


Chapter 9

Social Media: A Gateway for Online Child Grooming

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ABSTRACT

Advances in technology have provided people with unparalleled opportunities to communicate efficiently and in real time. Adults with an inappropriate sexual interest in children have also benefited from developments in information and communications technology, using it to establish contact with them, to develop relationships, and to groom potential victims for sexual abuse and exploitation. Based on this, this study examined how social media has become a gateway for online child grooming. The study was anchored on the luring communication theory. The study adopted in-depth interview as its research design. The study used purposive sampling technique to draw a sample size of 15 experts. Findings from the study revealed that since the introduction of social media platforms, the amount of child sexual abuse content has been increasing yearly as these platforms have become a channel that offenders use in soliciting and sharing of explicit images and videos of minors.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Media platforms have become an essential part of present-day life as they play major roles in the educational and social growth of children. However, they also expose children to new and advancing forms of sexual exploitation by sexual predators (Brown, 2017). One of the increasing risks is online child grooming. Online child grooming simply put, is when someone who disguises as a minor, befriends a child online, builds up their trust and develops a relationship with the child, with the intention of exploiting and harming the child (Childnet, n.d.). Every child has the possibility of being groomed, regardless of age, gender, race or location. Some children may have higher chances of getting groomed online due to special educational needs, disabilities, or other vulnerabilities and may find gaining support from an adult they trust hard (“Childnet”, n.d.).

The fast growth of technologies, boost in mobile infiltration and successive growth of the use of the internet (Roser, Ritchie & Ortiz-Ospina, 2015) led to many studies of the effect of the latter. One of the frequently used points of view in favor of providing children with access to the internet is its positive impact on their academic performance (Carter, Greenberg & Walker, 2016). Having access to a technology device at home and internet connection seems to be as essential as self-learning skills (Yesilyurt et al., 2014) and it is effectively used as a subsidiary learning source in schools (Siraj et al., 2015). Presently, the internet is a preferable way of getting swift and varied data than going to mainstream sources such as libraries (Kumah, 2015). Alongside the positive features linked with the growth of the internet, there are various risks children can become exposed to online and the effect these risks can have on children is significant. Online child abuse experiences can lead to psychological, emotional, safety and health-related issues for children (Alqahtan et al., 2017).

A topic drawing an increasing level of media and research attention in recent years is the safety of children online especially children on social media platforms. In accordance to the study of 11 countries done by Silver, 79% of responders are very worried about children’s exposure to vile and dangerous content online (Silver et al., 2019). Understanding the scale of the concern requires deliberation of multiple aspects. Nearly every age group of children is represented online in some capacity. For example, among the 12- to 15-year-old group, 83% have their own smart phones and among 5- to 7-year-olds, 42% have their own tablets usually with connection to the internet (Ofcom, 2019). Between 80% and 93% of children have access to social media platforms on their phones; nearly 60% are reported to have more than 100 friends and 65% of children who have social media profiles connect with “new friends” online (GSMA, 2016). In the environment of social media, half of the children set up their profiles to public and 20% of them have no idea on how to

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make their profiles private (Alqahtan et al., 2017). The blend of these factors means children are extremely represented online and later on highly open to online sexual predatory behaviors, leading to online grooming, sexual abuse and exploitation. This research studies how social media has become a gateway for online child grooming.

The status of a moral agent presumes moral duties, what one must do or avoid doing. The moral duty not to commit child sex abuse is universal and that the duty to reduce the individual risk of child sex abuse is specific to the offenders. Society has a moral duty to help reduce the rate at which online child grooming and child abuse is increasing by reporting child sexual abuse contents they see on social media platforms but societies rarely provide such opportunities and hence fail in their moral duty, as most people turn a blind eye to so many immoral contents seen online (Cherry, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study was anchored on the following four objectives, which would clearly establish the importance of this chapter. They are to be analysed or examined using the findings of the study.

1. To examine the factors that influence online child grooming
2. Analyse the consequences of online child grooming
3. Examine government laws and regulations against online child grooming
4. Examine how online child grooming can be prevented.

Questions would be posed to the study participants based on these objectives. Findings from the chosen population would be used to analyse these objectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two relevant theoretical frameworks were chosen to handle this topic. They are the Luring Communication Theory and the Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development. Both were found to be appropriate in examining the issue in line with the objectives of the chapter.

Luring Communication Theory

Olson et al. (2007) developed a luring communication theory model (LCT) that divides predation into five stages: obtaining access, deceptive trust creation, grooming, isolation, and approach.

Gaining access is the first step in the tempting process, according to Olson et al. (2007), in which the predator must be motivated and capable of gaining access to potential victims and their families. According to Olson et al., deceptive trust creation is defined as the ability of a perpetrator to cultivate relationships with potential victims and possibly their families in order to promote the perpetrator's personal sexual desire. Beyond grooming, the sexual predator must physically and emotionally isolate the victim, whether online or in person. Physical isolation is described as scheduling time alone with the victim, but mental isolation is defined as increasing emotional reliance on the predator for things like friendship and direction. While complete physical isolation is impossible to obtain over the Internet, the predator creates seclusion by ensuring the victim chats are unsupervised. In Olson et al. the initial physical touch or verbal lead-ins that occur before the actual sexual act are characterized as approach in the LCT model. Approach is the final phase in the online model of luring communication, when the predator wants to meet the victim offline with the goal of starting a sexual connection (Olson et al., 2007).

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg's moral development theory is a study of how children acquire morality and moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg's theory, moral development unfolds in six stages. Moral logic, according to the theory, is primarily concerned with obtaining and sustaining justice. Kohlberg's theory can be divided into three tiers. There are two stages of moral development at each level. Kohlberg argued that not everyone proceeds to the highest stages of moral growth, just as Piaget believed that not everyone reaches the highest levels of moral development.

The earliest phase of moral development is level one (1), which is pre-conventional morality. It lasts until a child reaches the age of nine. Children's decisions at this age are mostly influenced by adult expectations and the penalties of breaking rules. Within this level, there are two stages: the first is obedience and punishment, and the second is individualism and exchange. Level two (2) is Conventional Morality, which is distinguished by acceptance of social conventions about what is good and moral. Adolescents and adults internalize the moral principles they have learnt from their role models and society during this time. Accepting authority and adhering to the group's rules are also important during this time. At this level of morality, there are two stages: the first is the development of good interpersonal relationships, and

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the second is the maintenance of social order. Post-conventional Morality is the third level of moral development, where people develop a knowledge of abstract moral principles. The social contract and individual rights, as well as universal principles, are the two stages at this level. Only a small number of people, according to Kohlberg, ever reach the post-conventional stages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing previous studies by experts on this subject, this chapter will examine the pre and post internet grooming stages, effects of sexual grooming on children, how online grooming can be prevented, statistics on online child grooming, Instagram: A major platform for online grooming, and law and against child grooming. Three countries where laws on online grooming are applicable would be examined.

Pre and Post Internet Grooming Stages

Pre and post internet grooming stages and strategies are almost the same with just a little difference. (Ringenberg et al., 2021). Before the internet grooming stages included;

Targeting the child and getting to know everything about the child, the child's weakness and find ways to exploit them. Gaining the child's trust by getting to know their needs, and discovering ways to provide for those needs (whether emotional or material needs), gaining the trust of the parents/guardians in order to lower suspicion and gain access to the child by providing superficially warm yet planned attention and support. Isolating the child to strengthen their relationship with the child by making settings in which they are alone together. Sexualizing the relationship by talking about sexual acts with the child, asking the child for illicit pictures or sending illicit pictures of themselves to the child. Then maintaining control of that child's continuous participation in the relationship either through secrecy, blame or threat to the child, the child's family or friends (Raising Children, 2022).

Grooming stages during the internet era, now consists of targeting the child, sending a follow or friend request, chatting the child up and trying to gain the child's trust by creating a friendship or relationship and providing for their needs, risk assessment - online predator will begin to assess the level of threat parents or guardians pose to them, isolating the child, sexualizing the relationship, and finally maintaining control of the relationship and the child's continuous participation in the relationship (Ringenberg et al., 2021).

The Effects of Sexual Grooming, Abuse and Exploitation on Children

The effect or consequences of online child abuse on a child can be short term or long term. In the short term, a child victim of sexual abuse can display regressive behaviors (e.g. sucking of their thumb and bed-wetting in younger children), insomnia, eating problems, behavior and/or performance issues at school and reluctance to participate in school or social activities (UNICEF, 2016). Long-term consequences for a child victim may include, mental and physical issues like self-harm or attempt to commit suicide, the idea of being visually exposed permanently online, ignoring a child's right to be forgotten can be a traumatic factor for most victims. An abused minor may learn to use sexual conduct to get affection, attention, presents, and privileges as a result of this type of trauma. Other possible outcomes include the feeling of betrayal by adults and inability to trust them because the person they relied on caused them tremendous harm or failed to protect them. Abused children may feel powerless; victims feel ashamed and accountable for their mistreatment. As a result of their images or films appearing on the internet, victims may experience distress, anger and shame due to the fact that it may be seen by not just perpetrators but also their own friends and relatives, and there is a continuous circle of sexual violence, as victims can be re-victimized (UNICEF, 2016).

It is essential to have safety nets in place for children who are experiencing the horrifying aftermath of grooming, sexual abuse and exploitation whether online and offline. Many parents, schools, organizations, religious groups etc. are aware of this and provide some assistance, such as professional counselling services adjusted to the needs of victims of grooming, sexual abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2016).

How Online Child Grooming Can Be Prevented

Here are some suggestions on how the undesirable online child grooming can be prevented:

- Parents should discuss with their children about the difference between online and offline friends, it is important to point out that, however nice a new friend online can seem or however long they have spoken to them for, those online friends are still strangers.
- Parents should talk to their children about the red flags in chats which are very necessary to report, block and tell an adult or authority about. Such chats would include if the online friend suggested to meet up offline and requested the child to come alone or tell no one, asking for personal information about

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them of their family or to send explicit photos or videos, chats moving to private messages to avoid being seen by others, or asking them to keep secrets.

- Parents should figure out where the block buttons are located on their children's devices and applications. Social media platforms, phone and tablet apps, online games and websites all offer reporting and blocking buttons.
- Parents should always make sure their children know that they are there to help when needed (either emotional or materialistic needs). Children who worry about how a parent or guardian will react to certain issues are prevented from asking for help. Ensure that your child knows that, no matter what has occurred, you are there to do your best to help them through it all.

Statistics on Online Child Grooming

Social media platforms appeal to online predators because of direct and often unsupervised approach to children. In 2019, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received a total of 19,174 reports of online child grooming (also known as online child enticement) and in 2020 they received a total of 37,872 reports, that is a 97.5% increase and the major contribution is attributed to the COVID-19 lockdown. According to the report, 98% of reported offenders were apparently unknown to the child offline and 78 percent of victims were female, 13 percent were male, while 9% of reports had no gender information. ("Online Enticement", n.d.). To be able to have better understanding of the scale of online child grooming and online child sexual abuse, it is worth looking into the official statistics on yearly produced child sexual abuse content (CSAC). There is a legal responsibility for companies to report CSAC to the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) ("18 U.S. Code § 2258A - Reporting requirements of providers", n.d.) and this offers the opportunity to track data trends in this area. In the past few years, law enforcement agencies have seen a fast upward trend in CSAC. In 2018, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received 18.4 million reports of suspected online child sex offenses from all around the world. ("NCMEC Data", n.d.). In 2018 NCA received 3 times more UK-specific online case referrals compared to 2016: 113,948 versus 43,072 reports correspondingly (Brennan et al., 2022).

In 2019, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) assessed 260,426 reports on child sexual abuse content, 132,730 were confirmed as containing sexual abuse content and out of this 38,424 were confirmed as self-generated content ("IWF Annual Report 2019", n.d.). And in 2020, the IWF assessed a total number of 153,383 child sexual abuse contents reports and that was a 16% increase from 2019 and IWF analysts confirmed 153,350 reports of child sexual abuse content in total for 2020, 68,000 cases were confirmed to be self-generated content which accounts for almost half

(44%) the content IWF took action on in 2019. This is a 77% increase on 2019's total of 38,400 reports which included self-generated content. New analysis by the IWF shows that in 80% of these cases, the victims were 11 to 13-year-old girls. In 2019, 92% of the child abuse content were confirmed to be female, 3% were male and 3% were of both genders. In 2020, 93% of the child abuse content were confirmed to be female, 3% were male and 3% were of both genders (IWF", n.d.).

In Nigeria, though there are just a few reported cases and no annual statistics of online child grooming and online sexual abuse contents, there are still some stories online on blogs or online newspapers (Sun News online, 2022). Most times it is just few of these stories that make the news and most never get reported because of the stigma these victims face.

Instagram: A Major Platform for Online Grooming

As of December 2021, the number of monthly active Instagram users increased to 2 billion (Statista, 2022). As part of Instagram's terms and conditions, children under 13 are not permitted to have Instagram accounts (Instagram Help Centre", n.d.). According to the official statistics only thirteen- to seventeen-year-old children are on Instagram and they consist of 6.2% of all Instagram users worldwide (Statista", n.d.). In applying, children below 13 years can easily beat age related rules and also get entry to the platform as Instagram is not requesting for their users age when registering, even though this procedure cannot still fully guarantee that children don't get access to the platform when they are not meant to. There are several ways to avoid these processes; they can lie about their age, use their parents' social media accounts, or ask adults to open up an account for them.

In 2021, whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed that Meta had behaved in bad faith by concealing information of Instagram's damages to minors, particularly females. Rather than making significant modifications to mitigate the effects, Meta focused its resources on the creation of Instagram for Kids in order to expand its user base and attract children at a younger age to its brand (Ghaffary, 2021).

Instagram is frequently mentioned as a top platform for child sex trafficking and grooming. According to the Human Trafficking Institute's 2020 Federal Human Trafficking Report, 65% of child sex trafficking victims recruited on social media platforms were gotten on Facebook, with Instagram being the second most popular platform used (14 percent) (2020 Federal Human Trafficking Report, 2020).

Instagram was the most often used site for grooming in 2020, according to the latest data from the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), with police identifying the platform in 32% of incidents (NSPCC, 2022). In May 2021, 'Thorn', a child welfare non-profit, revealed some highly insightful quantitative analysis based on data collected in 2020 (Thorn, 2021). According to the

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study, Instagram was the second most popular social media platform among minors, with 76 percent of the 9 - 17-year-olds questioned said to be using it (50 percent, at least once a day); it was only second to Youtube, with 97 percent (Thorn, 2021). Given Instagram's high rankings for both minors' use and threats posed to minors, it is very necessary for Instagram to address this; they must take all reasonable steps to safeguard the safety of the children who use their platform.

Thorn is not the only one who has looked into Instagram's negative effects on minors. Instagram's owner, Facebook, undertook similar research and found Instagram to be damaging to kids (particularly young females) in a variety of ways. However, in the face of its own study, Facebook failed to behave honestly and ethically, and instead chose to keep the findings hidden from the public (Nealon, 2021). The revelations of a whistleblower and following hearings in the US Senate confirmed what many had believed for a long time: that Facebook constantly prioritized business over child safety and well-being (Nealon, 2021).

A big challenge for child protection on Facebook-owned platforms is end to end encryption; which means that only users involved in the communication have access to the data (WhatsApp, 2022.). Neither Facebook nor the law enforcement will be able to access private communication data. This modification was caused by the amplified pressure on Facebook to protect data privacy. This is why, taking into account the present state and difficulty of managing child welfare on social media platforms, it is vital to note that all parties (technology and social media companies, law enforcement, educational institutions, charity organizations and parents) have a responsibility for guaranteeing proper experiences for children's online activities.

Government Law and Regulations against Child Grooming

Grooming has already been designated as a criminal offense in some countries. According to a review of these regulations, some may be redundant due to existing legislation and practices in their respective countries.

Nigeria

In Nigeria, law and regulations for online child grooming have not yet been drafted. However, Article 27 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, makes child pornography, grooming, and sexual abuse illegal in Nigeria (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, n.d.). Child's Right Act (2003) is the law that guarantees the rights of all children (children as defined by Child's Right Act is any person under the age of 18) in Nigeria and so far 24 out of 36 states of Nigeria have adopted the CRA as a state law, making 12 states out of 36 yet to implement this act. Under the Child Right Act (2003) section 31 and 32,

makes it an offence to have unlawful sexual intercourse and to sexually abuse or exploit a child. Under section 31 the penalty is imprisonment for life if found guilty and under section 32 the penalty is 14-years imprisonment if found guilty (2, n.d.)

United States

In the United States, 18 U.S. Code § 2251 Sexual exploitation of children, subsection A, makes child grooming a federal offense that carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in jail, subsection E (18 U.S. Code § 2251 - Sexual exploitation of children, n.d.). 18 U.S.C section 2422 makes it a federal offence to use mail or any facility or means to intentionally persuade or entice a minor to be involved in prostitution or any sexual activity, which is punishable by 10years or life imprisonment (18 U.S. Code § 2422 - Coercion and enticement, n.d.). 18 U.S.C section 2425 makes it a federal offence to intentionally share personal information such as the name, address, telephone number, etc. of a person under 16 years, with the intention to entice, the minor to be involved in any form of sexual activity, the offender can be imprisoned for 5 years (18 U.S. Code § 2425 - Use of interstate facilities to transmit information about a minor, n.d.)”.

United Kingdom

In England and Wales, it is illegal to set up a meeting with a child under the age of 16 for oneself or someone else with the intention of sexually abusing the child under section 14 and 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The meeting of a minor has been declared illegal. The criminal faces a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, as well as an immediate ban from working with children or vulnerable persons. A similar clause was included in Scotland’s Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 (Wikipedia, 2022).

Despite all of these laws and bans, incidents continue to spread like wildfire, particularly during the COVID-19 shutdown, and these have sadly not been thoroughly and methodically investigated. Because of its online, remote, and anonymous nature, it is one of the least reported forms of abuse. It’s a covert crime, with the vast majority of victims and perpetrators remaining anonymous, including abused children who share a home with their parents. Because of the anonymous nature of the internet, discovering and deterring online sexual abuse is challenging; yet, detecting that a kid is mistreated online remains the primary job of the parents (Mbaegbu, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

To anchor this study, the qualitative research method is used. In-depth Interview was used to collect primary data. Using purposive sampling technique fifteen participants were chosen for this study by the literacy level and exposure of participants with regard to the subject of study and they were identified as participants 1 – 15. Research has shown that when undertaking studies aimed at accessing hidden population, a manageable population becomes necessary because of the difficulties in reaching willing participants or respondents (Daniela, 2020). In another study, it is a settled fact that in qualitative research, the sample size is contextually determined; and that in-depth qualitative research does not require larger population as is the case in qualitative research “oriented towards positivism” (Boddy, 2016). Again, Mills et al. (2009), cited by Sarfo et al. (2021) state that the choice on the size of a sample for any research depends both on the “research questions and the epistemological assumption.” In other words, as already confirmed by Boddy (2016), the choice is contextual, not fixed. Knowing the cultural sensitivity of the issue focused on in this study, it was only necessary to choose the population among those who have been witnesses to the issue and not necessarily only the victims who would feel inconvenienced to come under probe.

The discussion was conducted over the phone, face to face and also through interview guides for two weeks. Additionally, it should be highlighted that the interview guide included 13 semi-open-ended questions that justified the objectives of this study. This structure allowed for statistical analyses.

The demographic details of participants were represented in tabular form. Information obtained cut across gender, participants’ age, location, and profession.

DATA ANALYSIS

In Table 1 above, the study indicates the demographic arrangement of respondents. First is the number of male and female respondents, followed by the age range which is between 25 and above 40 years. The Table also shows the locations of the respondents across the areas focused on, and their professions.

Having established the demographics of the study as indicated in Table 1, the study zeroed into raising questions and getting answers. The question started with the preferred platform used by each of the respondents. The responses revealed interesting findings in terms the age differences and the referred platforms.

Table 1. Demographic details

Sex	Frequency
Male	6
Female	9
Total	15
Age Range	Frequency
25-30	6
31-35	3
36-40	1
40 & above	5
Total	15
Location	Frequency
Abuja	5
Plateau	5
Nasarawa	2
Benue	1
Port Harcourt	1
Abeokuta	1
Total	15
Occupation	Frequency
Medical Doctors	4
NGOs	6
Lecturers	1
Public/Civil Servants	2
Unemployed	2
Total	15

Source: Field Study, 2022

Q1: Social Media Platform Usage Preference

Following a brief discussion which checked to see the participants' preference of social media platforms and reasons for their preference, the participants were asked to choose which social media platform they preferred as their first question in the first category. This question saw that four (4) participants chose Twitter as their preferred app, while three (3) picked WhatsApp, three (5) indicated that Instagram was their favorite, and three (3) listed Facebook as their preference.

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Again, within the four (4) participants that chose Twitter, the participants were 30, 32 and 34 years old, while one (1) was 46 years old. This suggests that Twitter may appeal to users in their mid-thirties. A participant, P12 said,

I prefer Twitter because it is entertaining and I can keep up with world news and also news on different investments on twitter.

Among the three (3) participants who preferred Facebook, two (2) were individuals of older age group, 58 and 60, and just one participant was middle aged, 39. It stands to reason that older people prefer Facebook as it has been around for a long while.

Q2: How Often Participants' Use Social Media Platforms

An enquiry on how often participants' use social media was made, to which fourteen out of fifteen participants answered "Very often" and one (1) answered "Not often" because he's always busy with work he forgets to check social media at times. P1 said,

If not for WhatsApp, I'd be sending text message every time probably would be spending lots of money on credit, but now I subscribe my data for a month on my phone and also Mifi and I can chat with my family and friends.

Q3: Awareness of Online Child Grooming

All the participant demonstrated knowledge of online child grooming, some were fully aware of it, while others only grasped the surface of the subject. P8 said that she had an idea of the concept of online child grooming but did not have a deep knowledge on it. P14 said,

Online child grooming is when an adult becomes friends a child with the intention of sexually abusing the child.

Q4: Factor Responsible for Online Child Grooming

Participants agreed that there are combinations of factors responsible for this however, to give a concise answer to this, P3 identified the degradation of culture and over-exposure to sex-inducing content online as factors that influence online child grooming. For P11, it was the increase of children in the social media platforms. Furthermore, P2 stated that,

Children having access to the internet at an early age. Children want to explore, they are curious, so if devices are made that would make them want to explore, they would use it. Bait is also a factor that influence online child grooming, children have emotional and material needs that sometime they can't get from their parents or guardians, so when groomers offer them gifts or special attention they are easily misled and begin to do things to keep the attention or the flow of gifts. Factors that influence online child grooming from the adult, can be adults who don't find emotional or sexual satisfaction or balance/stability and also have no control in their "adult" relationships or marriages, tend to look for those stability in minors and also to control them.

Q5: Consequences of Online Child Grooming on the Child

Participants said mental disorders, low self-esteem, the child's inability to trust anyone after the experience, lack of concentration and participation in school, and substance abuse, are consequences of online child grooming (abuse) on the child/victim. Additionally, P2 stated,

There's a lot of consequences, a few are, the groomer could influence a child up to the extent of telling the child to run away from home and come to her/him which could lead to illegal migration or child sex trafficking or the child's organs could be harvested. Mental disorders and substance abuse etc.

Participant P4, also stated that,

Self-harm, physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, or broken bones, emotional and psychological problems, such as impaired social-emotional skills or anxiety, self-blame, depressions and low self-esteem, nightmares and trouble sleeping, anxiety and panic attacks, issues at school, for example, finding it hard keeping up with schoolwork or behavioral issues.

Q6: Prevention of Online Child Grooming

To P6, government should create laws against such with penalty for offenders, schools should educate children on preventive measures, social media platforms should put more restrictions, parents should guide and monitor social media use by children, and CSOs should advocate for preventive measures and treatment.

Furthermore, P2 responded that,

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Government should create awareness and orientations through infomercials on the media, community town halls meetings and also there should be social and behavioral change education or risk communication for primary to tertiary school levels. Government should also introduce laws and regulations that set out the punishment of online child grooming for offenders and justice for the victims. Schools should carry out exposure education and it should be incorporated into their curriculums, teach them all about online child grooming and abuse and also do awareness sessions during assemblies, through drama and debate clubs etc. Social Media Platforms should be able to trace and remove immoral contents and also find stricter ways of verifying ages of users signing up for their platforms. Parents should practice censorship; they should develop a habit of routine check of their child's devices and internet/social media usage. Parents should educate their children about social media, because the parents won't be there always to check the child's phone, children will go to school and parents will go to work, so educating their children about the dangers of social media, also sex and moral education. Social media education should come first, sex and moral education next and finally censorship. And finally, CSOs can prevent it through campaigns, awareness creation via infomercials, jingles etc.

Q7: Participants' Child or Minor is on Social Media

Majority of the participants disclosed that their children or the child under their care does have a social media account. Among 15 participants, the children of two (2) participant's, P3 and P5, whose children are two and five-year old respectively, gave "No" as their answer and explained their children are not on social media. P10 also explained that:

I allowed them to be on social media but once in a while I check what their looking at and who they're chatting with. Because if you don't let them join social media, they will find a way to do it behind your back.

Q8: Screen-time Awareness Level by the Participants

Most participants expressed a good level of awareness of what their children are doing when they use their devices and are connected to the internet. Sometimes they might not be aware of what their child/minor is doing due to an inability to be physically present next to the child. During the conversation, P15 stated,

I am very aware of my junior ones' screen-time. He doesn't have a smart phone, so he uses my phone for anything he does online, so once he's done, I go through

my browser history and chats and his social media accounts to see what he's doing and the kind of people he chats with. I know it can be seen as invasion of privacy, but it has to be done.

Q9: What does the Child/Minor do with Devices?

Majority of the participants stated that entertainment, educational researches, playing games, and chatting are the things they know their children use their devices for. For P11 affirmed that chatting, watching cartoons and movies, playing games and browsing of assignments, are what her younger one uses his phone for.

Q10: Child/Minor's Supervised vs. Unsupervised Time

P 12 said,

Due to the fact that I'm always busy and traveling I put a parental guidance software on my child's phone and linked his phone to my watch, so I get to limit his what he accesses with his device and also get to see who he chats with.

Participants who have older children disclosed that they cannot really supervise what their children do or who they are chat with when they use devices and are connected to the internet. P7 disclosed that,

When I'm walking towards my daughter, she locks her phone screen or turns her phone upside down so I won't see who she's chatting with, so how am I meant to supervise her screen-time? She won't even let me. So, I have a mother-daughter talk with her once in a while about the dangers of social media and ask about who she chats with and hope she doesn't entertain immoral conversations with online strangers. And when I see a video when scrolling through Facebook about an incident that involved social media and the dangers, I send her the video.

Q11: Heard of or Faced any Online Sexual Predatory Behaviors

Majority of the participant disclosed that they have heard of or faced online predatory behaviors. P11 said that,

On social media platforms especially Facebook, all you'll do is accept a friend request and next thing you'll see is some random guy sending you a picture of his dick on messenger and asking for your nudes, or some random guy sending you sex-chats. I instantly block and remove the person from my following of Facebook.

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And the funny thing is, most of the guys/men, in fact a 100% of them are from a certain geographical zone. So, I've stopped accepting friend request from men, even women (from those areas) because it might be a disguise.

Q12: Types of Sexual Predatory Behaviors Children Could be exposed to Online

All participants gave different predatory behaviors children could be exposed to online. Child pornography to bait from adults they met online, were some of the types of sexual predatory behaviors participants listed. P12 said,

Virtual pedophilia pages, pornographic images and videos, online sexual games.

P8 adds that even if children refused to go to places where immoral contents are shown, now, it just pops up on their screens as they scroll through social media or when they browse on the internet and out of curiosity, the children may click it to see what it is about.

Q13: Examples of Grooming Phrases

On one hand, it looks really innocent and appropriate in certain instances, but on the other hand, can be very alarming, especially when a stranger online says it to a thirteen-year-old child, said P14. For P1, stated

"You know I love you so much, right?"

P6 adds that when a predator is grooming a child, they always shower the child with compliments in order for the child to lower their resolve and feel good. Some grooming phrases that P6 identified are,

"You are pretty". "You are special". "You are the best"

DISCUSSION

Results obtained from the in-depth interviews show that there are many factors that influence online child grooming. This can be traced from early exposure of a child to social media to the various features these platforms have to the need for a child to be validated and have attention particularly if the child is neglected at home and has low self-esteem.

Responses also indicate that certain negative behavioral consequences on the child are traced to online child grooming. These include mental disorders, eating disorders, depression, bad performances and lack of participation at school, lack of trust, and in worst cases children can be suicidal. These are the after effects of online child grooming on children. This is in sync with a study UNICEF (2016), which found that, in the short term, child victims of sexual abuse can exhibit regressive behaviors, sleep and eating disorders, behavior or performance issues at school and an unwillingness to participate in school or social activities and long-term complications, including emotional and physical issues such as immune deficiency, chromosome erosion and missing brain tissue or might even commit suicide.

In examining government laws and regulations against online child grooming, it was discovered that there are laws set in place by 3 nations, Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom. Despite all of these laws and bans, incidents continue to spread like wildfire, particularly during the COVID-19 shutdown, and these have sadly not been thoroughly and methodically investigated. Because of its online, remote, and anonymous nature, it is one of the least reported forms of abuse.

This chapter, based on results obtained from the sampled population, revealed certain challenges regarding prevention of online child grooming. Because of the anonymous nature of the internet, discovering and preventing online sexual abuse is challenging; yet, detecting that a kid is mistreated online remains the primary job of the parents. During the interview process, participants took the topic of children's online safety seriously and understood the need for thorough parental supervision. This, according to Ktoridou, Eteokleous, and Zahariadou (2012) can influence the quality of children's experiences online and prevent abuse. The strategy common for every participant regardless of a child's age is being physically present or being able to listen to the activities a child is engaged in being online.

FINDINGS

Our findings have in most cases reinforced previous beliefs or findings by previous scholars. They have also thrown up certain new scientific information and challenges that would form the bases for further research.

This chapter found out that Facebook-owned platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook-Messenger) also known as the Metaverse now, are the social media platforms majorly used by offenders for grooming, abusing and exploiting children. These platforms also have the highest rate for child sexual abuse content being shared around the world.

Findings from this study show that most parents or guardians and the public in general are not familiar with the complexity of the grooming process and see

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certain behaviors as individual rather than connected harmful activities. In turn, this means that parents or others may react appropriately to some grooming stages and miss others.

The use of social media platforms for online grooming has been growing rapidly over the past years. As more children sign-up for these platforms so does the rate of online child grooming increase because adults looking to abuse children will go where kids can be found. As a result, grooming can apparently happen anywhere.

Social media has both great risk and advantage for children. However, key factors that may tip the outcome of use in either direction is bent on what the children are using it for, what they are viewing and sensitization of the children/minor about the dangers of social media.

The most noteworthy predatory behavior children are going to be exposed to on any social media platform is immoral content (child sexual abuse content). This disadvantage was largely emphasized by majority of the participant who partook in the study and also the literature review.

The effect of problems created by online child grooming (abuse) can be disastrous and long term, ranging from mental disorders to children being suicidal after having such experiences, in addition victims can be re-victimized again as adults.

With the laws and regulations that have been placed by the government, groomers are still lurking in hidden and dark places on these social media platforms, finding more ways of hiding their identity and avoiding being caught.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on examination of the responses from our population as a result of the in-depth interview and discussions, and having used the same responses in analysing and justifying the objectives of the study, here are some recommendations based on the already discussed findings.

In view of the information provided by this chapter, the chapter recommends that it is time for government to not penalize the offenders but also sanction social media platforms that fail to behave honestly and ethically, and instead chose to keep the findings hidden from the public and prioritize business over child safety and well-being.

Parents and guardians should have a close relationship with their children and pay close attention to their children in order to notice change in behavior. They are to ensure the children have constant access to them and are not afraid to tell them anything and should also monitor their children's online activities (especially younger ones).

Social media platforms should play their part and report child sexual abuse contents and offenders' accounts to the government authorities so they can trace and penalize the offenders. They should also restrict minors from accessing immoral contents on their platforms.

It is essential to have safety nets in place for children who are going through the horrifying aftermath of sexual abuse and exploitation whether online and offline. Many parents, schools, organizations, religious groups etc. are aware of this and provide some assistance, such as professional counselling services adjusted to the needs of victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Individuals should catalyze their deepest moral and help reduce the rate at which online child grooming and child abuse is increasing by reporting child sexual abuse contents they see on social media platforms to government authorities or organizations that has been set up such as Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

CONCLUSION

With the above scientific findings, it is believed that government, lawmakers, the judiciary, non-governmental organizations, operators of social media platforms, families and individuals will rise to the challenge of protecting our children from this moral corruption. They are expected to apply stricter measures to ensure that children are not misled into immoral acts by those who should be protecting their interests. Social media can be a source of disciplined behaviour among our youths instead of being turned into an avenue for corrupt manners.

The internet and Social Media platforms have become an essential part of present-day life, and play a major role in the educational and social growth of children. However, they also reveal children to new and advancing forms of sexual exploitation by sexual predators.

The study found that social media is the most dangerous place for a child, causing more harm than good, and that early exposure to social media is a major factor that influences online child grooming, because the child is naive and unaware of the dangers that social media poses, making it easy for groomers to entice and exploit them. The study also found that, while social media platforms such as Facebook promises to disclose online child abuse information to authorities, the Facebook whistleblower's revelation reveals that they disguise how destructive their site is for children because they (children/minors) are the major users. The consequences of online child grooming or abuse are damaging and can last a long time; victims may develop mental or eating disorders, low self-esteem, difficulty trusting others,

and, in the worst-case scenario, suicide ideation. Victims and even adults might be re-victimized.

Instead of using parental control, parents or guardians frequently utilize physical presence as a risk mitigation approach and rely on creating trust with their children. The findings are important for a variety of organizations, including parents, technological businesses, educational institutions, and governments, because of their diversity. This research provides a solid platform for future qualitative and quantitative research in the field of online child safety. It is anticipated that further studies would incorporate responses from direct child victims of online grooming, how their lifestyles or behaviors have been influenced, and in their own opinion and what should be done by parents and government or other community of interest groups to control the situation

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Child Prostitution: Prostitution involving a child, and it is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The term normally refers to prostitution of a minor, or person under the legal age of consent.

Child Sexual Abuse: Also called child molestation, is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation.

Cybersex Trafficking: Is a cybercrime involving sex trafficking and the live streaming of coerced sexual acts and/or rape on webcam. Cybersex trafficking is distinct from other sex crimes. Victims are transported by traffickers to 'cybersex dens'.

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Fantasy Defense: Where a defendant accused of attempting a crime (enticing minors into sexual activity, for example) claims that they never intended to complete the crime. Instead, they claim they were engaged in a fantasy and, in the case of luring a minor, believed they were dealing with an adult.

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory: Is a study of how children acquire morality and moral reasoning.

Minor: Someone under a certain age, usually the age of majority, which legally demarcates childhood or an underage individual from adulthood. The age of majority depends upon jurisdiction.

Online Child Grooming: Simply put, is when someone (under disguise or not) as a minor befriends a child online and builds up their trust and develops a relationship with the child, with the intention of exploiting and harming the child.

Pedophilia: A psychiatric disorder in which an adult or older adolescent experiences a primary or exclusive sexual attraction to prepubescent children.