CHILD PORNOGRAPHY IN SLOVAKIA AND PROJECT BRIDGE

Assist. Prof. Dr. Michal Chovanec, Ph.D.,
Prof. Dr. Jozef Meteňko, PhD.,
1 Academy of Police Forces in Bratislava, Slovakia
2 Academy of Police Forces in Bratislava, Slovakia

ABSTRACT
Pornography has been a part of human life since the time of the Moravian Venus from the Young Palaeolithic period because it can also be considered a certain type of pornography. She could represent a certain prestige because she is naked and in the equipment of not only a warrior. It is also a symbol of fertility, as evidenced by its full curves as a sign of life and the preservation of the family. The issue of pornography is extensive and there is still no unified and comprehensive definition of it. Therefore, even child pornography is still controversial, and it is so from several points of view. Slovakia in modern development as a relatively young country developed and so did child pornography in Slovakia. The paper analyzes theoretical and statistical information concerning on situation in Slovakia. But authors also use frequently general information from abroad on pornography. Finally, the author's comments need actual possibilities for changes oriented to the European scientific project Bridge.

Keywords: child pornography, definition, occurrence, child pornography statistics, views on the future – project Bridge.

INTRODUCTION
As a historical aspect, we can say, the depiction of naked people performing sexual acts is nothing new to humans. Evidence of numerous forms of erotic art originating in ancient Greece and Rome and other European, Asian, and African cultures has been discovered by archaeologists. The Kama Sutra is an ancient Indian text dealing with human sexuality, authored by Mallanága Vátsayájana. Consisting of 36 chapters, it provides advice on human sexual behavior, describes different positions used during intercourse, and even offers information on household management and everything related to it [1].

Salmon and Diamond [2] have different opinions; they consider male fantasy to be a projection into pornography, which, according to them, developed over time and space. The existence of pornographic artifacts of many ancient cultures is known; it is depicted on statues or wall paintings that decorated the brides of the city of Pompeii. In pornography, desire, and physical gratification are primary, while courtship, commitment, and long-term relationships are absent. It is a fantasy world in which women are permanently aroused, desires sex with unknown men, and always reach orgasm. Pornographic videos contain some plot, focus on their own sexual acts, and emphasize the depiction of attractive female bodies, especially close-ups of breasts, genitalia, and facial expressions suggesting sexual arousal. Male-focused, sexually explicit videos dominate the market. This is unmistakable proof that men are more oriented to visual
stimuli than women. Simply put, pornography is a world for men that they have easy access to at minimal cost (minimax principle), a place where they can have impersonal sex with countless gorgeous and orgasmic women.

The Internet has completely changed pornography in terms of how it is produced, who produces it, who the participant is (actor/actress), who watches it, where it is consumed, how often it is consumed, and who consumes it. These are all important factors that have changed the expansion of the availability of pornography through the Internet. The traditional model of pornography used until then consisted of producers, directors, actors/actresses, and other personnel such as make-up artists, camerapersons, and others. Today, the situation is different. People film themselves using a video camera during intercourse, upload the video to the Internet, and people pay them for every single view of the video. In this direction, pornography has certainly spread. Individuals currently using a traditional method cannot be compared with those using websites [3].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As we are concerned with the numbers and frequency, as Cooper [4] states, the word “sex” is the most searched and most frequently entered word in Internet search engines. About one-third of all internet users visit sexual websites [5]. From online shopping, up to 70% of the profit comes from sexually explicit material [6]. Nine percent of internet users spend more than 11 hours a week searching for and viewing sexually explicit material [5].

According to the estimate of Internet world status [7], 51.8% of the population of North America has access to the Internet and uses it. Approximately 135 million of American adults have access to the Internet at home, and 75 million have access to a robot [7]. Online search is one of the most popular on the Internet with 5.7 billion searches in the month of January 2006. This figure represents an almost 39% increase in searches in one year [9]. According to Zooknic Internet Intelligence, nearly 112 million websites were available in 2009. Ropelato [10] reported the existence of more than 4 million pornographic websites containing 372 million pages of pornographic material. Further, he stated that 68 million people search for pornographic material every day, which is, according to his calculations, 25% of all daily searches. Interestingly, the porn industry makes $57 billion annually, $12 billion of which is generated in America alone.

According to Whitzer [11], sex for sale is a very lucrative business. The author further notes that in 2006, Americans spent $13.3 billion on magazines, videos, and DVDs, live sex shows, strip clubs, adult television programs, computer pornography, and phone sex. Sales and rentals climbed from $75 million in 1985 to $957 million in 2006. In one decade, pornography sales more than doubled from 5,700 in 1995 to 13,588 in 2005.

In 2011, more money was spent on pornography in the US than all tickets purchased for professional basketball, football, baseball, and ice hockey games combined [12].

Definitions of Pornography

Although defining pornography might seem very simple at first glance, it is not. We could easily find out if we asked a few randomly selected people how they themselves implicitly defined pornography. There is no doubt that we would get exhaustive and comprehensive answers from our random respondents. We would work on the problem only when trying to compare the individual answers with each other. There is no uniform definition of pornography. Several domestic and foreign authors agree on this: [12], [1], [13]. Some researchers define
pornography simply as “material intended and expected to create sexual arousal for the recipient” [5] p. 56).

However, most researchers argue that pornography cannot be defined simply as sexually explicit material. This material must contain subjugation, degradation, depersonalization, enslavement, abuse, and/or violence against women. Clinically speaking, it is important to recognize the definition of pornography based on how each individual defines it. It may be important for the therapist to learn the client’s definition of pornography during their treatment assessment [5].

Frederick [14] p. 84) adopted the definition of pornography from the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship: “sexually explicit representation that has the function or intention of sexually arousing an audience.” Within Slovak legislation, pornography is defined according to § 89 ZB SR no. 85/2000, paragraph 24, and defines pornography as follows: “A pornographic work is a depiction of sexual intercourse or another method of sexual intercourse or a depiction of naked genitals, the purpose of which is to induce sexual excitement or sexual satisfaction.”

TABLES, GRAPHS & FIGURES

Pornography and children
Internet child pornography is currently on the rise, and along with it, concerns are increasing, supported by the technical maturity of the present time (the Internet, or a direct connection between two or more computers), which leads to easier access and greater protection of consumers of child pornography. This is illustrated by the increase in the number of consumers of child pornography, where in December 2000, it was estimated to be around 360 million. By September 2009, there were an estimated 1.73 billion consumers, which represents an almost 500% increase in less than a decade [15].
Authors Chen et al. [16] note an insufficient focus of research on the effect of internet pornography on adolescents. The prevalence of internet child pornography is unknown, but despite this, researchers agree that its availability is increasing. The 153,369 URLs which displayed child sexual abuse imagery in 2020 appeared across 5,590 domains, traced to 59 countries. This is a 13% increase from 4,956 domains in 2019. We’ve seen an increase in the number of domains being abused to host child sexual abuse material in 2020.

The annual report clearly shows the decline and subsequent rise of URL pages over the years – see graph no. 5 [7].

[Graph showing development of domains hosting child sexual abuse over time]

The websites containing child sexual abuse content were registered across 169 top-level domains - 81 generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs), and 88 country code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs). For domain analysis purposes, the webpages of www.iwf.org.uk, www.iwf.org.uk/report, and www.iwf.org.uk/what-we-do are counted as one domain: iwf.org.uk [7].
As we can see from graph number 2, the most frequently used internet domain is .com in the number of 59%, followed by the domain .net in the number of 23%. 4% use the domain.ru, 2% have domains such as .nz, .fr. 1% have the domains .org, .al, .to, xyz, and pw., these are the 10 most used domains.

Seigfried [15] surveyed 307 respondents (181 women and 126 men) using a voluntary anonymous internet questionnaire. Of them, 277 were classified as non-consumers of internet child pornography, and 30 respondents were classified as consumers based on subjective introspection. The study showed that women are more frequent consumers of internet child pornography (10 female respondents from their 30s, which represents 5.5%) than previously assumed, while it was an introspective internet questionnaire.

As Seigfried-Spellar and Rogers [17] note, the forensic or penalized male population is the primary source for major research purposes to investigate and understand child pornography consumption. There have also been attempts to determine the female consumer (consumer) not only of internet child pornography, because they are considered exceptions to the rule by various members of society, including scientists or experts. For example, research by Frei et al. [18] suggests that women have a complete lack of susceptibility to visual eroticism, a fundamental difference between the sexes. Herbeck in [17] even talks about a strong maternal instinct in women that could explain why women rarely engage in the consumption of child pornography.

A substantial part of adolescent internet users is exposed to internet pornography. Despite growing concerns, there is little research focusing on this population category. The issue of pornography consumption by adolescents was addressed in the research by Sabina [19], in which 192 male and 371 female respondents participated (563 in total). The results showed that a total of 72.8% of participants (93.2% boys and 62.1% girls) saw pornography for the first time before they were 18 years old. Most were exposed to pornography between 14 and 17 years of age, with boys significantly more likely to consume pornography more often and watch more types of pornography than girls. A significant proportion of boys and girls have seen deviant or criminal sexual activities, including child pornography and sexual violence. And all of this happened at least once before them turning 18. Girls were significantly more likely than boys (42.3% girls and 6.8% boys) to not report viewing pornography for any purpose, which means that they were exposed to it mostly involuntarily. A smaller proportion of research participants (12% boys and 18.7% girls) mentioned that they had viewed pornography online before the age of 18 and that it had a strong effect on their attitudes or emotions. When asked
about these strong reactions, boys were significantly more likely to report feelings of sexual excitement (80% boys and 27% girls), while girls were significantly more likely to report feelings of embarrassment (73% girls and 25% boys) and disgust (51% girls and 20% boys). More than three-thirds of boys and girls with a strong emotional effect described feelings of shock or surprise (65% boys and 78% girls). Half of the boys and about one-third of the girls felt guilt or shame. About the same number of boys and girls reported that the exposure made them less eager to seek out sexual activity (20% boys and 22% girls), have unwanted thoughts about the experience (25% boys and 24% girls), or feel unattractive or inadequate (15% boys and 19% girls).

The possible connection between pornography consumption and sexual risk is particularly important in relation to the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young adults according to UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS) in Simković [20]. According to the UNAIDS organization (ibid.), young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are at a higher risk of contracting HIV infection. A study by the World Health Organization [20] reported the highest rate of diagnosed cases of sexually transmitted diseases is observed between the ages of 20 and 24, followed by the age category of 15–19 years.

Authors Thornburgh and Lin [16] found that 31% of American children between the ages of 10 and 17 who have a computer at home view pornographic websites, and 45% of them aged 14–17 have seen the site compared to 15% aged 10–13.

Child pornography in Slovakia
Child pornography is much more specific compared with general pornography. First of all, there is a difference in the legislative implementation; in Act no. 300/2005 Coll. The Criminal Code (TC), individual concepts such as child, child pornography, child pornographic performance, production, distribution, and storage of child pornography are comprehensively defined as follows:

§132 TZ – Prostitution, pornography and child pornography performances
par. 4 – For the purposes of this law, child pornography means the depiction of intercourse, another form of sexual intercourse, or other similar sexual intercourse with a child, or the depiction of exposed parts of a child's body aimed at inducing sexual satisfaction of another person.

par. 5 – For the purposes of this law, a child pornographic performance is understood as a live performance intended for an audience, including with the use of information technology means, in which a child is involved in real or pretended sexual behavior, or in which parts of the child's body are exposed, aimed at inducing sexual satisfaction of another person.

§368 TZ – Production of child pornography
par. 1 – Whoever uses, obtains, offers, or otherwise abuses a child for the production of child pornography or a child pornographic performance, or enables such abuse, or otherwise participates in such production, shall be punished by imprisonment for four to ten years.

par. 2 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for seven to twelve years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1: a) on a child under the age of twelve, b) a more serious way of acting, or c) publicly.

par. 3 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for ten to fifteen years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1: a) and causes serious injury or death, or b) and will gain considerable benefit from it.

par. 4 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for twelve to twenty years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1: a) and causes serious harm to the health of several persons or the death of several persons.
§369 TZ – Spreading child pornography
para. 1 – Whoever reproduces, transports, supplies, makes available or otherwise spreads child pornography shall be punished by imprisonment for one to five years.
para. 2 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for three to eight years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1: a) a more serious way of acting, or
b) and obtains a large-scale benefit from it, or
c) as a member of a dangerous group.
para. 3 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for four to ten years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1 and obtains a significant benefit from it.
para. 4 – The offender shall be punished by imprisonment for seven to twelve years if he commits the act referred to in paragraph 1 and obtains a large-scale benefit from it.

§370 TZ – Possession of child pornography and participation in a child pornography performance.
para. 1 – Whoever keeps child pornography or who acts with the intention of gaining access to child pornography through an electronic communication service shall be punished by imprisonment for up to two years.
para. 2 – As in paragraph 1, whoever intentionally participates in a child pornography performance will be punished.

Police crime statistics according to tactical-statistical classification in the ratio of detected and clarified criminal activity started in 1997. For more information see chart no. 1. In the years 1997 to 1999 is no registered activity in this field in Slovakia. In 2000, 5 cases of child pornography were detected, and the same number were discovered, i.e. the perpetrator was found. In 2001, statistics were not carried out. In the same chart no. 1, we can see the increasing trend of detected child pornography between 2002 and 2009. The only exception is the year 2004, in which the overall number of detected and clarified cases was low. We think this is more of a systemic error than an actual decline in child pornography. No statistics were made in 2010. The reason is unknown to us.

Chart no. 1 – Crime statistics according to tactical-statistical classification in the ratio of detected and clarified criminal activity from 1999 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>detected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the statistics of the police force processed from 2011 to May 2023 by individual months of the year, the results are as follows. The years 1997 to 2010 are processed in police statistics only from a year-round perspective, i.e., not by individual months – for more information see chart no. 1. Based on the data processed according to the tactical-statistical classification in the proportion of detected and clarified criminal activity in graph no. 3, we see that the production, dissemination, and storage of child pornography is on the rise in individual years. From 2012 to 2015, its occurrence was kept below the threshold of 100 detected. Since 2016, every subsequent year has seen a two-fold increase in detected child pornography.
The production of child pornography (chart no. 2, graph no. 4) recorded a slight decrease in individual years between 2012 and 2015, while compared to 2016 it recorded a two-fold increase, which continued until the end of 2019. From 2020, there was a decline in the production of child pornography in Slovakia. The incidence was around 50 cases during the observed annual periods – graph no. 4.

Between 2006 and 2010, police statistics on the production of child pornography were compiled only in an annual report (see chart no. 2). In individual years, we can see slight increases in the detected production of child pornography. Clarification of the production of child pornography was on average around 50% in the monitored years. In 2010, police statistics were not made.
Graph no. 4 – Production of child pornography (§368 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to detected and clarified criminal activity

Spreading child pornography (§369 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to detected and clarified criminal activity is shown in chart no. 6 and table no. 3. In table no. 3 proliferation of child pornography from 2006 to 2010. Between 2007 and 2008 there is three times increase in the detection of the proliferation of child pornography. In 2009, a decrease was recorded in its detection. On the contrary, its clarification increased somewhat in 2009. There are no data available from 2010.

Chart no. 3 – Spreading child pornography (§369 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to detected and clarified criminal activity from 2006 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>detected</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spread of child pornography in Slovakia has seen a significant increase since 2016, and this increase has gradually increased at least once every year (see graph no. 5). In the years 2019 and 2021, there was a decrease in the spread of child pornography, while even in the mentioned years its occurrence was around 200 cases per year.
Graph no. 5 – Spreading child pornography (§369 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to detected and clarified criminal activity

Chart no. 4 – Possession of child pornography and participation in a child pornography performance (§370 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to the detected and clarified criminal activity from 2006 to 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>detected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarified</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possession of child pornography and participation in a child pornography performance (graph no. 6) saw a gradual decrease in its detection in 2011 and 2012. In the years 2013–2015, the trend was reduced throughout the year, and from 2016, there was an increase in detection, which has continued over time. The mentioned trend also applies to its clarification.

Graph no. 6 – Possession of child pornography and participation in a child pornography performance (§370 of the Criminal Code) in proportion to the detected and clarified criminal activity
RESULTS AND NEAR FUTURE

From the statistical overview, we can conclude that child pornography is still on the rise. Here we can include detected and clarified criminal activity, its production, distribution and possession of child pornography. For this reason, we as the Academy of Police Forces in Bratislava joined the challenge of the European Union with the BRIDGE project – see the specific details on the project site [21] and with other countries such as Sweden, Finland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Spain. In the BRIDGE project, we try to catch and work with people who consume pornography and work on their non-paraphilic behavior.

The Bridge project is funded by the EU Commission. It has been planned and will be carried out and analyzed, in a collaborative effort by an international consortium of researchers represented Sweden, Germany, Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Finland:

- Christoffer Rahm, Center for Psychiatry Research, Karolinska Institute, Sweden.
- Professor Peer Briken at Universitaetsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf, Institute for Sex Research and Forensic Psychiatry, Germany.
- Professor Rafael Ballester-Arnal at Universitat Jaume I De Castellon, Spain.
- Ass. Professor Katerina KlapiLOva at National Institute of Mental Health, Czech Republic.
- Professor Jozef Metenko at Akademia Policajneho Zboru V Bratislave, Slovakia.
- Executive Director Nina Vaaranen-Valkonen at Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry., Finland.

With Project Bridge we offer our professional services to individuals who are concerned about their thoughts or behaviors involving children and who ask themselves if they want to make a change. We meet them where they are online (both on clearnet and darknet) and we guide them to take the next steps to treatment. This is done by supporting and encouraging their motivation for change by providing psychoeducation, resources, and motivational interviewing to help them move forward in the treatment process.

Participants who search for child sexual abuse material on the Darknet and Clearnet will find a link to the RightDirection Chat. If they are interested in receiving help with thoughts or behaviors involving children, they will first go through an autogenerated self-assessment which asks inclusion criteria, current mental health status, and the frequency and current impact of their thoughts or behaviors. We will also continue collaborations with different social media platforms, such as Facebook.

A recommendation will be autogenerated after the answers are submitted, advising the next steps. Participants will first receive ReDirection’s self-help program. After completion, participants will be invited to an online chat where a professional will give them information about their options and answer any questions they have. The next step is signing up for an online meeting with a professional for personalised psychoeducation and Motivational Interviewing. Motivational Interviewing is conducted over four to six sessions, which will help encourage the participants to seek face to face therapy. The final step is referring to in-person therapy at a clinic in the participant’s country. The first session is registered by the staff in Project Bridge.

If Project Bridge is successful, the clinical implications are far reaching including for children at risk of being used for online exploitation. The lesser the demand for the CSAM material, the
fewer children are exploited. Because this project’s goal is to increase the number of at-risk individuals going to treatment, the main objectives for this study include the percentage of patients that show up to the booked in-person appointment, as well as the percentage of high-risk patients that show up to the booked in-person appointment.

The ethics approval for Slovakia

The Ethics Commission of the Academy of the Police forces in Bratislava has evaluated the ethical competence of the Bridge project and has granted a decision on ethical competence for 20.06.2023. The Ethics Committee of the Academy of the Police forces in Bratislava archived the decision to grant ethical competence under the number APZ-KR-453-011/2023.

RESEARCH PLAN FOR PROJECT BRIDGE

For better qualitative preparation Bridge project, we discuss more specific questions.

Main research questions

Is Mi Bridge, an anonymous online program based on the principles for Motivational Interviewing, effective in making high risk individuals for committing child sexual abuse prone to seek face to face treatment?

Is ReDirection, an anonymous online self-help program based on the principles for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, effective in reducing sexual urges in minors among individuals with low and medium risk?

How do individuals with sexual urges involving minors perceive their needs for help and the treatment alternatives offered?

Overview of the field

Child sexual abuse violates children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and can lead to severe short- and long-term psychosocial consequences for the children and their relatives [21] [22] [23]. With the internet and communication technologies enabling new ways to sexually abuse children from far geographical distances, the problem is drastically increasing and has become a global problem, pertaining large societal costs. [24]

One of few feasible strategies to act preventatively before damage is done, is to reach out to individuals at risk of committing these crimes and offer risk reducing treatment. There is a possibility for this to be done, since many individuals with sexual urges involving children want help, as they periodically can feel guilt, shame, anxiety, and hopelessness related to their thoughts or behaviors. As of today, most of the existing preventative treatment programs for people at risk of committing child sexual abuse are offered in correctional or forensic settings and are thus mainly a method to reduce the risk of reoffending – not preventing abuse in the first place [25]. Few programs are directed to help-seeking, self-identified individuals in non-correctional settings. The ones who are, show that it is possible to recruit patients that way, although still in small numbers in relation to the total amount of individuals, given a prevalence of pedophilia around 1% [25]. Therefore, new and more attractive treatment programs that can be accessible for larger number of at-risk-individuals need to be developed, that are effective in reducing the risk for crime, and at the same time are safe and well appreciated by the patients. We also need to get a clearer picture of how these individuals experience their situation, how they formulate their needs and how they perceive the help that is offered. Further, treatment should be adapted to the risk level for committing child sexual offences; a recent literature review shows that low and medium risk individuals should be recommended psychotherapeutic
Interventions, while high risk individuals should also be considered for pharmacological treatment.

In a series of studies, performed by partly the same researchers as in this consortium, an online intervention called Prevent It is evaluated. It is directed to the same target population, and shares many features with the programs we will evaluate in Project Bridge - recruitment globally, from Darknet and Clearnet sites, procedure for information and consent, anonymous participation, having an intervention that is based on cognitive behavioral principles, using the same internet platform for delivering the intervention, and for storing data, same routines for handling any information about criminal acts, or children at risk of being harmed, as well as using the same questionnaire battery for baseline characterization and treatment evaluation. The experience from the Prevent It studies is that this kind of interventional study is feasible, safe, and in the case of Prevent It, also effective in reaching its goals [26].

Methods

Project Bridge will be conducted in three parallel studies:

Study I: Evaluation of feasibility and effectiveness of Mi Bridge online intervention.

Study II: Evaluation of feasibility and effectiveness of ReDirection self-help program.

Study III: Semistructured interviews of individuals with sexual interest in minors, according to the Cultural Formulation Interview, to produce a cultural formulation, aiming to improve culturally sensitive diagnosis and treatment by focusing on the patient’s perspective and social context.

In project are detailed descriptions of each study’s methods.

All contact with participants, the treatment, evaluations, and termination of the contact, is conducted via the online treatment platform Iterapi, hosted by Linköping University, and is designed specifically for hosting clinical trials of internet based psychotherapeutic interventions.

Significance

Project Bridge has the potential to establish new online strategies to protect children at risk of being sexually abused, which will be of great benefit for the individual child, as well as to the at-risk population for committing these acts, and for society at large. Scientifically evaluating a preventive treatment program for individuals at risk of committing child sexual abuse using the rigorous design of randomized controlled trial will result in an evidence-based treatment with the potential to soon be delivered globally in large-scale. The results from the project will be of high scientific value for the research society.

Description of study designs

Common for all three studies are:

- Recruitment
- Participants
- Measures for baseline and treatment evaluation

Recruitment

Participants are recruited to voluntarily join the Project Bridge after indicating that they use child sexual abuse material (CSAM) by either searching for CSAM or searching for help...
resources for their use of CSAM or for their sexual interest in minors. The participants are recruited via the dark web and the surface web. On specific dark web search engines, when an individual searches for CSAM using one of the codes known to researchers, they will be offered a link to the Project Bridge landing website, through which they may consent to participate in the study. The same recruitment method will be active on certain surface web search engines and adult content platforms. Additionally, some social media platforms’ help centers will offer a link to the Project Bridge landing site for those who are concerned about their sexual thoughts about children. When an individual clicks on the link to partake in the Project Bridge study, they are forwarded to the Project Bridge webpage which is hosted on the Iterapi platform.

Participation is anonymous. We believe that from a "transcultural" perspective on Darknet, it is best to offer participants anonymity. Furthermore, the urges and behaviors we want to treat are criminal and strongly stigmatized and we believe that the tendency to correctly report such behavior decreases if participants cannot be anonymous. This has been the procedure in several other previous research studies performed by the same PI, approved by Swedish Ethics Review Board, as well as by ERBs for collaborating sites in Germany and Portugal. The individuals apply to participate by creating an anonymous login on the study's website. The participants are anonymous, and no personal information (such as name, IP address, social security number, or address) is requested or saved. Participants are recruited based on preferred language for treatment and can live in all parts of the globe. Recruiting participants for internet-based psychotherapy treatment outside the Swedish borders has been done in several previous studies.

Pilot phase started on the 30th of June 2023. During the pilot phase two participants were included by the Slovak.

Recruitment RCT (Recruitment for Randomized Controlled Trial)

Recruitment of Slovak speaking participants for the RCT runs from 14.10.2023. No participant were enrolled into project Bridge in RCT phase. We have documented 4 registered Slovak speaking participants in the platform, but none of them booked an offered timeslot. The situation reflects the novelty of the topic in Slovakia, which the Bridge project also opens up for discussion and improvement.

First period finished on April 21, and after prolong we expected to finish recruitment on July 21 2024.

Participants

After inclusion, participants are directed to different studies, according to the detailed study plans below for study I, II, and III below: low and medium risk individuals will be offered ReDirection self-help program, and high-risk individuals will be offered Mi Bridge intervention. Study III will recruit from all risk categories.

Inclusion criteria for Project Bridge: English speaking, or Swedish speaking, or Finnish speaking, or Czech speaking, or Slovak speaking, or German speaking, or Spanish speaking; 18 years or older; AND concern about sexual urges regarding children; urges to act on sexual behaviors involving children, both offline and online, incl. e.g., sexual harassment, viewing CSAM, exploiting children for sexual posing, committing rape via a webcam, paying for and taking part in live broadcasts of rape committed by others against children, and other forms of sexual exploitation of children.

Exclusion criteria for Project Bridge: Participants with a severe psychiatric illness (such as high acute suicide risk or severe substance abuse) will be excluded. These conditions require specialized care that an anonymous online psychotherapeutic program cannot provide.
Participants that are judged to have a limited understanding of the languages that the treatment is delivered in, or lack serious intentions to participate will also be excluded.

As in many other online studies, age is self-reported. This means that the participant can lie about their age. In this study, we add an extra control element by also having a chat or audio-based interview with each participant before a decision on inclusion is made. In that interview, a therapist controls, through conversations with the individual, that the inclusion and exclusion criteria are (likely) met. If the person is assumed to be under 18 years of age, the person is excluded. It should be added that the treatment does not include anything specifically harmful to young people.

The study will include participants that potentially have an ongoing criminal behavior (e.g., watching child sexual abuse material). We believe that this group of individuals cannot be excluded from research. On the contrary, the development of evidence-based treatments for people who have such a serious mental illness that they commit crime should be a priority research area.

Measures

Participants will respond to the following measures:

- Sexual Symptom Assessment Scale
- Sexual Child Molestation Risk Assessment
- Sexual Child Molestation Risk Assessment
- ACUTE-2007-SR
- Sexual Behavior Involving Minors Scale (SBIMS)
- Hypersexual Behavior Inventory (HBI-19) Control and Consequences Items
- Hypersexual Behavior Inventory (HBI-19) Coping Items
- Cognitive and Emotional Congruence with Children (C-ECWC) Scale
- Sex with Children (SWCH) Scale
- Perceived Social Support Questionnaire (F-SozU K6)
- Quantity-Frequency Measure
- Leisure/Recreation Demographic Items
- Religion/Spirituality Demographic Items
- Readiness to Change Questionnaire (RCQ)
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- Self-rating Sexual Interests (LASSIE) version 2.1 (Lassie)
- Criminal History, Static-99R, CPORT, and SSPI Self-report items
- Employment/Education Instability (History) Demographic Question
- Relationship Instability (History) Demographic Questions
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test—C (AUDIT-C)
- Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding—short form (BIDR-SF)
- Socially Desirable Responding Question
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Questionnaire
- Internalized Pedonegativity Scale (IPS)
- Ritvo Autism and Asperger Diagnostic Scale – 14-item Screener
- Negative Effects Questionnaire
- Child Harm Question
- Participants who complete any of the interventional programs will be invited to answer the “qualitative interview questions” after completing the program.
DISCUSSION

Over the years, criminological statistics in Slovakia have shown and confirmed findings about the increase in the consumption of pornography and its individual subcategories, e.g. child pornography and others types. We can compare these findings with, for example, the increasing number of domains (Internet Watch Foundation, 2020). Social restrictions during the pandemic for two years in a row also showed how people spent their time. Until then, it was thought that watching pornography was exclusively a male affair, but the opposite is true. Pornography consumption among women doubled during the pandemic, while among men it only slightly increased. In addition, it is necessary to add that the extreme increase in women is conditioned by the fact that women previously consumed less pornography and thus the increase was greater compared to men.

The project and its development are discussed not only among the involved researchers, but through the steering committee and among experts from other EU countries as well as from North America. Actual problems are concern on the recruitment of Participants. Especially in Slovakia we have significant difficulties in recruitment. In the last analysis, we also tried to evaluate the current situation. The reason, in our opinion, is mainly the fact that this project actually just opens a public discussion about the problem of illegal activity on the scene of CSAM users. To help expand this discussion, we used many techniques from advertising.

CONCLUSION

The Internet as a medium has brought a high degree of anonymity to consumers of child pornography, which has become even more prevalent during the past two years of the pandemic. The use and even excessive consumption of pornography also result from the misunderstanding and immaturity of users, i.e., distributors and consumers. It is thus important to ensure that there is appropriate awareness so that people have relevant information based on which they can take appropriate decisions and actions. Total restriction is not the solution, as it could be seen in the Danish experiment where the release of all pornography did not bring an increase in crime, but the opposite. This is the reason why we think that the restriction of any pornography will not bring about its reduction in the sense of its consumption, but the opposite. We see the solution in preventive programs such as the BRIDGE project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors prefer and present as the expected system changes not only in Slovakia outputs in the researched area, which are published in this study, as the partial result of research EU project “Bridge” No. 101084355, call ISF-2021-TF1-AG-CYBER.

REFERENCES


Societies and Sustainability
Open access peer-reviewed journal of SGEM WORLD SCIENCE (SWS) Scholarly Society Vienna


[21] www.iterapi.se/sites/bridge/lang/sk


