

Once cyber grooming starts, the first five days are critical

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Cybercriminal phenomena seem to have caught society and authorities unprepared and off guard. As a quick response to explain the phenomena, research has tried to transfer existing theories and solutions about crime and deviant human behavior from the physical world to cyberspace.

Manja Nikolovska's dissertation from the University of Jyväskylä first identifies and elaborates major shortcomings of the current cyber grooming literature. It then maintains that until researchers gain an empirical understanding of how cyber-specific behavioral characteristics are being used by offenders and victims in the cyber-grooming process, they cannot offer a detailed explanation and up-to-date prevention of online child [sexual abuse](#).

The dissertation proposes a novel way of studying chat-interactive cybercriminal incidents. Nikolovska uses the discovery of time-stamped "cyber affordances" as cyber-specific conceptual variables, which the offender and victim may use during the cyber-grooming process. The [conceptual model](#) is applied to the empirical data of real-life cases of cyber grooming of children.

Limiting internet usage is not the answer

Instead of trying to limit children's [internet usage](#) or access to certain content, Nikolovska's research encourages a focus on promoting safe

online practices. Providing education on internet decision-making is also crucial, because her research reveals that in cases of cyber grooming, law enforcement and parents have extremely short windows in which to intervene. The results show that it is very likely that a critical incident, such as a request for a picture or a call, for example, will occur in the first five days of active communication.

"With this kind of research," Nikolovska explains, "I am striving to propose new ways of safe and mindful internet behavior by highlighting the [internet](#)'s most seductive and dangerous aspects."

"Information technology has already been unshackled from its physical basis. We can literally say that it is all in the 'cloud'. I argue that researchers and practitioners should follow suit, and perhaps unshackle themselves from previous knowledge strictly tied to the rules of the physical world, and move toward more independent explorations in cyberspace."

Manja Nikolovska defended her [doctoral dissertation](#) in computer science, "The Internet as a Creator of a Criminal Mind and Child Vulnerabilities in Cyber Grooming of Children," on February 7, 2020, at the University of Jyväskylä.

Provided by University of Jyväskylä

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