aged 13-15 most female

Vulnerable victim profile

Loneliness

§ *'The girls were definitely insecure and lonely.'*

§ *'Many of the girls lacked adult contact....they felt safe with me.. I always made time...'*

Self-harm

§ Discussed by the young person and observed by the offender at physical meeting

Self-esteem

§ Young people feeling concerned about their body image and the groomer can exploit this – mirroring compliments

Concurrent sexual abuse

§ *'She wanted attention in her life, she said she had lost her mum and her step-dad abused her'.*

§ *'They had no hang ups- these were girls already being abused'*

Offender perception

§ Offender adept at meeting these needs to the extent that they perceive the young person is in control of the encounter:

- *‘She began to pester me to go online and talk to her’*
- *‘She could walk away from me at any time and she new this’*
- *‘They would ask me, they’re re so convinced they’re adults, in the end, who’s the victim?’*



Disinhibited Online Risk-Takers

- § Victim disinhibition involved using sexual screen names; using sexual chat; populating adult chat rooms; sending explicit images of self. Online groomers describe watching for and drawn to this behaviour:
 - *‘she said ‘I’d love to shag an older guy’*

- § However, online confidence did not always mirror offline reality:
 - *‘she was really quiet when met, even after a few meetings she never really said anything’*
 - *she presented as womanly and mature but when we met I knew it was just a mask*



Resilient Young People

§ Evidence of safety messages getting through as offenders told by most to ‘go away’ in no uncertain terms.

- *‘It was not easy as young girls had been taught not to talk to guy’s age 20’*
- *‘When presented own identity, was told ‘piss off you nonce’.*

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'.

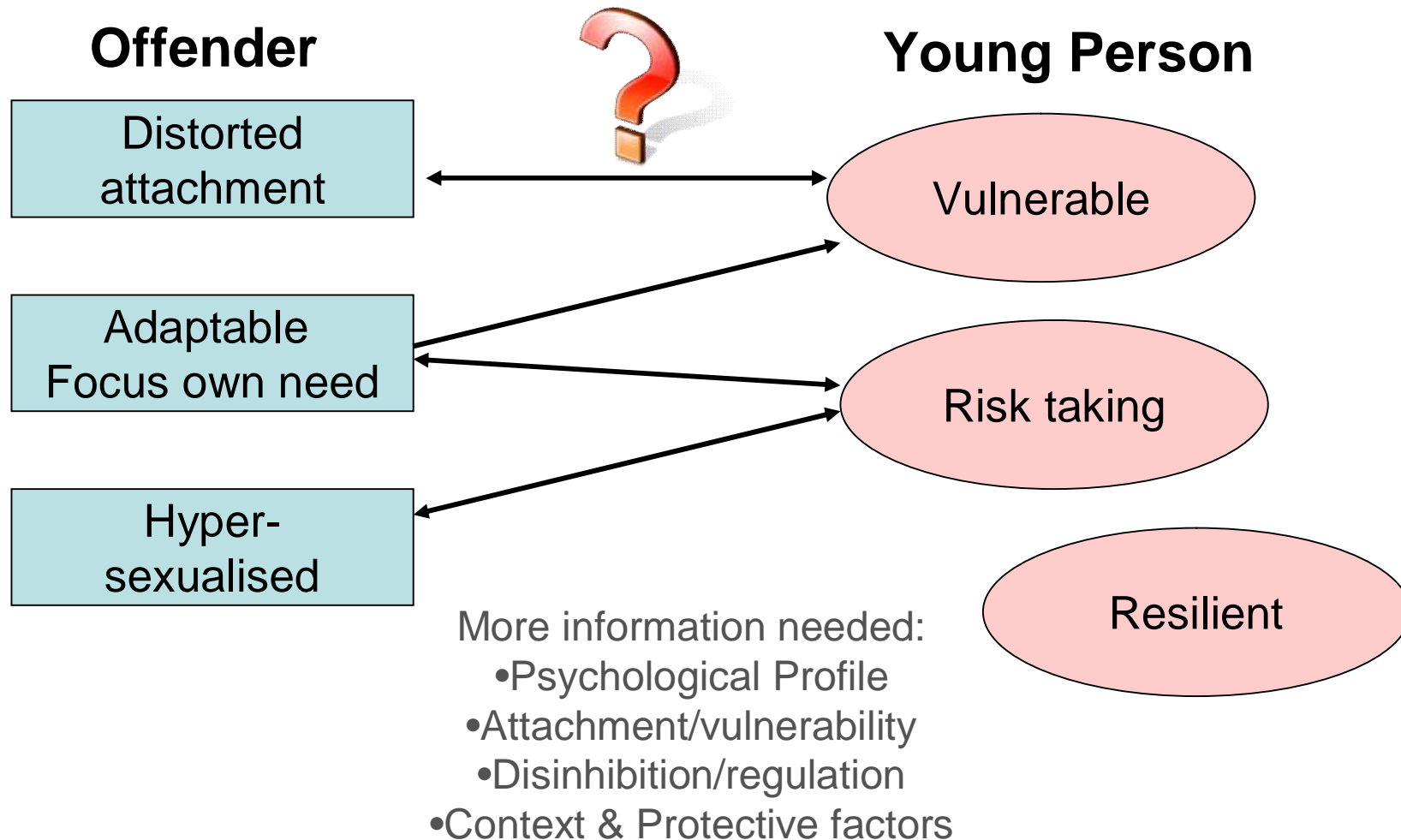
Risk takers

- § 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.

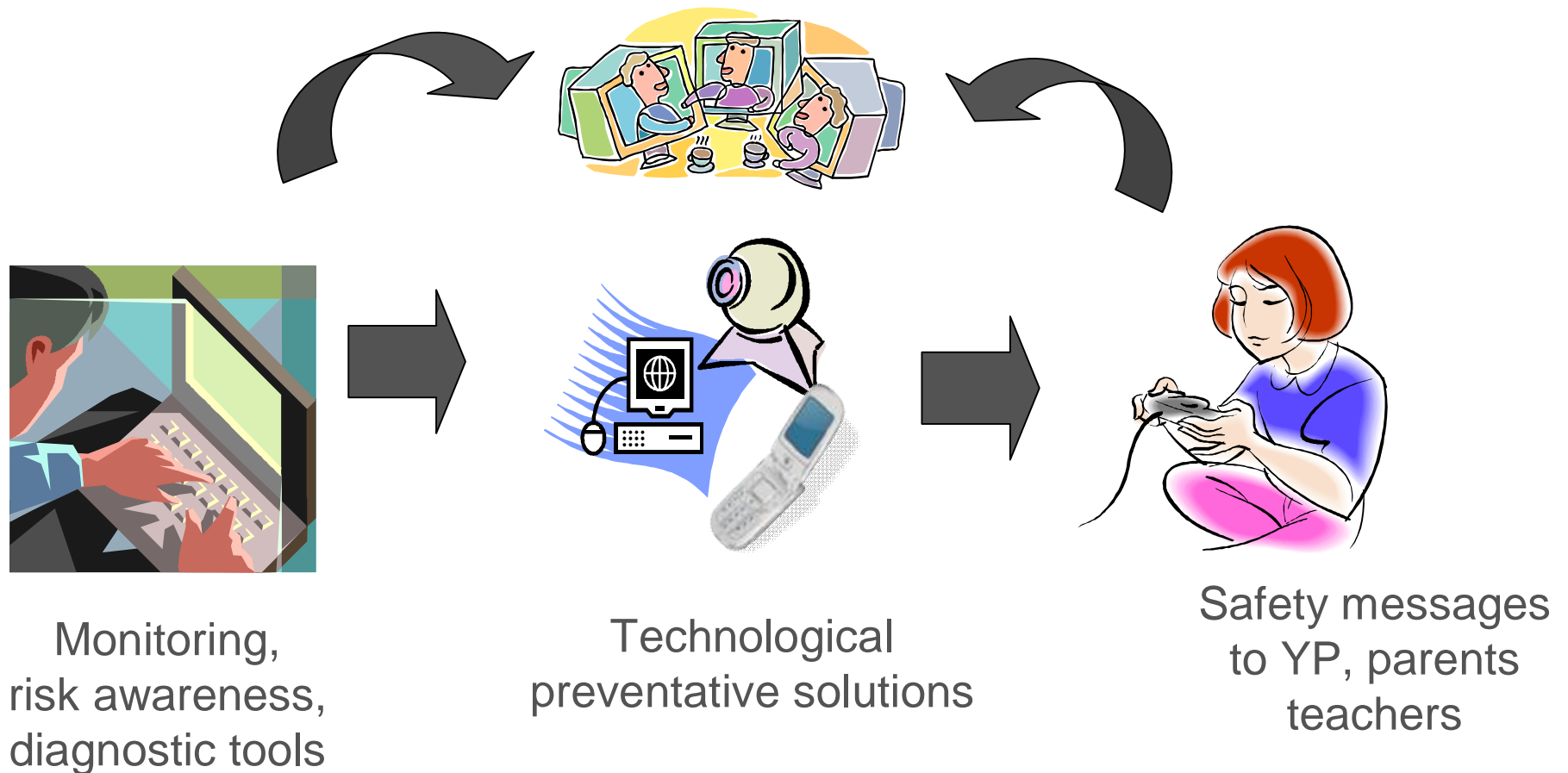
Resilient

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

Matching of Offender and Victim



Prevention, Intervention & Treatment

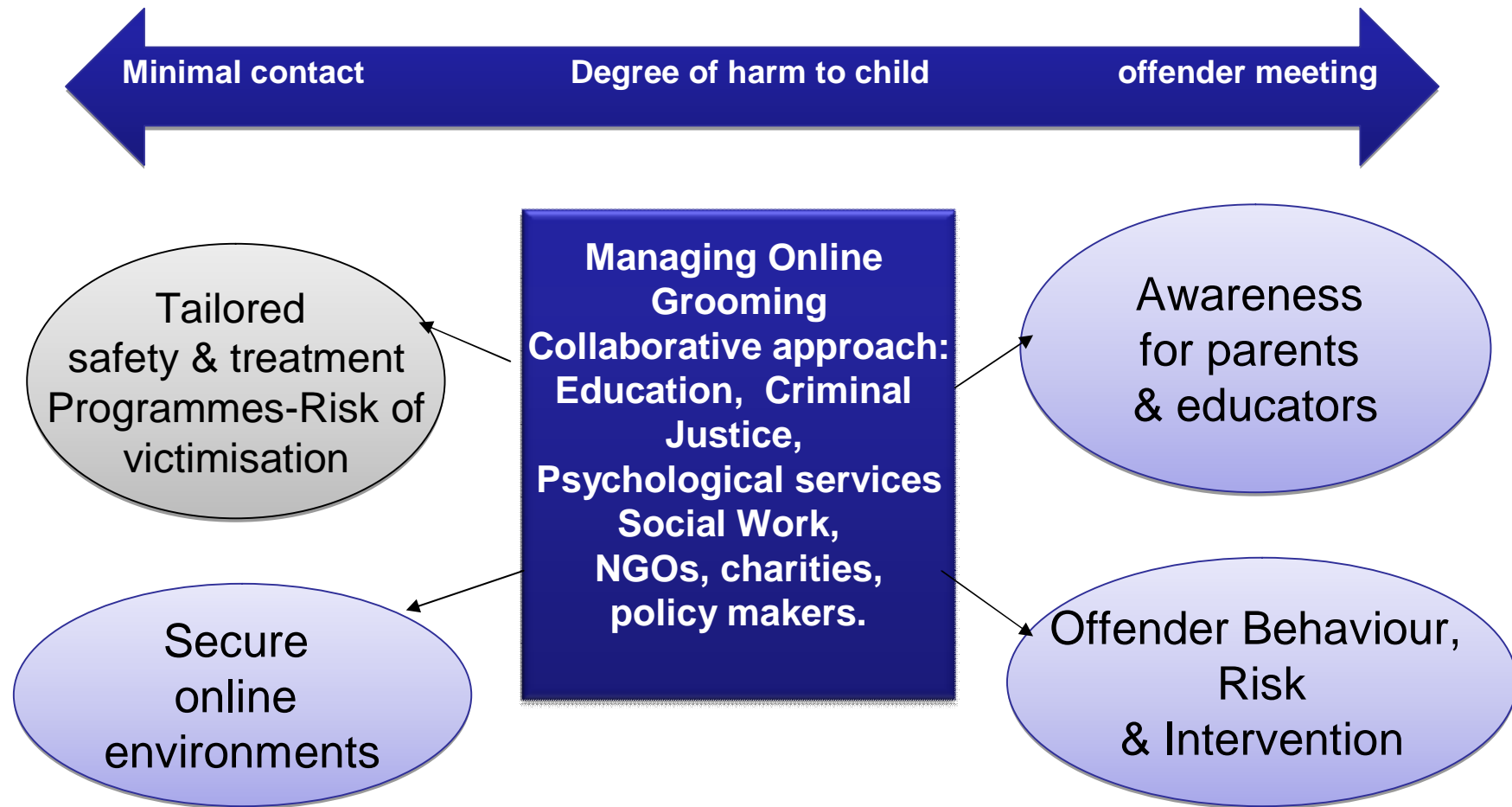


- § Further investigation of vulnerable children/young people and match of offender to victim needed. Understanding impact of even low level internet contact by strangers and grooming will help improve preventative work.
- § More understanding of child resilience needed, psychological, social, familial factors.
- § More targeted messages for different types of vulnerability needed for prevention initiatives. More awareness raising still needed with young people, parents and educators across Europe.
- § More awareness needed for professionals working with vulnerable children (eg those in care) to identify and reduce online risk.
- § Consider how internet providers can 'design out' offender behaviour on SNS (grooming, networking, indecent image sharing). Is more specialist monitoring possible?

Existing internet safety initiatives in EU

- § Hotlines and helplines, teaching and training material for teachers and parents.
- § The Youth council – DigiRaad- in the Netherlands is a young advisory group aged between 10 and 18 years old advises the Dutch government about safety for young people.
- § Austria, France and Germany have developed targeted websites related to safe practices offering cartoons and games with safety messages attached, teenager advice, and information for parents.
- § Spain, Navegacion Segura (Safe Navigation) contains games with quizzes to include cyberbullying and grooming warning messages & websites that warn against dangerous behaviours and lifestyles.
- § Childnet, UK actively promotes positive and creative ways for young people to use the internet with an emphasis on the three strands of Access, Awareness, Protection and Policy.
- § ThinkuKnow (TUK) programme, managed by CEOP, widely disseminated in schools concentrates on three key messages: **to have fun; to stay in control; and to report a problem around dangers online** (Davidson, Lorenz, Martellozo & Grove-Hills).

Public Health Problem





Further information

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

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

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