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IICSA Changemakers statement response to   Illegal Harms consultation   February 2024

1: Overview

The IICSA Changemakers have come together as an informal coalition to deliver a commitment to inspire a national mission to prevent child sexual abuse and provide much improved support to victims and survivors. Together the IICSA Changemakers recognise the importance of working coll   ectively to bring about change so the protection of children from sexual abuse and support for victims and survivors is given a much greater priority in public life .

In their first year the Changemakers have spoken collectively at numerous events   and throu gh consultations   explaining the need for collaboration and   the join up required across sectors and Government departments to deliver the ambitions of the recommendations of the inquiry.   This collective response to the illegal harms consultation highlights   areas of most pressing concern or note to the IICSA Changemakers.

2: Causes and impacts of online harms

Ofcom's assessment of the causes and impacts of online harms   are welcome . An evidence review recently published by   IICSA Changemaker member the   NSPCC focused on children's exposure to online sexual risks and the role technology plays in   furthering   or reducing these risks.[1] Drawing from studies in the UK and internationally, it provides an up-to-date assessment of online child sexual abuse. Chapter three of this review focuses on the varied approaches of and impacts of the sexual nature of harms committed against children and young people online. The evidence base, although underdeveloped in this respect, suggests that children are more likely to block contacts when they are concerned about sexual solicitation by adults, than to use reporting functions on platforms or seek help offline. This is concerning as it reduces the opportunity to engage with a child or young person on the harms that have been caused to them by that interaction.

The University of Bedfordshire interviews people as part of their research into online harms and a 16 year old female interviewee said:

"You can block [an abusive] account from yourself easily enough, you can just press block, but that doesn't stop them from doing it to anyone else …I think they should just make it easier to report situations …I think they [currently] need a certain amount of reports to that account before they have to shut it off, but surely if they, if you could write in what's happened, they can read what's happened, see how serious it is, surely they should be able to close it off."[2]

Victims of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) must receive sufficient and specific support. The IICSA recommendation on providing appropriate support did not

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[1] Bryce, J. et al (2023) Evidence review on online risks to children. London: NSPCC.
[2] Learning about online sexual harm | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

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exclude online harm and is highlighted by IICSA Changemakers to Government departments as they asses what the response to that recommendation might evolve to , therefore it remains pertinent to draw on that requirement when examining illegal harms .

IICSA Changemakers support the NSPCC call for regulated platforms to play a role in providing funding for victim and survivor supp ort and recovery services. In the future, we recommend Ofcom redistributes part of any income generated from enforcement fines for breaches to CSEA duties to these vital support services.

3: Risk factors and different kinds of illegal harm

The focus on grooming and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) are all welcome and supported by IICSA Changemakers . IICSA Changemaker member Barnardo's supported have significant experience in supporting young people after this offence takes place. A 10- year - old girl called Lisa who was coerced into sharing indecent images and videos of herself with strangers online, was supported by Barnardo's recnetly .

Lisa, was targeted through an online webcam generator site. This platform is a free chat website that allows users to socialise with others without the need to register. The site randomly pairs users in one - on- one sessions where they talk anonymously.

The abuse then moved to two social media platforms which lasted for four months before Lisa's mother, discovered the abuse on Lisa's iPad and mobile phone.

Lisa met with a Barnardo's support worker weekly. During their sessions, they covered different topics to he lp relieve her anxiety around being online or becoming a target for abuse again

Ofcom is right to note the growing risk of generative - AI and must continue to monitor the use and impact of AI -generated CSAM. IICSA Changemaker member the Internet Watch Found ation (IWF) shared key information with parliamentarians during the passage of the Online Safety Bill summer 2023 that explained AI generated material is now so realistic that IWF analysts struggle to tell the difference between real images of abuse and those generated using Artificial Intelligence. There has been a stark improvement in the quality of these images in the past three months.[3]

The major challenge for law enforcement posed by AI CSAM is of distinguishing photorealistic AI CSAM from real CSAM – victim identification. This challenge should be addressed through technological solutions – tools like AI classifiers, and advanced digital

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[3] osb-lords-report-briefing-04-07-2023.pdf (iwf.org.uk)

forensic knowledge among investigators.[4] Data that comprises an AI watermark can be added to real images; the watermark can be removed from AI-generated images.[5]

4: Governance and accountability measures in the illegal content Codes of Practice

Consistent and robust risk mitigation and management is required to deliver strong governance around illegal content. Regulatory compliance is consistently required in decision-making at the very top of organisations to deliver true accountability approaches. This can be supported by the targeted use of enforcement powers, including that which enables a senior manager to be held liable for compliance with a confirmation decision.

IICSA Changemaker member the NSPCC highlight that even with regulatory scrutiny, there is a real risk that services will seek to bury or underplay evidence of harm on their service. This will make ongoing review of this area difficult if evidence is not openly reviewed, accepted then actioned upon. There remains a need to ensure that there is external input and oversight of risk assessments carried out by tech companies.

The focus on different sized organisations may well create a misunderstood imbalance when it comes to designing in protection and safeguarding matters.

5: Overarching approach to developing illegal content Codes of Practice and the code itself

IICSA Changemakers support the first Codes of Practice as an important minimum standard. Future engagement to ensure survivors' voices remains integral to future development work is strongly advised (though the pace of the Illegal Content Code of Practice is appreciated and was necessary).

The balance of speed versus a longer-term view is welcome to deal with the current harms and the future threats that are ever evolving.

Although there are limitations within the Online Safety Act, one of our primary concerns is the lack of requirements for private and end-to-end encrypted (E2EE) services. E2EE services should have been compelled to enable law enforcement agencies to detect CSAM and support enquiries.

The proposed measures and exemptions mean that the expectations on these services are severely limited, and for large platforms such as WhatsApp (owned by Meta) they will not need to introduce any large scale changes.

It is also important that the Code of Practice sets out how it will identify a child's account from an adult's account. IICSA Changemaker member the NSPCC highlights that private

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[4] How AI is being used to create child sexual abuse imagery oct 2023 iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

[5] How AI is being used to create child sexual abuse imagery oct 2023 iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

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messaging is the frontline of online grooming. Data from ONS shows that 74% of appro   aches to children by someone they do not know online first take place via private messaging.[6]

A real focus of the IIICSA Final report was prevention and focus on perpetrators. It is vital that further measures are added in the future which directly target perpetrator activity.

IICSA Changemaker member Barnardo's, alongside the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE), led a coalition of charities to call for the Online Safety Act to include robust age verification to prevent children from seeing this harmful content online. They highlighted that when recommending age verification and age assurance methods, Ofcom should consider not only the importance of accurately identifying children, but also the importance of identifying and blocking spurious accounts. Age verification and age estimation technologies are already widely used in everyday life – from online gambling sites to purchasing alcohol online. The providers of these technologies operate at scale, and in a way that respects the privacy of the user. They operate using a 'double-blind' model – meaning that the age verification provider never reveals the users' data (other than that they are over 18 years old) to the site, and the age verification provider never sees what sites the user is accessing. Age verification providers are tightly regulated by organisations such as the Information Commissioner's Office to ensure that they comply with GDPR and other relevant international standards.

We strongly support the proposals for CSAM hash matching and CSAM URL detection. These tools are critical for ensuring CSAM can be proactively detected, removed, and reported.

6: Livestreaming

IICSA Changemaker member t he IWF have highlighted that the material they remove online is often taken from livestreams where children have been groomed, coerced and blackmailed into streaming their own sexual abuse online.   [7] Images and videos from these livestre   ams are clipped and then widely shared and sold by perpetrators. Preventing CSEA on livestreaming will be critical to protecting children and disrupting the trade of CSAM between perpetrators.

Commander Richard Smith, the professional lead for child safegu   arding for the Metropolitan Police Service, told   IICSA about the live streaming of two girls aged six and nine who were being groomed to commit sexual acts. A number of offenders were watching and contributing to the grooming. The Metropolitan Police Servi   ce asked the service provider to remove the streaming and requested information which would identify the offenders. Commander Smith said that although the content was removed and the offenders' accounts closed, the service provider:

"Refused to provide any   information regarding the offenders. While those offenders could no longer use their previous accounts to access the platform, there was nothing to stop them creating new accounts and to continue their previous offending. Without the police having

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[6] Office for National Statistics (2021) Children's online behaviour in England and Wales: year ending March 2020.
[7] IWF (2018) IWF research on child sex abuse live-streaming reveals 98% of victims are 13 or under.

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access to data which might lead to the identification of offenders,   [the Metropolitan Police Service are] unable to safeguard the children to whom offenders may have access."[8]

<u>In summary</u>

IICSA Changemakers highlight that   Ofcom's assessment of the causes and impacts of online harms have set the   right tone and   direction   for this consultation.   It is clear that strong governance will be needed to deliver against   the ambitions for illegal harms.

Whilst it is appreciated differ   ent size organisations will sometimes have different expectations put upon them we would ask for review of   smaller organisations not requiring compliance with areas such as 3f and 3g where they could build in mechanisms with safeguarding in mind from the o   utset and describe how they want their teams to act in regards to identifying harms.

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[8] https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/11537/view/open-session-transcript-20-may-2019.pdf