E-ISSN: 2997-9439

American Journal of Education and Evaluation Studies

https://semantjournals.org/index.php/ AJEES

| Research Article

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Crimes Against Children in Cyberspace: Types, Features, and Countermeasures

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Abstract: This article addresses the pressing issue of crimes against children in cyberspace. The paper examines various scientific approaches to defining this concept, presented by researchers such as Sonia Livingstone, John Carr, and Yoon Jung, as well as international organizations including the UN and UNICEF. The author highlights the characteristics of cybercrimes against children, including their virtual nature, transnational aspect, perpetrator anonymity, and the technological complexity of investigations. The article provides a detailed description of the main types of such crimes, including those related to child pornography, online sexual exploitation of children, cyberbullying, illegal collection of personal data, and others.

Special attention is given to measures for combating cybercrimes against children, such as strengthening international cooperation, improving legislation, implementing technological protection measures, enhancing law enforcement training, and conducting educational work. In conclusion, the author emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing this problem, requiring the participation of not only law enforcement agencies but society as a whole.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Grooming, Sextortion, Livestreaming, Cyberbullying, Cyberstalking.

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Introduction

The rapid development of modern information technologies and the widespread use of the Internet have a tremendous impact on all aspects of society, including the lives of children. The Internet not only provides children with a wide range of opportunities but also poses serious dangers to them. Crimes against children in cyberspace are one of the most acute problems of our time.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, a renowned researcher from the London School of Economics, asserts that crimes against children in cyberspace refer to illegal behavior committed through the Internet and other information and communication technologies, which cause harm or create a risk of harm to the physical, mental, moral, and social development of children.[^1]

These types of crimes have their own characteristics:

1. Committed through virtual space - there may be no direct physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim.

2. Transnational nature - the crime can be committed across different countries.
3. Anonymity function - criminals have the ability to conceal their identity.
4. Technological complexity - detection and investigation of crimes require special knowledge and skills.
5. Risk of widespread impact - many children can be harmed by a single crime.

In scientific circles, there are various approaches to the concept of crimes against children in cyberspace. Research and discussions in this field continue as the types of crimes also change with the development of technology.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, in her work of the same name, defines: «crimes against children in cyberspace are violations of children's rights using digital technologies, any illegal behavior that threatens their safety and well-being.»

John Carr, an American legal scholar, in his book «Child Abuse, Child Pornography and the Internet» (2004), interprets this concept in a narrow sense: «crimes against children in cyberspace mainly include crimes related to child pornography and sexual exploitation of children.»[^2]

The difference in opinions between these two scholars is that Livingstone provided a comprehensive definition, while Carr focused on crimes of a sexual nature.

Another approach is proposed by Australian criminologist Yoon Jung in her book «Cybercrime and Its Victimization» (2017): «In cyberspace, crimes against children are not only crimes committed directly against children, but also any cybercrimes involving or affecting children.»[^3] This definition covers a wide range of cybercrimes and also takes into account indirect consequences.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its 2015 report provides the following definition: «crimes against children in cyberspace are any criminal behavior aimed at exploiting, abusing children or causing them harm using information and communication technologies.»[^4]

The Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (2001)[^5], on the other hand, considers cybercrimes against children mainly in the context of child pornography-related offenses and provides the following definition in Article 9: «offenses related to child pornography - production, offering or making available, distribution or transmission of child pornography through a computer system, for oneself or another person.» acquisition, as well as possession of a computer system or computer data storage medium.»[^6]

UNICEF, on the other hand, offers a more comprehensive approach in its 2017 report: «crimes against children in cyberspace are any actions using digital and interconnected technologies that violate children's rights, threaten their safety, development and well-being, or cause harm.»[^7]

Main types of crimes against children in cyberspace

1. **Crimes related to child pornography**

This type of crime is one of the most common forms of crimes against children in cyberspace. Crimes related to child pornography include:

a) Production of child pornography - creating, photographing, or video recording pornographic images of children.

b) Distribution of child pornography - uploading, sending, or distributing child pornography through the Internet in other ways.

c) Storage of child pornography - storing child pornography on a computer or other electronic device.

d) Access to child pornography - accessing or viewing child pornography through online platforms.

At the international level, several legal acts have been adopted to combat child pornography. These include, for example, the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2000)[^8] and the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (2001)[^9].

2. **Online sexual exploitation of children**

Such types of crimes include:

a) Grooming - establishing trusting relationships with children through the Internet and preparing them for sexual exploitation.

b) Sextortion - demanding sexual images or behavior from children through blackmail.

c) Livestreaming - demonstrating sexual exploitation of children in real-time via the Internet.[^10]

The danger of such crimes lies in the fact that criminals often pretend to be children or teenagers, approaching victims and gaining their trust.

3. **Cyberbullying and cyber intimidation**

Cyberbullying is systematic psychological harassment, intimidation, or bullying of children through the Internet and other electronic means of communication. This can manifest in the following forms: a) sending offensive messages b) posting insulting posts on social networks c) disclosing personal information about a child d) creating fake profiles in someone else's name.

On the other hand, cyber intimidation is intimidating a child through the Internet, threatening them. This is often used to force a child to do something.

4. **Illegal collection and distribution of children's personal data**

Such types of crimes include: a) unauthorized collection of children's personal data b) selling children's personal data to third parties c) using children's personal data for illegal purposes.

Children's personal information can often be used for marketing purposes, as well as for fraud or blackmail.

5. **Involving children in extremist and terrorist activities**

The Internet is actively used by extremist and terrorist organizations to recruit children into their ranks. This process can consist of the following stages: a) establishing contact with children and gaining trust b) gradually instilling extremist ideas c) encouraging children to participate in extremist groups d) preparing children for terrorist acts.

6. **Involving children in illegal content**

Such types of crimes include: a) showing pornographic materials to children b) showing scenes of violence to children c) showing materials promoting drugs or alcohol to children.

7. **Violation of children's intellectual property rights**

Such types of crimes include: a) unauthorized distribution of works created by children b) commercial use of works created by children c) creation and distribution of counterfeit works in the name of children.

8. **Involving children in fraud**

Internet fraudsters often try to take advantage of children's gullibility. This can manifest in the following forms: a) organizing false games or contests to obtain financial information from children b) encouraging children to subscribe to paid services or products c) hacking children's social media accounts and using them for fraudulent purposes.

9. **Involving children in illegal activities**

Internet criminals may try to involve children in various illegal actions. For example: a) involving children in drug trafficking b) involving children in groups engaged in illegal activities c) using children in fraudulent schemes

10. **Cyberstalking of children**

Cyberstalking is tracking a child through the Internet, regularly sending them messages, collecting information about their actions, and attempting to establish a connection with the child.[^11] This can seriously affect the safety and mental state of the child.

Conclusion

Crimes against children in cyberspace are a complex and multifaceted problem. This type of crime can cause serious harm to the physical, mental, and moral development of children, as well as negatively affect their future lives.

To combat crimes against children in cyberspace, it is necessary to take the following measures:

1. Strengthening international cooperation - given the transnational nature of this type of crime, further development of law enforcement cooperation between states is necessary.
2. Improving national legislation - each state should strengthen mechanisms for protecting children's rights in cyberspace, bringing its legislation in line with international standards.
3. Adopting technological measures - Internet providers and social media platforms should implement special filters and control mechanisms to protect children.
4. Enhancing the qualifications of law enforcement officers - training specialists with special knowledge and skills in combating cybercrime.
5. Conducting awareness campaigns on cybersecurity among children, parents, and teachers - it is necessary to inform the general public about the rules of safe Internet use.
6. Improving the system of assistance to victims - it is necessary to develop mechanisms for providing psychological, legal, and social assistance to child victims of cybercrime.

The fight against crimes against children in cyberspace is a task not only for law enforcement agencies but for society as a whole. Only through joint efforts can we protect our children from the dangers of virtual space and give them the opportunity to fully use the positive potential of the Internet.

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