Digital photos could put kids at risk

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A study published in the *International Journal of Electronic Security and Digital Forensics* this month suggests that parents and carers could be putting children at risk if they upload digital photos that are automatically "geotagged" by their camera.

Joanne Kuzma of the University of Worcester, England, has analyzed photos that clearly show children's faces on the photo sharing site Flickr. She found that a significant proportion of those analyzed were geotagged and a large number of those were associated with 50 of the more expensive residential zip codes in the USA.

The location information could possibly be used to locate a child's home or other location based on information publicly available on Flickr," explains Kuzma. "Publishing geolocation data raises concerns about privacy and security of children when such personalized information is available to internet users who may have dubious reasons for accessing this data."

Geotagging is the process of adding geographical identification metadata to various media, including photographs. The necessary tools are often built into camera and [camera phones](#) and either use the [mobile phone networks](#) or [global positioning system](#) (GPS) to pinpoint a given photo. The tool is very useful for photographers wanting to keep track of the places they shoot. The same technology can also have applications in forensics. Websites such as Flickr and many other photo-sharing and [social networking sites](#) can also utilize this metadata or allow users to add the appropriate geotags to their photos manually.

Kuzma found that all the zip code locations analyzed had geotagged images of children, new babies in and around the family homes, all searchable in the public areas of the site. All of the geotagged images could easily be superimposed on a map of a given area, which Kuzma suggests might pose a significant security and privacy risk.

She says that users should understand the implications of this new technology and post only appropriate data to protect themselves and their children. However, she also adds that, "The industry needs to better inform parents and individuals who post pictures to public websites that geolocation information can have both advantages as well as repercussions, as safety must be a priority."

  More information: "Children and geotagged images: quantitative analysis for security risk assessment" in *International Journal of Electronic Security and Digital Forensics*, 2012, 4, 54-64

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