More effective and better protection is needed for children online

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Present-day technical and legal methods of preventing child pornography offences and online grooming are not sufficiently effective and do not meet their purpose. A thesis from the University of othenburg, Sweden, shows that new approaches are needed to improve online protection for our children.

Marie Eneman of the Department of Applied Information Technology has studied in her thesis how information technology is used for child pornography and grooming, that is to say adults making contact with minors for sexual purposes, and the technical and legal controls that exist to protect children. She has studied all Swedish judgments on child pornography offences over the period 1993-2008 and has interviewed a number of people convicted of child pornography offences.

"Information technology has made it easier to produce, distribute and access child pornography, and has also increased the risk of grooming. As well as availability, technology brings a certain degree of anonymity, a global market and the possibility of making contact with like-minded people," says Eneman.

In her thesis, she identifies hortcomings in present-day legal and technical regulation models.

"The picture of the role of information technology in these offences is more complex than the legislators, police and prosecution authorities could have envisaged, and technology poses a great challenge," she says.

While implemented technical egulation, in the form of filtering, currently focuses solely on websites, Eneman shows that significantly more types of information technology are used to distribute child pornography. One example is file sharing. [Information technology](link) is not a homogeneous technology, it consists of several technologies with different characteristics. It is therefore important to adopt a broader perspective in looking at the technology in order to be able to develop effective regulatory models. The thesis additionally shows how offenders have been able to adapt and have developed various social and technological strategies to reduce the risk of being exposed and finding ways of circumventing filtering, for example.

Eneman's thesis asks whether we might need to accept certain restrictions on our rights in order to improve protection for our children. "Rights such as freedom of expression and personal privacy are fundamental and should continue to be defended, but they must be adequately balanced in relation to other important rights such as the right of the child not to be sexually exploited," she says.

Provided by University of Gothenburg