Progression, maintenance, and feedback of online child sexual grooming: A qualitative analysis of online predators

# Details

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## Authors

de Santisteban P.;del Hoyo J.;Alcázar-Córcoles M.Á.;Gámez-Guadix M.

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* Risks and harms
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* Online safety and policy regulation
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Social mediation
* Digital and socio-cultural environment
* Other

## Sample

The sample of this study consisted on 12 male convicts in Spanish prisons, who had perpetrated contact sex offenses against minors whowere under 16, including 11 females and 6 males, whom they had met or communicated with over the Internet. Of the 12 parti-cipants, 10 were Spanish, and two came from Latin American countries. Participants ranged from 21 to 51 years of age (M= 38,SD= 10.32). Four participants had attended the Program for the Control of Sexual Assault (PCAS), although one did not complete itbecause he had been expelled before the program ended. Of the remaining eight, two offenders had also received individualizedtreatment, while six of them had not received any psychological treatment. The time interval between date offirst contact and date oflast contact between the victims and the perpetrators ranged from 1 day to 4 years.

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support
* Other

## Other Parent Implication

The importance of parental risk awareness

## Implications For Educators About

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* Stepping up awareness and empowerment
* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Fighting against child sexual abuse and child exploitation
* Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

The need to develop new strategies evidence based to treat, detect and prevent online child sexual grooming

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The limited literature on online child grooming has focused mainly on studying the characteristics of perpetrators and victims that facilitate the sexual abuse of minors. Little attention has been given to the perceptions of the perpetrators about the abuse process and the strategies used to sustain it over time. In the present study, after identifying a sample of 12 men convicted of online grooming, we used qualitative grounded theory through in-depth interviews and comparisons with the proven facts of their convictions. The results show how aggressors actively study the structural environment, the needs and vulnerabilities of the minors). In this way, the aggressors adapt by using most effective strategies of persuasion at all times, so that the child feels like an active part of the plot. This allows the aggressors to have sexual interactions with minors either online or offline and in a sporadic or sustained manner. This process is maintained with some distorted perceptions about minors and the abuse process, which seem to feed back to the beginning of the cycle with other potential victims. The interaction between the persuasive processes and the distorted perceptions of the aggressor leads to a potential work focus for treatment as well as detection and prevention. Trying to visualize the complexity of the phenomenon could also help researchers to understand processes from this approach that may be applied with other types of vulnerable populations.

# Outcome

This research shows an exploratory model of the process of online grooming providing information on how online predators manage to introduce minors into the abuse process through different strategies. The participants have had sexual interactions with actual minors (as opposed to undercover investigators or other proxies), and this "brings us closer to the knowledge of the dynamics of communication that are established" (de Santisteban et al., 2018: 214). Results show the distorted perceptions of the aggressors regarding the children and the abuse, and this fact provides information on the mechanisms that could maintain the process of grooming. In parallel, the access to the proven facts in the inmates’ cases allow detecting the existence of multiplicity of victims, de Santisteban et al., (2018: 214) stress out that "the results of this study could be used to develop specific treatment programs with offenders exhibiting this criminal typology and they are important to keep in mind for the creation of prevention policies aimed at children, caregivers, and teachers". The authors also point out that "it would be interesting to further examine the importance of situational factors (e.g., absence of parental supervision) and the interaction or these factors with individual factors (e.g., minors’ depression symptoms) in ways that could expose minors to greater danger and future studies should consider the perspectives of children who have been involved in an online grooming process" (de Santisteban et al., 2018: 214).

[Text adapted by the coder and extracted from the original text (de Santisteban et al., 2018)]