

Trends & Policies in Criminal Justice

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Dr. Jeongsook Yoon is a Research Fellow at Korean Institute of Criminology.
(yoonjsk@kic.re.kr)

Dr. Hyeonsook Kim is an Expert Advisor at Seoul National University Human Rights Center.

Dr. Taehun Lee is an Associate Professor at Chung-Ang University.

Characteristics and Countermeasures of Grooming in Sexual Violence against Children and Juveniles

Introduction

In 2018, a petition was posted on the Cheongwadae National Petition Board about a church pastor in Incheon accused of having sexually abused at least twenty adolescent girls in his church for 8 years, infuriating the general public. The offender was said to have continued the offense by grooming the victims such as buying the girls treats and counseling on personal issues to gain trust prior to the sexual assaults.

Grooming aims to take emotional control over the victim in sex crimes against children and is frequently carried out by people in careers with the powers to exploit or lure children (e.g. religious leaders, teachers, sports coaches, etc.). Recently, grooming has also become widespread over the internet and through SNS networks among adults with the objective of having sexual contact with children.

Potential victims are 'groomed' online and offline in improper ways by offenders intending to sexually assault children or juveniles. The crime may go on for a long time because the victims are less likely to be aware of the inappropriateness. Thus, the victims' trauma is severe from being sexually abused by someone with whom they believed to be in a trusting relationship.

Accordingly, it is necessary to better understand the characteristics of grooming, which happens very often in sexual violence against children or juveniles, identify the tactics and set up measures to detect grooming in an earlier stage.

Research Methods

Literature review

- Review existing literature on sexual grooming

Analysis of prosecutorial investigation and court trial records

- Identify characteristics of grooming
- Identify characteristics of victims & offenders
- Analyze grooming tactics and processes leading to sexual violence

Sexual violence cases in investigation and trial records					
Type of sexual violence		Percentage (%)		Number of crimes	
General(Non-grooming) sex crimes		50.0		54	
Grooming sex crimes	Offline grooming	50.0	39.8	54	42
	Online grooming		11.1		12

Analysis of grooming in foreign judicial precedents

- Comparative law research on the current status and system regarding grooming sex crimes in foreign countries and suggestion of efficient ways for institutionalization

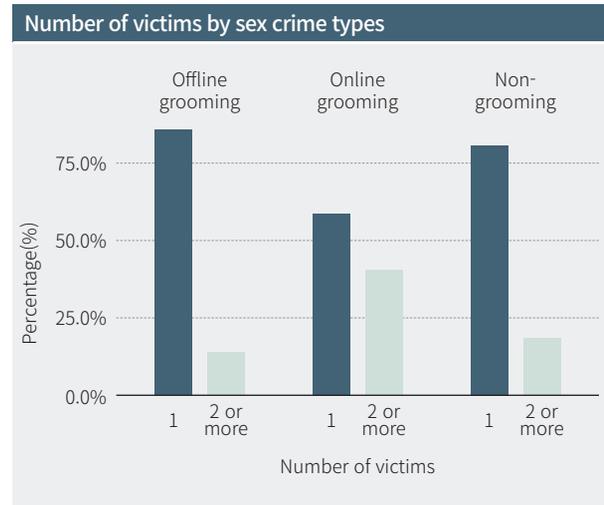
Results

Analysis of sexual violence cases against children or juveniles

Number of victims

- The number of online grooming sex victims were 1.6 on average, the highest per crime type.

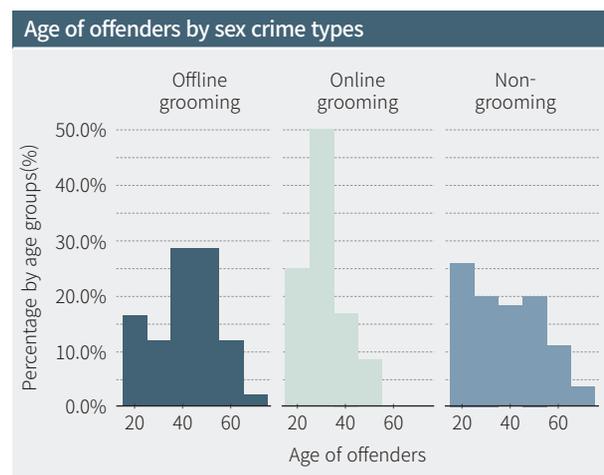
Number of victims by sex crime types			
(Unit: Person)			
Number of victims	Offline grooming	Online grooming	Non-grooming
Average number of victims	1.1	1.6	1.3
Standard deviation	.43	.79	.72



Age of offenders

- Online grooming was most frequently committed by offenders in their 30s, many of them under 40 years old (83.3%).

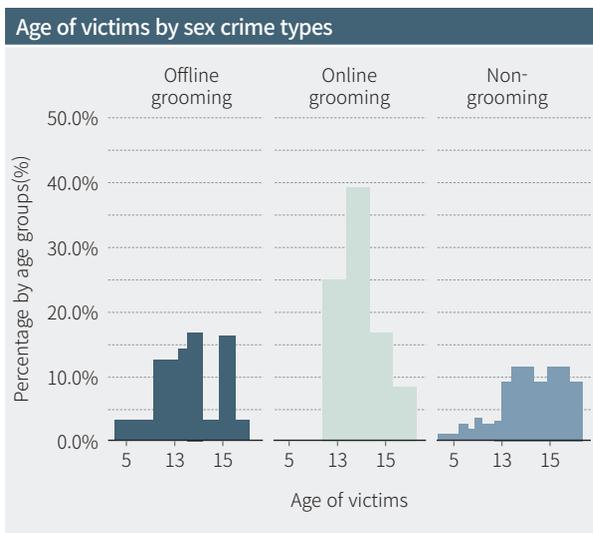
Age of offenders by sex crime types			
(Unit: Person)			
Age of offenders	Offline grooming	Online grooming	Non-grooming
Average age	41.7	31.2	38.1
Standard deviation	12.9	8.7	14.4



Age difference between offenders and victims

- Age difference was significantly small in online grooming cases compared to other sex crime types.

Age difference between offenders and victims by sex crime types			
(Unit: Age)			
Age difference	Offline grooming	Online grooming	Non-grooming
Average age difference	27.8	16.5	24.6
Standard deviation	14.0	8.3	14.4



Relationship between offenders and victims

- General sexual offense was mostly committed by strangers, accounting for 62.1% of the total, whereas 84.2% of the online grooming sex offenders were in online relationships with the victims. On the other hand, offline grooming was mostly made by acquaintances other than families or relatives (40.8%), followed by relatives at 36.7%.

Relationship between offenders and victims by sex crime types			
(Unit: %)			
Offender-Victim relationship	Offline grooming	Online grooming	Non-grooming
Families or relatives ¹	36.7	-	15.2
Acquaintance other than families or relatives ²	40.8	5.3	15.2
Online relationship	6.1	84.2	4.5
Non-acquaintances (one-time relationship)	10.2	-	62.1
Others	6.1	10.5	3.0

Duration of sexual violence

- The duration was longest in the case of offline sexual assaults. Most of the cases that lasted longer than 5 years were committed by families or relatives. Grooming by families or relatives seems to have comparatively higher possibility of becoming persistent.

Duration of sexual violence by sex crime types				
Duration of sexual violence ³				
Classification	1 day	2 days or more		
	Percentage	Total percentage	Detailed period	Percentage
Offline grooming	11.9	78.6	2 days ~ 1 week	2.4
			Over 1 month ~ less than 3 months	9.5
			Over 3 months ~ less than 1 year	0.0
			Over 1 year ~ less than 2 years	16.7
			Over 2 years ~ less than 3 years	7.1

1 ____ This relationship includes children (grandchildren), adopted children/children of de facto partners, siblings/other relatives.

2 ____ This relationship includes children of friends/neighbors, school/institute students and daycare children, employer-employee relationship.

3 ____ Responses answered as 'none' and 'unknown' for the duration were excluded from the analyses.

Duration of sexual violence by sex crime types				
Duration of sexual violence ³				
Classification	1 day	2 days or more		
	Percentage	Total percentage	Detailed period	Percentage
			Over 3 years ~ less than 5 years	16.7
			More than 5 years	11.9
Online grooming	33.3	58.3	2 days ~ 1 week	33.3
			Over 1 month ~ less than 3 months	0.0
			Over 3 months ~ less than 1 year	16.7
			Over 1 year ~ less than 2 years	8.3
			Over 2 years ~ less than 3 years	0.0
			Over 3 years ~ less than 5 years	0.0
			More than 5 years	0.0
General sex crimes	50.0	20.4	2 days ~ 1 week	5.8
			Over 1 month ~ less than 3 months	3.8
			Over 3 months ~ less than 1 year	0.0
			Over 1 year ~ less than 2 years	3.8
			Over 2 years ~ less than 3 years	1.9
			Over 3 years ~ less than 5 years	1.9
			More than 5 years	3.8

Marital status of offenders

- Regarding the marital status of the offenders by sex crime types, 20 out of 41 offline grooming sex offenders (47.6%) were either married (remarried) or in de facto relationships. This rate was relatively higher than the cases of 1 online groomer (8.3%) and 15 general sex offenders (27.8%).

Marital status of the offenders by sex crime types						
Marital status	Offline grooming		Online grooming		Non-grooming	
	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)
Single	21.4	9	83.3	10	51.9	28
Married (remarried)	45.2	19	8.3	1	22.2	12
De facto relationship	2.4	1	-	-	5.6	3
Divorced (Separated)	28.6	12	8.3	4	18.5	10

Household member types of victims

- Household member types of the victims by sex crime types showed that 35.7% of online grooming victims lived with other people. In comparison, a high percentage of the victims of offline grooming (86.1%) and non-grooming (91.5%) lived with people who are families or relatives.
- The 'other household members' category includes runaways living on the streets and those living with same age groups, mainly minors living alone without families, relatives or guardians (that are neither families nor relatives). Juveniles under such circumstances have easier access to chat apps and compensated dating sites for finding a place to stay or making money and are vulnerable to online grooming as a result.

Household member types of the victims by sex crime types						
Household member type	Offline grooming		Online grooming		Non-grooming	
	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)	Percentage (%)	Number of crimes (cases)
Parents	41.9	18	50.0	7	61.7	29
Single parents	44.2	19	14.2	2	29.8	14
Guardians other than parents (grandparents, etc.) ⁴	7.0	3	-	-	2.1	1
Other (runaways, etc.) ⁵	7.0	3	35.7	5	6.4	3

Specific types of grooming sex crimes

DATA analysis

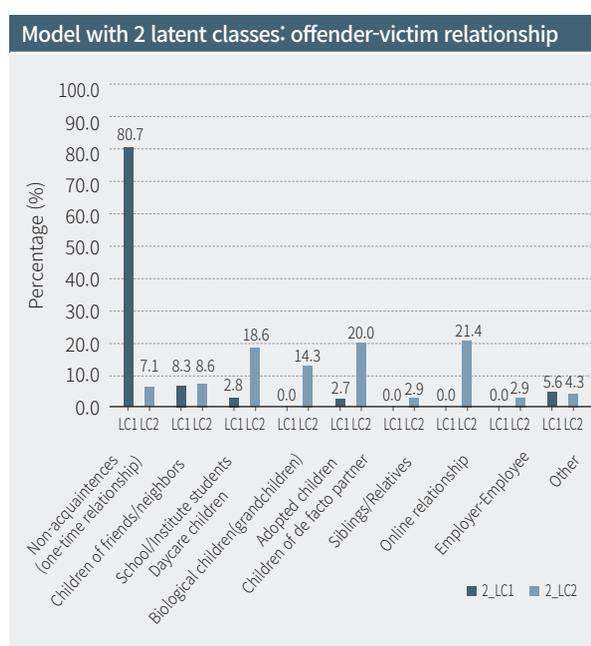
- Latent class analysis mandatorily requires determining the optimum number of latent classes reflecting the data most adequately. The number of latent classes in this analysis was determined by a general process of conducting latent class modeling for cases of 2 to 5 latent classes and comparing model fit indices to the item response patterns of respective models. The model fits of each latent class model are indicated in a Table below.

Model fits of latent class models				
Class	2	3	4	5
LL	-816.36	-765.72	-731.38	-711.78
BIC	1899.6	1934.10	2001.21	2097.78
aBIC	1719.49	1662.36	1637.84	1642.78
AIC	1746.72	1703.44	1692.76	1711.55
Parameters	57	86	115	144
VLMR	.490	.637	.959	.761
BLRT	.000	.000	.000	.200
Entropy	.995	.972	.974	.984

- The model fit results show that entropy and BIC were most suitable among the information criteria for the latent class model with 2 classes, and the adjusted BIC and AIC were most appropriate for the latent class model with 4 classes. Since each model fit index has unique characteristics and none of the indices is absolute or superior, the adequate number of latent classes was determined based on the analyses of the response patterns of the models with 2 classes (2_LC1, 2_LC2) and 4 classes (4_LC1, 4_LC2, 4_LC3, 4_LC4).

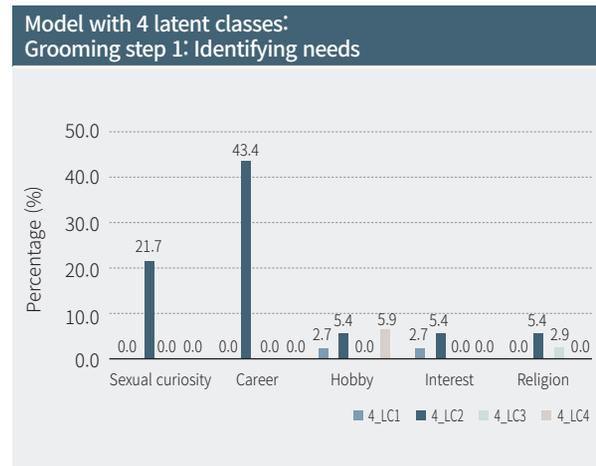
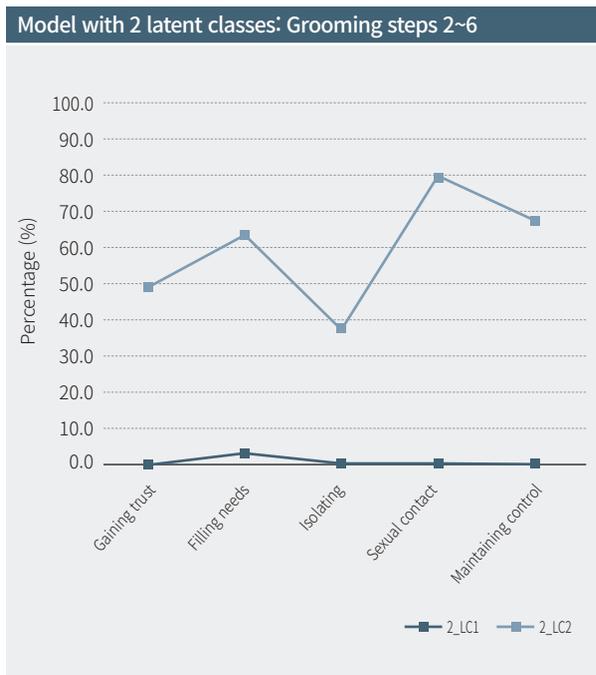
Comparison of grooming and non-grooming cases

- According to the analysis results of the model with latent 2 classes, trust between offenders and victims was low in sexual violence falling under 2_LC1. Grooming did not occur in 2_LC1 cases, and the crimes were usually committed by strangers.
- In contrast, many of the sex crime cases falling under 2_LC2 involved a trust relationship between offenders and victims. Most of the grooming steps were carried out in 2_LC2 cases, with the majority of the offenders being acquaintances and some meeting over the internet. It is possible to assume from the response patterns that 2_LC1 cases have the characteristics of conventional sex crimes while 2_LC2 cases have the characteristics of grooming sex crimes.



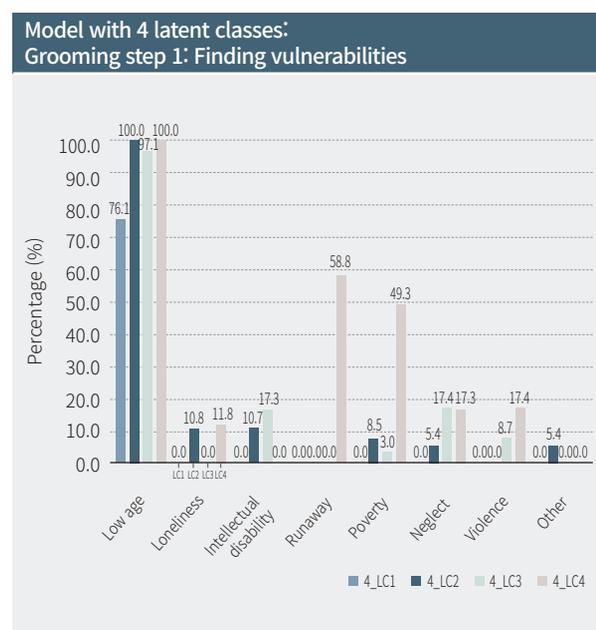
4 ____ Living with guardians other than families or relatives, such as friends of grandparents, relatives or parents.

5 ____ Living alone without any guardians, i.e. runaways, living in rented rooms, etc.

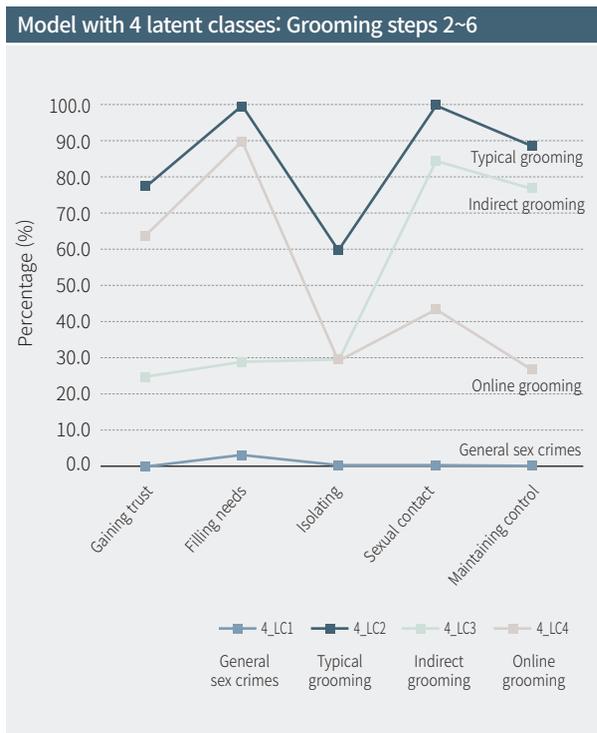


Specific types of grooming

- The analysis of the model with 4 latent classes revealed that the trust level between the offenders and victims were low in sex crimes falling under 4_LC1. The majority of the offenders were non-acquaintances and did not go through the grooming phase. The pattern was similar to 2_LC1 cases of the model with 2 latent classes and thus can be classified as conventional sex crimes. However, offenders and victims were generally in a trust relationship in sex crime cases falling under 4_LC2, 2_LC3 and 4_LC4. A high number of offenders were acquaintances and grooming occurred more than 4_LC1 cases. Therefore, 4_LC2, 2_LC3 and 4_LC4 cases can be classified as grooming sex crimes as 2_LC2 cases.
- Based on the analyses, 4_LC1 cases can be classified as conventional sex crime, 4_LC2 as typical grooming, 4_LC3 as indirect grooming and 4_LC4 as online grooming.



- In sex crimes falling under 4_LC4 (online grooming), offenders met the victims mainly online and targeted children or juveniles that are runaways, in poverty or physically or emotionally abused. Most offenders of 4_LC4 cases did not try to find out the victims' needs but concentrated on gaining trust and filling the needs. The tendency to make sexual contact with or maintain control over the victims was relatively lower than other grooming cases (4_LC2, 4_LC3). All three types under 4_LC2, 4_LC3 and 4_LC4 had the characteristics of grooming sex crimes in a broad definition and the grooming levels were higher than in 4_LC1 cases, or general sex crimes.



Policy Recommendations

- In consideration of legislations in other countries, sexual grooming should not be decriminalized on the ground that it does not accompany the result of an act of 'sexual violence'. Authorities must have a more detailed and scientific understanding of how sex crimes occur and acknowledge that sexual violence against children may constantly be committed repeatedly over a long period, not simply one-time incidents happening in a short time.
- A considerably large number of grooming cases examined in this research lasted for several years. It will become seriously difficult to end sex crimes against children or juveniles unless grooming is criminalized, because grooming is what makes sexual abuse to continue for a long time. 'Grooming sex crimes' are carried out by adults misusing their dominant status and trust relationship, in purpose of controlling the minds and bodies of children. The authorities should pay more attention and take efforts in conducting research and collecting data to prepare comprehensive measures such as investigating and prosecuting grooming sex offenders, sentencing, preventing recommitments and providing support to the victims, in cooperation with relevant institutions.

Expected Effects of the Policies

Prepare proper regulations on sexual grooming

- Prepare amendments to the Act on the Protection of Children and Youth against Sex Offenses
- Prepare amendments to the special Act on the Punishment of Sexual Crimes

Provide education to change the social perception of sexual grooming

- Education for people working in educational institutions as schools/institutes
- Education for parents
- Education for the public

Major Keywords

- Sex crimes against children or juveniles, Grooming, Online sex crimes, Sex crimes committed by families or relatives



Change

Human Behaviors
Community Response
Social System