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15 years fighting Child Pornography Online shows that for paedophiles the child's age matters not the age of the picture

ISPAI Hotline.ie Service marks 15 years of full operations, fighting against the distribution of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), universally agreed to be one of the most serious crimes on the Internet. Hotline.ie Analysts responding to public reports of suspected illegal content have first-hand experience of the shocking images paedophiles share on the Internet of children they have raped and abused. As the Industry providing Internet hosting and connection to the public, ISPAI members are determined to act swiftly and decisively against online CSAM and to support Garda investigations to identify the victims and bring the perpetrators to justice.

ISPAI members fund Hotline.ie so the Irish public who accidentally encounter suspected CSAM when using the Internet can report it anonymously and bring it to Industry's attention when otherwise it would remain unknown. When Hotline Analysts confirm CSAM on a member's network, they notify the ISP and Gardaí who move swiftly to remove these images and initiate police investigation. Mostly CSAM reported to ISPAI Hotline.ie is traced to overseas hosts but the Hotline does not "drop the ball" there. Being part of the INHOPE international network of hotlines allows reports to be rapidly relayed to other jurisdictions so similar take-down and police action can be taken there.

"Regrettably ours is not the only 15th "anniversary" commented Paul Durrant, CEO of ISPAI and General Manager of Hotline.ie, "recently, Hotline.ie received a report that led our Analysts to a web location with hundreds of CSAM images. These were recognised as those of a 4 year old girl whose images had been widely reported around the time Hotline.ie was established. Here they were again, 15 years later, still being shared online by paedophiles. Our Industry is very conscious that circulation of such images constitutes re-victimisation of the children involved even though many are now adults and we are determined to play our part in having these removed from the Internet".

In this case the victim's images had been shared over the Internet by her abuser in 1999. Not long after he was tracked down by police in the UK and successfully prosecuted. Known instances of the images were removed from the Internet at the time. Despite the offender being jailed and the victim rescued from the abuse in early 2000, someone had uploaded her images to be encountered at the end of 2014. It is reassuring that a civic-minded person took the right decision and made an anonymous report to Hotline.ie. Though found to be hosted in the USA, the images were notified by Hotline.ie via INHOPE to the US authorities and were removed within 24 hours.

"It saddens me to say this is not a unique occurrence by any means", continued Durrant, "what is more worrying today is that our Analysts see many sexual images and videos of children where it is clear that they have placed the content online themselves. They are using webcams and many seem to be being reacting to instructions of someone on their screens. We would like to warn children and their parents that these images are likely to be just as persistent as those pictures from 1999."

These cases clearly demonstrate that once an image is put on the Internet, the user completely loses control over who saves it, shares it, and misuses it. What is more, notwithstanding the determined efforts to remove them, they can reappear, any place, any time, even many years later.

This does not just apply to images of children that are actually illegal. In the past few years, Hotline analysts have witnessed a marked increase of sexually provocative self-generated images of children and adolescents turning up on adult pornography forums or sites. These images and videos are (mostly) not illegal but have been copied from the originators' social networking profiles, placed out of context on adult sites and associated comments show they are being misused by paedophiles. As the material is not in itself illegal, Hotline and law enforcement are largely unable

to act. That is why, ISPAI feel it is necessary to raise alarm signals to the public, and parents in particular, that not only can their children's images end up on inappropriate locations but to be aware of the astounding and prolonged lifespan of content on the Internet.

As today's youth is increasingly connected via multiple mobile devices, basically growing up in a highly digital environment, parents must not underestimate the risks to which their children might unknowingly expose themselves when taking those "funny" sexy selfies and posting these online. They must be taught about protecting their "digital reputation" (that is, how they present themselves to the world by their Internet postings) and to "think before you click" and post to the Internet; this applies as much to photos and videos they take of their friends as those of themselves.

"As an Industry we are committed to fighting criminal misuse of the Internet infrastructure we provide. Hotline.ie is integral to national and international efforts to act against the distribution of CSAM online – notifying ISPs and law enforcement of reported reoccurrences of the old, and the many new, illegal photos and videos of child victims which continue to appear. However, Industry action is only part of the solution, parents must play their part talking to their children and explaining about their own responsibility to protect themselves online by not posting images that are likely to draw the attention of the wrong people", added Durrant.

[End]

Editorial Notes

- ✓ **15th Anniversary Infographic** which was developed aiming to put the activity of ISPAI Hotline.ie into context and offer a glimpse of the various dimensions of its work and specific traits uncovered by Hotline Analysts over the years.
- ✓ **Hotline.ie** (www.hotline.ie) is an online service run by the **ISPAI** (www.ispai.ie) where the public may anonymously and confidentially report child sexual abuse content* they encounter on the Internet and suspect to be illegal. The service also accepts reports of online racial hatred or financial scams with an Irish context. The goal being to have this content removed from the Internet and law enforcement alerted.
- ✓ Because of the global nature of the Internet illegal content encountered by users in Ireland can be actually located anywhere in the world. Hence the need for Hotline.ie and the **INHOPE** association (www.inhope.org), of which it is a founder member, which links up similar Hotlines in 51 countries around the world.
- ✓ **Where reported material is found to be illegal by Hotline.ie** it is traced to the source country and notified through the INHOPE network to the Hotline in the appropriate jurisdiction, so they can work with their local law enforcement agency who may initiate investigations and relevant ISP to expedite the removal of the content.
- ✓ On the very rare occasions when **illegal content is traced as being hosted in Ireland, Hotline.ie** will immediately alert the specified contact point in An Garda Síochána and ISPAI member to ensure that evidence is preserved and the material removed from public access as quickly as possible. Investigation of the material and its distribution online is a matter for **An Garda Síochána**. ISPAI members cooperate to provide log evidence to support such investigations under the legal warrant/court order
- ✓ **In extreme cases**, children who place (particularly provocative) images online, have been contacted by paedophiles who then proceed to groom them into providing more explicit images or exposing themselves on webcam services. The material then likely to reach a level where it becomes illegal as defined under the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act (1998). While the children may believe these images are private between themselves and the contact, very often they are posted on obscure websites or forums frequented by paedophiles. These online sites are very mobile, frequently changing location and name and increasingly migrating to the "Darknet".
- ✓ ***Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**, or versions thereof, is the more descriptive terminology currently used to describe what is defined as "Child Pornography" in legislation.

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