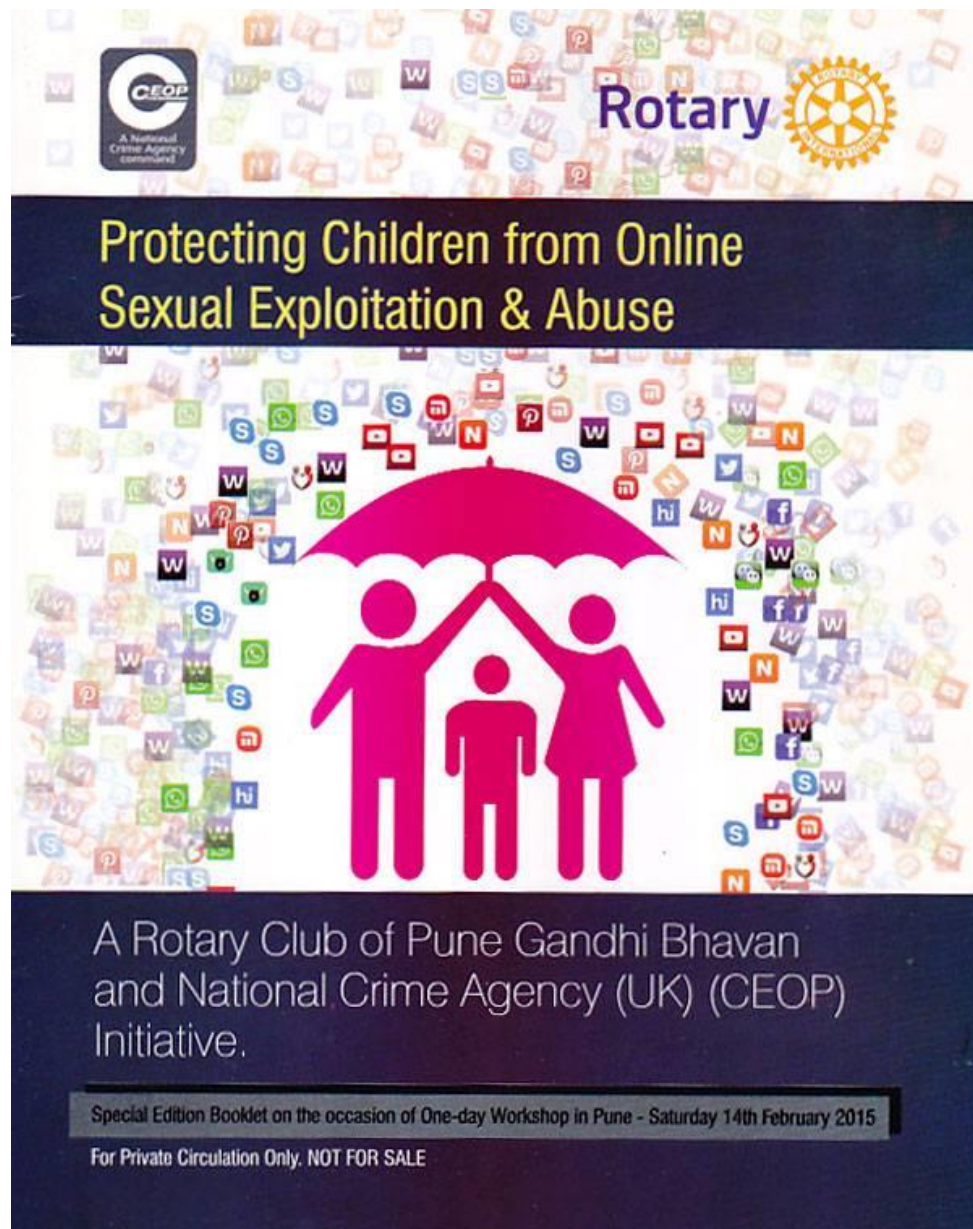


Protection of Children from Online Sexual Abuse

She was a distinguished guest at an event "Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation & Abuse" organised by National Crime Agency, UK and Rotary Club, Pune in February 2015. Her article "Protection of Children from Online Sexual Abuse" has been published in a Special Edition Booklet.



Protection of children from online sexual abuse

- Nirali Bhatia

Online sexual abuse is when a child or young person is pressurised, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with an adult or young person via an electronic media especially internet.

According to EPCAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), attacks against children through new technologies are "pervasive (and) cause deep and lasting physical and psychological damage." These attacks include child pornography and "live" online sexual abuse for paying customers, online sexual solicitation, cyber stalking and bullying, and access to illegal and harmful materials. Criminals also use cyberspace to arrange tourism for paedophiles and the trafficking of children.

Just as in the physical world, a framework to protect children in cyberspace must be established which is based on child rights and human rights instruments. Families are the first line of protection for children and young people generally. But, given that all families are not equally equipped to manage this task in relation to the virtual world and that the risk posed to different children will vary, families and carers need specific support to do this.

Children themselves are often more skilled and informed than the adults tasked to protect them. This should be recognised as a clear signal to welcome the genuine participation of children and young people in finding solutions.

Types of online violence/abuse

Violence and harms against children and young people in cyberspace and in relation to new technologies include:

- The production, distribution and use of

materials depicting child sexual abuse.

- Online solicitation or 'grooming' (securing a child's trust in order to draw them into a situation where they may be harmed).
- Exposures to materials that can cause psychological harm, lead to physical harm, or facilitate other detriment to a child.
- Harassment and intimidation, including bullying.

Vulnerability factors

Children and young people of all social classes risk confronting any or all of these forms of violence as they occur in relation to new technologies. These children are made the subjects of photos that are then sent into cyberspace, or they are advertised online as commodities, and/or they are affected by violence and harms arising from other people's online interactions, including the use of pornography (depicting adults and/or children).

Some children are especially at risk due to a range of vulnerability-enhancing factors common to all environments. They are in socially and economically difficult situations, they have already experienced harm such as sexual abuse and exploitation, they are lonely, they feel alienated from their parents and others, they have low self-esteem, and/or they lack confidence. Gender is also seen to be a risk factor, with seemingly more girls than boys appearing to be harmed through cyberspace interactions.

Social interaction in cyberspace is affected by distinctive factors that can influence people's behaviour in ways not apparent in offline interactions. People do and say things they would not normally do and say (even among people who know each other offline). People do not always recognise that their behaviour

