Online exploitation

A definition

Online exploitation on social media is using the internet to facilitate the sexual abuse of a child. It can be the production or the sharing of child sexual abuse material online (Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation). However, it can also be the exploitation of children by their parents through influencing jobs. That means parents who create content on social media and promote goods and services.

Why is this important?

According to 2018 studies by NCMEC's Child Victim Identification Program and Interpol, girls are the most touched by online sexual exploitation, as well as prepubescent children. 78% of reports regarding online enticement involve girls, while only 15% involve boys (8% are not gender determined). Children with large social media followings ("Kidfluencers") have created around $8 billion in the social media advertising industry (Masterson, 2020). According to Marina Masterson (2020), children are threatened by exploitation because of the lack of legal rights to the earnings they generate, safe working conditions or protections via labour laws.

Tips and tricks

→ Educate yourself through websites such as InHope. Check privacy settings for your children. You can use this article on Experian.com by DeNicola L. on "How to manage your privacy settings on social media". See "Privacy and sharing concerns" safety resource.

→ Talk with your children or students about what they know about online exploitation, and what they think risks on social media can be and provide them solutions to keep safe.

→ Don't overshare content about your children or students on social media and ask for their consent. It can impact their self-confidence and their awareness of online privacy's importance. You can consult this article from Safer Kids Online on "Oversharing is not caring: basic principles to teach your children" (2023). Keep in mind that it doesn't just happen to others.

→ With the rise of artificial intelligence, it is possible to create very realistic images and videos making people say or do things that never existed in real life. Social media is a

place where everyone can go and take part, even people with doubtful intentions. Photos can be reused, modified and sold.

Useful resources and tools

Kietzmann J., Demetis D., (2023), Protecting children from exploitation means rethinking how we approach online behaviour, The Conversation. This article explains what online exploitation is, how to spot it and how to avoid it, as it can be tricky for parents to be aware they are oversharing content.

Cezarita Cordeiro V., (2021), "Kidfluencers" and Social Media: the Evolution of Child Exploitation in the Digital Age, Humanium. This article explains what kidfluencers are and the exploitation of kids on social media nowadays.