Online child sexual grooming

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## Topics

## Sample

Sample of secondary school students between the ages of 14 and 18, who were studying in a city in the west of Catalonia (Spain). Data were gathered in relation to 489 adolescents studying third and fourth year ESO (compulsory secondary education) and the first and second years of A-Level in 2015

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

This work presents the results of quantitative research into online child grooming carried out with a sample of 489 secondary school students in Catalonia (Spain). Besides determining the rate of victimisation of children by this behaviour, it establishes the profile of the victims and the offenders. In addition, it analyses the dynamics of these processes, victim–offender interaction, the level of effect that this behaviour has on the victims and the way in which an end was put to the situation. The results obtained in this empirical research do not permit confirmation of the common opinion that the widespread use of information and communication technology has led to an exponential increase in the victimisation of minors through online child grooming behaviour by unknown adults offline, because of which we need to react through the criminalisation of this behaviour.

# Outcome

Besides determining the rate of victimisation of children by this behaviour, it establishes the profile of the victims and the offenders.
This study has highlighted how grooming behaviour corresponding to the stereotype of the unknown adult offline who contacts the child online to make sexual solicitations is not the most common. The annual rate of victimisation by grooming was higher for peer grooming (12.3%) than grooming by adults (10%). Children did not tend to contact on the internet people they did not know, whilst the online contacts did not correspond to the ‘stranger danger’ construct and did not tend to include deceit, violence or intimidation. In short, 1 out of every 10 children was contacted by an adult online attempting to get them to talk about themselves and only 1 out of every 20 was contacted by an adult online to talk about sex.
Together with the containment of criminalisation to that required in international regulation, taking into account the high degree of the occurrence of children experiencing this type of behaviour, taking measures to prevent this process of victimisation should be tackled decisively.
Also in matters of prevention, the international documents insist on the establishment of the regulatory standard to be fulfilled in this regard. In this sense, a powerful tool aimed at the prevention of these forms of victimisation, as indicated in the scientific literature (Davidson and Gottschalk, 2011; Davidson and Martellozzo, 2008; McAlinden, 2012; Ost, 2009), comprise educating children, teaching them about how to use new technologies safely and responsibly. In conclusion, more action on prevention and less on criminalisation would be desirable to deal effectively with this field of victimisation at the least cost possible to the children themselves.
The results obtained in this empirical research do not permit confirmation of the common opinion that the widespread use of information and communication technology has led to an exponential increase in the victimisation of minors through online child grooming behaviour by unknown adults offline, because of which we need to react through the criminalisation of this behaviour.