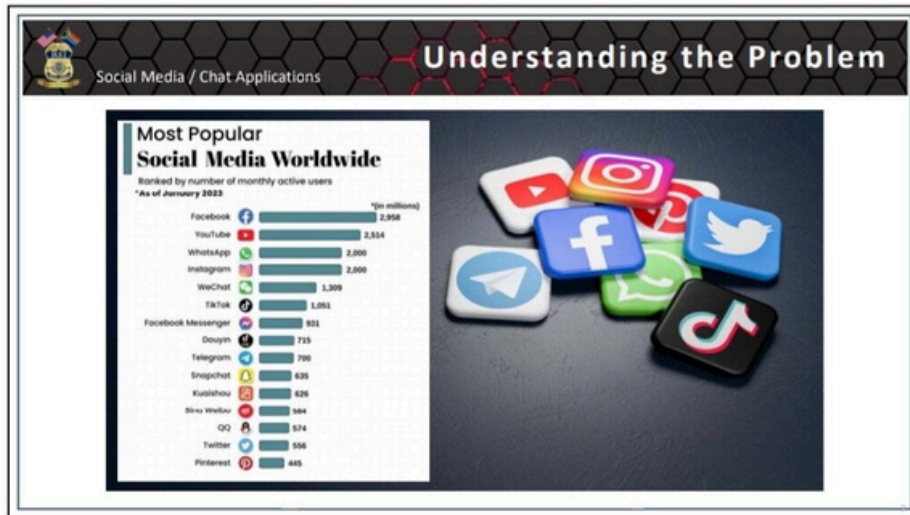


THE ALARMING RISE OF CSAM AND CHILD EXPLOITATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

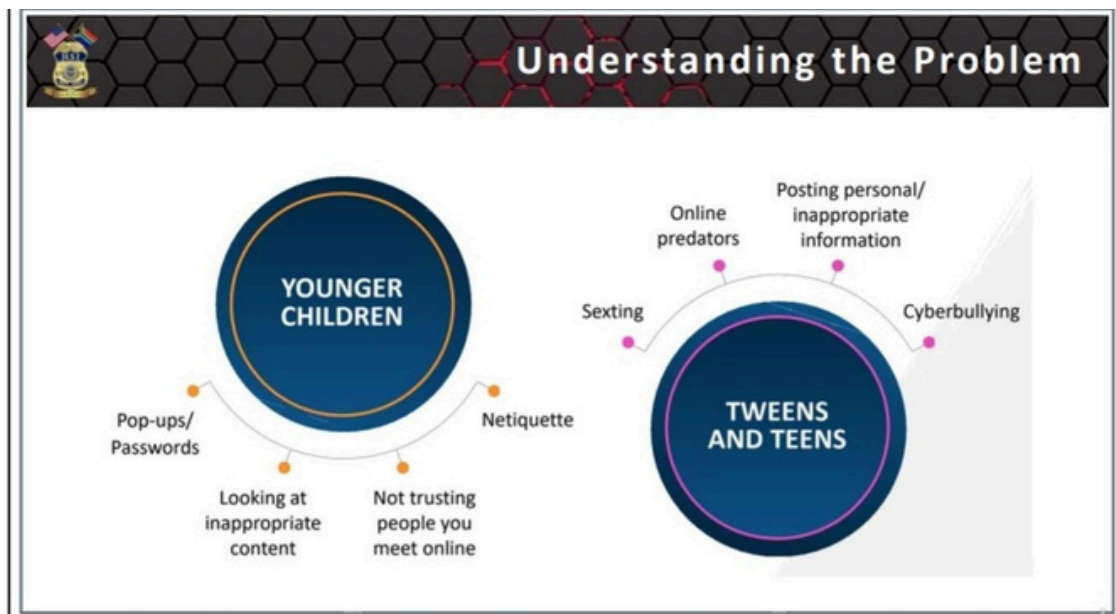
As an activist dedicated to the protection of children's rights, it is with deep concern that we address the increasing prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and child pornography in South Africa. The digital landscape, while offering numerous benefits, has also become a breeding ground for predators who exploit our most vulnerable—our children.



THE SURGE IN ONLINE EXPLOITATION

Recent reports indicate a disturbing rise in cases of child pornography and online sexual exploitation. The Films and Publications Board (FPB) has highlighted a significant increase in incidents related to CSAM, particularly as more children engage with the internet through social media and online gaming platforms. Between November 2023 and January 2024 alone, several arrests were made in connection with an online child pornography ring, underscoring the urgent need for robust measures to combat these heinous crimes.

In South Africa, approximately one-third of children are at risk of online violence and exploitation. This alarming statistic reflects a broader trend where children are increasingly exposed to unsolicited sexual advances and grooming by predators. The situation is exacerbated by inadequate laws and the lack of effective monitoring systems, creating a fertile ground for these criminals to operate with impunity.



THE ALARMING RISE OF CSAM AND CHILD EXPLOITATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

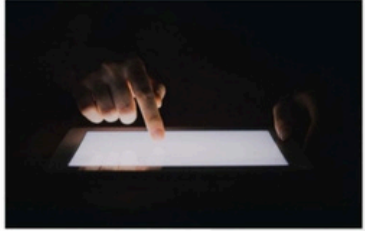
One of the platforms where this exploitation occurs is online gaming. While gaming can provide entertainment and social interaction, it also presents significant risks. Predators often infiltrate these spaces, posing as friends or allies to gain children's trust. Studies show that many children unknowingly share personal information with strangers while gaming, making them vulnerable to manipulation and abuse.

Grooming Indicators

Online Predators and Grooming Tactics

How It Happens

- Initial contact and rapport-building
 - A fake profile of a boy or girl of the same age
 - Meeting places include chat apps, online games, and social media
- Move the conversation off-platform
- Grooming and solicitation begins

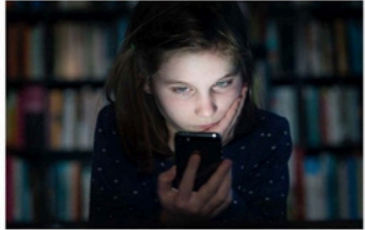


Grooming Indicators

Online Predators and Grooming Tactics

How It Happens

- Grooming
 - Gradual introduction of risky behavior attached to rewards
 - Interests in common, positive attention, romantic interest
 - Physical or virtual gifts
- Ultimate goal of offenders is new CSAM content, physical offline meetings, or financial gain



*** ONLINE GAMING: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The interactive nature of online games allows predators to build relationships under false pretenses, leading to potential real-world encounters that can have devastating consequences. It is imperative for parents to engage with their children about the games they play and the people they interact with online. Open conversations about online safety can empower children to recognize threats and protect themselves.


*** THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

- As we navigate this troubling landscape, the role of parents cannot be overstated. It is crucial for caregivers to monitor their children's online activities actively. This includes: Setting clear boundaries on internet usage.
- Discussing the importance of privacy and not sharing personal information.
- Encouraging children to report any suspicious behavior or uncomfortable interactions they encounter online.

Moreover, parents should familiarize themselves with the games their children are playing and understand the potential risks involved. By being proactive, we can create a safer digital environment for our children.

THE ALARMING RISE OF CSAM AND CHILD EXPLOITATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The rise in CSAM and child exploitation is not just a statistic; it is a call to action for all of us. We must advocate for stronger legislation that protects children from online predators and ensure that law enforcement agencies are equipped to tackle these crimes effectively. Collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, educators, and parents is essential in creating comprehensive strategies that prioritize child safety.




Understanding the Problem

CSAM Website on Darknet's Onion Router/Tor Network

Victims Identified in 39 States and 5 Foreign Countries

- 8 female and 243 male
- 59 victims – 16 to 17 years old
- 159 victims – 13 to 15 years old
- 26 victims – 10 to 12 years old
- 4 victims – 7 to 9 years old
- 2 victims – 3 years old or younger



- Over **27,000** Members
- Over **2,000** Videos
- Over **300** Spin-off Investigations Opened

- Of Those Arrested Running the Website: **2** in Georgia, **1** in Louisiana, **1** in Indiana. Multiple follow-up arrests around the country.

**** A CALL TO ACTION

We cannot afford to remain silent while our children are at risk. It is time for us to stand together against this growing menace and work towards a future where every child can explore the digital world safely. Let us unite in our efforts to protect our most vulnerable citizens—our children—because they deserve nothing less than a safe environment where they can thrive without fear of exploitation.

**** ACKNOWLEDGING COMMUNITY EFFORTS

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Johan Claassens, Senior Criminal Investigator and Computer Forensic Analyst at the Department of Homeland Security Investigations, along with NPO Unchain Our Children, for hosting an informative session last week. This event was instrumental in educating parents and guardians about the dangers of CSAM and online exploitation. By providing valuable insights into how predators operate and what signs to look for, we are better equipped to protect our children.

For more information contact info@grovesfoundation.co.za

