Online Predators: Protecting Teenagers from Internet Sexual Exploitation

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Abstract

The rise of the internet has brought about numerous benefits for teenagers, but it has also given rise to a disturbing phenomenon: online predators. This article explores the issue of internet sexual exploitation and its impact on teenagers. It highlights the dangers posed by online predators who exploit vulnerabilities, trust, and naivety of young individuals. The article emphasizes the importance of educating teenagers about the risks and providing them with effective strategies to protect themselves online. It also discusses the role of parents, educators, and law enforcement agencies in safeguarding teenagers from online predators. By raising awareness and promoting proactive measures, we can create a safer online environment for teenagers and prevent the devastating consequences of internet sexual exploitation

Keywords: Online Predators, Fraudulent Acts, Teenagers, Sexual Exploitation

Introduction

The internet has revolutionized the way we communicate, learn, and connect with others. For teenagers, it offers a world of endless possibilities and opportunities for growth. However, alongside these benefits, there exists a darker side that poses a significant threat to their safety and well-being: online predators engaging in internet sexual exploitation. Online predators are individuals who exploit the vulnerabilities of teenagers, using the anonymity and accessibility of the internet to groom, manipulate, and ultimately sexually exploit their victims. They prey on the trust, curiosity, and desire for validation that are natural parts of adolescence.

Internet sexual exploitation has emerged as a pressing issue, with online predators preying on the vulnerabilities, trust, and naivety of teenagers. These predators utilize various platforms, social media networks, and chat rooms to establish contact with their targets, often masquerading as peers or sympathetic individuals. Once a connection is established, they gradually manipulate and coerce teenagers into engaging in inappropriate and harmful activities. The consequences of online sexual exploitation are devastating, ranging from emotional trauma and psychological distress to long-lasting damage to a teenager's self-esteem and overall well-being. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to address this issue head-on and equip teenagers with the necessary knowledge and tools to protect themselves in the online realm.

Online predators typically create fake identities or use deceptive tactics to establish trust and manipulate their victims. They may pretend to be someone they are not, such as a peer, a romantic interest, or a trustworthy individual, in

order to gain the confidence of their targets. They exploit this trust to exploit or harm the individuals emotionally, financially, or sexually. Their motivations can vary, but some online predators seek power, control, or sexual gratification through their actions. They take advantage of the anonymity and vast reach of the internet to prey on unsuspecting individuals and exploit their vulnerabilities. It is important to educate one self and others about online safety, privacy, and the risks associated with interacting with strangers online. Maintaining open communication with children, setting clear boundaries, and monitoring their online activities can help protect them from online predators. Additionally, reporting any suspicious behavior or incidents to the appropriate authorities is crucial in combating online predation and ensuring the safety of individuals online.

This article aims to shed light on the topic of online predators and provide valuable insights into the strategies and measures that can be taken to safeguard teenagers from internet sexual exploitation. By raising awareness about the risks and vulnerabilities associated with online interactions, we can empower teenagers to navigate the digital landscape safely and confidently. Furthermore, we will explore the roles of parents, educators, and law enforcement agencies in ensuring the online safety of teenagers. By establishing open lines of communication, fostering digital literacy, and enforcing effective protective measures, we can create a collective effort to combat online predators and create a secure online environment for our youth. Together, let us delve into the complexities of internet sexual exploitation, uncover the dangers posed by online predators, and discover the

proactive steps we can take to protect teenagers from falling victim to their insidious traps. By working together, we can provide the guidance and support needed to empower teenagers and keep them safe in the vast expanse of the internet.

Online Predators
Online predating seem to be the regular normal in our society today. The internet is another world on its own where so many evil's take place. 90% of our children and even adults get's glued on the internet on a daily basis. People with evil and intentions, surf the net too looking for naïve victims that will fall easily to them. Online predators are individuals who use the internet and digital platforms to target and exploit others, particularly vulnerable individuals, for their own gain or pleasure.. A lot of teenagers has met their end from people they met on the internet who lured them to secluded places and killed them after extorting them. An encounter with an online predator has gotten many people robbed, raped, beaten, maimed and defiled (in the case of an innocent child). Wale Odunsi (2021) reported the activities of a gay online. The caption reads "EFCC arraigns alledged online gay predator for $8 420 scam in Kaduna State" The report is written below:

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Monday arraigned Abdulrahim Dangana before Justice Darius Khobo of the Kaduna State High Court.The defendant faces a one-count charge that borders on obtaining by false pretence.The anti-graft commission told the court that the alleged internet fraudster targeted homosexuals online.An investigation revealed that Dangana registered a Gay/Bisexual hook-up App called Grindr and A4A website, using the pseudonyms: Ryan, Dave, Frank and

Eric.He allegedly used fake profiles to contrive romantic relationships with gay individuals and lured them into sending nude pictures.Dangana then used the photos to blackmail and extort them through gift cards and bitcoins he converted into naira using his bank accounts and e-wallets. In the charge, Dangana, between January and September, collected the sum of $8,420 from victims after falsely presenting himself as a white homosexual man on Grindr App.The defendant blackmailed them and threatened to "expose them to their families and loved ones".The offence violates Section 1(1)(a) of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act 2006 and is punishable under Section 1(3) of the same Act. Dangana pleaded "not guilty" to the charge when it was read to him.Nasiru Salelen, the prosecution counsel, asked the court to fix a date for trial, while the defence counsel, Solomon Otuwaga, urged the court to release his client on bail.Justice Khobo granted Dangana bail in the sum of N1 million and one surety who must be resident in Kaduna with valid means of identification. Khobo adjourned the case until December 2, 2021.

Kemi Olaitan in Ibadan (2023) also noted that: "Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) yesterday disclosed that no fewer than 20,000 Nigerians had fallen victims of online financial frauds while reiterating its commitment to work assiduously to protect telecommunications subscribers against what it described as loan sharks". The question is , why our people easily fall victims. NCC Head of Consumers Affairs Bureau, Mr. Ayanbanji Ojo (2023) in the same report noted that: "the commission has received over 20,00 complaints of those who have fallen

victims of the sharp practices of online fraudsters". He continued by noting the need to educate the people on the financial fraud going on in the telecoms space, he also said that "the activities of the loan sharks had caused a lot of people pain with many traders vulnerable to online fraudulent practices". The internet is filled with tales of tnese scammers who lure feed on the naivety of there victims to defraud, kill or commit other more heinous crime on the unsuspecting victim. What could be the cause? Is our society going morally downward?

Morality in the strictest sense of it has to do with right**ness or wrongness of any human** action. As man is a moral agent he has the inherent abilities to choose between right and wrong. NIETZSCHE (2023) in his writings titled "THE MORAL DECADENCE IN PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS" gave us an insight on actions that could be termed morally wrong when he said:

> There are certain actions which all of us would condemn as morally wrong and ought not to be done by anybody. For example, armed robbery embezzlement of public funds, bribery and corruption, neglect of one's duties dishonesty, and so on. In the other way, there are also certain actions, which are fidelity to one's duties, respect for human life, hospitality, kindness, helping those in need, honesty and so on. Though according to Frederich Nietzsche, it is not good to refer some of the above listed virtues as right or good rather they are evil and could be seen among the inferior people. He said so in his explanation of master morality and slave morality. Equally, there are other kinds of actions above which opinions differ. Some say it wrong while others consider it as right. For instance, such actions like abortion,

contraception, euthanasia, masturbation and so on

the question still remains unanswered and instead several other questions comes up as posited by Nietzsche and they are: How do we decide which actions are right and which actions are wrong? What is the criterion or standard for making such judgements? What do we even mean when we say that a certain action is morally wrong? Is it for the individual to decide for himself which actions he is to consider as wrong or right? Is it true that "there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so, or is certain things good or bad irrespective of our thinking? What are the fundamental principles of morality and how do we come to know them? There must be some elements that makes these actions inherently evil in themselves. Okpokwasili (2021:158) has this to say:

Morality is seen as an individual's personal stand of what he considers right and wrong. An individual's moral concept is constructed alongside the society the individual finds himself or herself in. Man as a social animal cannot be separated from his society. He is greatly influenced by his society and as such what he considers to be moral is derived and developed within societal context and approval.

Man being a social animal cannot separate himself from the society he belongs to. Every human society is also guided by law(s). Man must abide by such laws or gets punished when he does not. An online Predator can come in the guise of many forms Example of such disguise is listed below:

1. Online Predator: An individual who utilizes the internet and digital platforms to target and exploit others, particularly vulnerable individuals, through various harmful activities such as grooming,

cyberbullying, sextortion, or child exploitation.

2. Internet Predator: A person who preys on others using online platforms, typically seeking to deceive, manipulate, or harm their victims for personal gain or gratification.

3. Digital Predator: An individual who employs digital technology, such as computers, smartphones, or social media, to engage in predatory behavior, often targeting unsuspecting victims for malicious or exploitative purposes.

4. Cyber Predator:A person who utilizes cyberspace and online environments to stalk, harass, intimidate, or exploit others, often employing anonymity, deception, or manipulation to carry out their harmful activities.

5. Online Sexual Predator: Specifically refers to individuals who use the internet to target and exploit others, particularly children or minors, for sexual purposes. They may engage in grooming, solicitation, or distribution of explicit material involving minors.

They engage in various harmful activities which is harmful physically and mentally for their victims Such activities include but not limited to:

a. Grooming: Online predators build relationships, trust, and emotional connections with their targets, often pretending to be someone they are not. Their ultimate goal is to manipulate and exploit the individuals, usually for sexual purposes or financial gain.

b. Cyberbullying: Predators may use online platforms to harass, intimidate, or threaten their victims. This can include sending abusive messages, spreading rumors, or engaging in other forms of

harmful behavior that cause emotional distress.

c. Sextortion: Predators manipulate their victims, typically by obtaining explicit images or videos, and then use those materials to blackmail and extort them. They may threaten to share the content publicly unless the victim complies with their demands

d. Child exploitation: Online predators target minors for sexual exploitation, trafficking, or grooming. They may engage in the production, distribution, or consumption of child pornography, or lure children into engaging in inappropriate activities.

e. Identity theft and fraud: Some online predators use deceptive tactics to gain access to personal information, such as financial details, social security numbers, or login credentials. They can then use this information for identity theft, financial fraud, or other illegal activities.

It is essential to be vigilant and cautious while interacting online, particularly when sharing personal information or engaging with strangers. Education about online safety, privacy settings, and responsible internet usage is crucial for protecting oneself and others from online predators. Reporting any suspicious activities or incidents to the appropriate authorities is also important in combating online predation and ensuring the safety of individuals in the digital world.

Teenagers

The concept of a "teenager" as we understand it today is a relatively modern construct, and it may not have been explicitly discussed by classical philosophers. However, philosophers have offered insights into the transition from childhood to adulthood and the challenges faced during that stage of life.

Aristotle, in his work "Nicomachean Ethics," discusses the concept of youth. He distinguishes between childhood and adulthood but does not explicitly mention the teenage years. According to Aristotle, youth is a period of growth and development, during which individuals gradually acquire the virtues and qualities necessary for a flourishing life. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Rousseau, in his book "Emile, or On Education," discusses the stages of human development. He emphasizes the importance of a natural and progressive education that allows children to develop at their own pace. Although he does not specifically mention teenagers, his ideas on education and personal growth are relevant to this period of life. Søren Kierkegaard: Kierkegaard, a 19th-century existentialist philosopher, explored the concept of individuality and the challenges of personal identity. While he did not address teenagers directly, his ideas on subjective experience and the quest for authenticity can provide insights into the struggles faced during this transitional phase.

Teenage age is usually between the age of 13-19 years of age. At this age, the individual is on the road of self discovery and assuming of different identities that sooths the person or the image of one's idol. Crosnoe R &Johnson MK (2011) explained it further when they said that teenage age means:

> lives as a tapestry of three threads—developmental trajectories (physical and psychological growth), social pathways (sequences of institutional roles and activities), and social convoys (continuity and change in interpersonal relations)—situated in settings of daily life, larger structures of society, and the broader sweep of history.

At this age of discovery, the individual feels the need to explore and try out new just the same way adults around them are doing. This is what usually lands them in trouble and also makes them easy prey's to online predators. It is also worthy to note that teenage years is also regarded as adolescent age.

Sexual Exploitation

Immanuel Kant - In his "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" and "Metaphysics of Morals" gave relevant insights emphasizes the importance of treating others as ends in themselves rather than as mere means. He argues that using another person's body for sexual gratification without their consent is a violation of their dignity and autonomy. He was quoted by sanders (2020) that : "The desire which a man has for a woman is not directed toward her because she is a human being, but because she is a woman; that she is a human being is of no concern to the man; only her sex is the object of his desires". Sanders (2020129-139:) went further to saythat:

Kant's views on sexual morality are traditional and con ser va tive. He opposes every conceivable sexual practice except sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Whether all of Kant's views on sex actually follow from his moral philosophy is less important than the underlying idea they re" ect—that we do not own ourselves and are not at our own disposal. He objects to casual sex (by which he means sex outside of marriage), however consensual, on the grounds that it is degrading and objectifying to both partners. Casual sex is objectionable, he thinks, because it is all about the satisfaction of sexual desire, not about respect for the humanity of one's partner

Internet sexual exploitation, which is also known as online sexual exploitation, refers to various forms of sexual abuse or exploitation that occur through the use of the internet. It involves the manipulation, coercion, or exploitation of individuals, particularly children and vulnerable adults, for the purpose of sexual gratification or financial gain. Some common ways and contexts in which internet sexual exploitation occurs can be seen below:

a. Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM): The production, distribution, or possession of explicit material depicting children engaged in sexual activities is a severe form of internet sexual exploitation. This includes images, videos, or live-streamed content involving minors.

b. Online Grooming: Predators may use various online platforms, such as social media, chat rooms, or gaming platforms, to establish trust and develop relationships with minors. They often pretend to be someone they are not and gradually manipulate victims into engaging in sexual conversations or activities.

c. Sextortion: This occurs when someone coerces an individual, often using explicit images or videos obtained through deception or hacking, into providing more explicit material or engaging in sexual acts. The perpetrator threatens to distribute the material publicly if the victim does not comply.

d. Live-streamed Abuse: Perpetrators may force victims, often children, to engage in sexual acts while live-streaming the abuse to viewers who pay to watch. This happens in hidden or private online spaces.

e. Webcam Exploitation: Individuals, including children, may be coerced or manipulated into performing sexual acts on webcams, which are then recorded and distributed without their consent.

f. Sex Trafficking: The internet has become a tool for traffickers to recruit, advertise, and sell individuals for sexual exploitation. They may use online classifieds, social media, or escort websites to facilitate these activities.

g. Revenge Porn: Intimate images or videos shared willingly between partners can be maliciously distributed online without the consent of the person depicted, often as an act of revenge or to humiliate them.

To combat internet sexual exploitation, various organizations, law enforcement agencies, and governments work together to raise awareness, develop preventive measures, and enforce legal consequences for perpetrators. It is crucial to educate individuals about online safety, encourage reporting, and promote responsible internet usage to protect potential victims from harm.

Emotional blackmailing

Karnani SR, Et al (2019) was of the opinion that: emotional blackmail is a subtle form of manipulation that may shape some of our closest relationships". ABBASPOUR Z Et Al (2019) agreeing with him said that: "Just like any blackmail, emotional blackmail centers around a basic threat; if you don't do this for me, bad things will happen". This means that the concept of emotional blackmail, which is a subtle form of manipulation that can impact our closest relationships. It draws a parallel between emotional blackmail and traditional blackmail by highlighting a common element: the presence of a threat. Emotional blackmail involves using emotional pressure, manipulation, or coercion to get someone to do something or behave in a certain way. The manipulator typically employs tactics that exploit the target's emotions,

vulnerabilities, or fears. The sentence emphasizes that emotional blackmail centers around a basic threat, which can be explicit or implied. The threat implies that if the target doesn't comply with the manipulator's demands, negative consequences will occur. The rate individuals are being blackmailed in the society especially teenagers call for immediate attention. Many has been lured into several indecent acts as a result of media threats. Many have also fallen victim and lost their lives in the process. Online predating poses a danger to our society and requires urgent attention so as to put an end to it.

Manipulation causes one to exhibit behaviors that lack any sense of rationality because the victim is somehow coerced into performing the said act. The victim is treated as a means to an end instead of an end in itself. Mills (1995: 100–101) noting this said that: "a manipulator is interested in reasons not as logical justifiers but as causal levers. For the manipulator, reasons are tools, and bad reasons can work as well as, or better than, a good one". His victims are mere objects that he can twist and turn to his whims and capricices. Individuals should seen as who they are and treated as such. Anything less than that is inhuman. Hill (1980: 96) noting this, said that: The idea that one should try to reason with others rather than to manipulate them by non rational techniques is manifest in Kant's discussion of the duty to respect others. Few examples of online emotional blackmailing tactics is outlined below:

a. Guilt-tripping: The person may use guilt as a means to make someone feel responsible for their negative emotions or outcomes. They might say things like, "If you don't do this for me, I'll be so disappointed and it will be all your fault."

b. Threats: This involves using threats of negative consequences to pressure someone into complying with their demands. For instance, they might threaten to expose personal information or spread damaging rumors if their target doesn't comply.

c. Victim-playing: The individual may portray themselves as the victim, exaggerating their suffering or distress to make the other person feel guilty and provide what they want. They might say things like, "I'm so miserable, and it's all because of you. You're the only one who can help me."

d. Emotional manipulation: This includes tactics like gaslighting, where the person distorts reality, undermines the other person's perception, and makes them doubt their own feelings or thoughts. They might say things like, "You're just overreacting. It's not a big deal. You always make everything about yourself."

It's important to remember that emotional blackmail is an abusive and unhealthy behavior. If you find yourself on the receiving end of such tactics, it's crucial to set boundaries, communicate assertively, and, if necessary, seek support from trusted friends, family, or professionals.

Fraudlent Acts

A fraudulent act refers to any deliberate and deceptive action or behavior intended to deceive, manipulate, or defraud others for personal gain or to cause harm. It involves misrepresenting facts, providing false information, or engaging in dishonest practices with the intent to deceive someone or gain an unfair advantage. Fraudulent acts can occur in various contexts, such as business transactions, financial dealings, online scams, or impersonation.

Nigeria has been associated with certain types of fraud, such as advance fee fraud (commonly known as "419 scams") and online scams. These scams often involve email or online communications that attempt to deceive individuals into providing money or personal information under false pretenses. The term 'internet fraud' (2021) refers to any type of fraud scheme that uses email, web sites, chat rooms or message boards to present fraudulent solicitations to prospective victims, to conduct fraudulent transactions or to transmit the proceeds of fraud to financial institutions or to others connected with the scheme". According to Black's Law Dictionary (2014) : "Fraud is an intentional perversion of truth for the purpose of inducing another person or entity in reliance upon it to part with something of value or to surrender a legal right". In the definition provided by Black's Law Dictionary, it states that fraud is an intentional perversion of truth. This means that the person committing fraud deliberately misrepresents or distorts the truth, either through statements, actions, or other means. The purpose of this intentional misrepresentation is to induce another person or entity to rely on that false information. The reliance can be in the form of believing the misrepresentation to be true or acting based on that false information. As a result of this reliance, the deceived party may part with something of value, such as money, goods, or services, or surrender a legal right. In simpler terms, this definition describes fraud as an act where someone intentionally lies or distorts the truth to deceive others, causing them to give up something valuable or forfeit a legal entitlement.

It's important to note that this definition emphasizes the intentional nature of fraud, as it requires a deliberate act to deceive and induce reliance for personal gain or to cause harm to others. The Association of

Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) (2020) defined fraud as any: intentional or deliberate act to deprive another of property or money by guile, deception, or other unfair means.

Here are a few examples of fraudulent that teenagers engage themselves in Nigeria:

a. Identity Theft: When someone steals another person's personal information, such as their name, Social Security number, or financial details, with the intent to commit fraud or engage in illegal activities using the stolen identity

b. Ponzi Schemes: This is an investment fraud where individuals are promised high returns on their investments, but the returns are actually generated from funds contributed by new investors rather than legitimate profits. It relies on a continuous influx of new investors to sustain the scheme.

c. Credit Card Fraud: When someone uses another person's credit card information without their consent to make unauthorized purchases or transactions.

d. Internet Scams: Various online scams exist, such as phishing emails, where individuals receive fraudulent emails pretending to be from reputable organizations to trick them into revealing sensitive information like passwords or financial details.

e. Insurance Fraud: When someone intentionally provides false information or exaggerates claims to an insurance company to obtain benefits or compensation to which they are not entitled.

f. Forgery: This involves creating or altering documents, signatures, or financial instruments with the intent to deceive others, such as forging signatures on checks or legal documents. It's important to be vigilant and cautious to protect yourself from fraudulent acts. If you encounter suspicious activities or believe you have been a victim of fraud, it's recommended to report the incident to the relevant authorities and seek legal advice.

How to stop teenagers from being victims of online predators

Protecting teenagers from online predators is crucial for their safety and well-being. Here are some steps and tips to help prevent teenagers from becoming victims of online predators:

a. Communication and Education: Maintain open and ongoing communication with teenagers about online safety. Educate them about the risks, potential dangers, and tactics used by online predators. Encourage them to ask questions, share their concerns, and report any suspicious or uncomfortable online interactions.

b. Privacy Settings and Security: Teach teenagers about the importance of privacy settings on social media platforms and other online accounts. Help them understand how to protect their personal information, including their full name, address, phone number, and school details. Encourage them to use strong and unique passwords for their accounts.

c. Online Friendships and Social Media: Advise teenagers to be cautious when accepting friend requests or connections from unknown individuals online. Teach them not to share personal information or engage in private conversations with strangers. Encourage them to review and adjust their social media privacy settings to limit who can see their posts and personal information.

d. Critical Thinking and Skepticism: Teach teenagers to think critically and question the intentions of individuals they meet online. Encourage them to be skeptical about requests for personal information, financial assistance, or meetings with

online acquaintances. Remind them that not everything they see or hear online may be true.

e. Reporting and Blocking: Instruct teenagers on how to report and block individuals who make them uncomfortable or engage in inappropriate behavior online. Help them understand the reporting mechanisms available on social media platforms, chat apps, or gaming platforms.

f. Monitoring and Supervision: Maintain a level of supervision over teenagers' online activities without invading their privacy. Keep an eye on their online interactions, monitor their social media accounts, and know the websites they visit. Ensure they understand that your supervision is for their protection and not an invasion of their privacy.

g. Online Safety Resources: Familiarize yourself and teenagers with online safety resources and organizations that provide guidelines and support, such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.missingkids.org) or the Federal Trade Commission's website (www.consumer.ftc.gov).

Remember, establishing trust and maintaining open lines of communication with teenagers is crucial. Encourage them to come to you if they encounter any suspicious or uncomfortable online situations. By combining education, awareness, and vigilance, you can help protect teenagers from online predators.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Protecting teenagers from internet sexual exploitation and online predators is of utmost importance in today's digital age. It requires a collaborative effort from parents, guardians, educators, and society as a whole. By prioritizing education, communication, and proactive measures, we can create a safer online environment for teenagers. Empowering teenagers with

knowledge about online safety, fostering open dialogue, and teaching them to recognize potential risks and red flags will go a long way in safeguarding their well-being. Together, we can work towards preventing and combating internet sexual exploitation, ensuring that teenagers can navigate the online world with confidence and security.

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