

***“Child Online Safety amidst COVID-19: Global Experiences & Community Efforts”
Online Roundtable Summary Report***

Date & Time: 10 Dec 2020 (Thu), 4 – 5 pm (Hong Kong Time)

Format: Zoom Conference

Summary:

COVID-19 impacts on daily life becomes a new normal, it leads to changes in the domain of child online protection. Children and young people have more time connecting to the Internet to play and learn, it also brings about a higher chance for them to be exposed to risks. On 10 Dec 2020, eHelp Association has invited guests from INHOPE* to share the global trend about child online protection during the pandemic, as well as the global collaboration in better safeguarding the younger generation. Representatives from NGOs, Tech companies and law enforcement agencies, as well as law makers were engaged in this roundtable to share their observations, practices and experiences on the topic of child online safety during the pandemic. This roundtable also serves as a platform for various stakeholders in Hong Kong to explore rooms to cooperate in promoting better online well-being of our next generation.

** INHOPE is the leading global network combatting online Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). The Network consists of 46 hotlines in 42 countries (as of June 2020)*

Introduction and Welcoming Note

Mr. David Ng, Co-founder of eHelp Association, introduced the background of eHelp Association and the roundtable as an opportunity for the community to interact. The organisation was established in 2018 as an NGO promoting child online safety, which was a follow-up action of a Community Roundtable in 2017. Roundtable is a core event of eHelp Association, hoping to create a platform for community members from different sectors working together to promote the well-being of our next generation on cyberspace.

Ms. Christie Hoo, Co-founder of eHelp Association, gave a welcoming note to the guests and participants of the roundtable. She thanked the continuous support from eHelp founding members from different sectors on the organisation development, as well as the support from INHOPE for the development of Hotline combating CSAM in Hong Kong. She also welcomed the participation of guests from different backgrounds joining the roundtable, and was looking forward to the further collaboration on safeguarding children and youth online.

Guest Sharing - Protecting Children Online amidst COVID-19: Global Collaboration, Challenges and Solutions

Ms. Samantha Woolfe, Partnerships and Network Expansion Lead and **Ms. Suzanne Wissenburg**, Training and service manager of INHOPE joined the session as guest speakers.

Samantha introduced INHOPE as a network of 45 hotlines in 42 countries across the globe. INHOPE has already been in operation for about 20 years with support from a lot of the global tech companies around the world (e.g Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft). INHOPE provides the public with a way to anonymously report illegal content with a focus on CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material), ICCAM is a tech platform that hotlines in the INHOPE network can exchange reports. eHelp Association is now in the process of becoming a hotline within the INHOPE network. INHOPE is excited to see eHelp Association be a provisional member probably in May 2021. She has also stressed the value of the international network, while the work of combatting CSAM is transnational, it demands international collaboration for exchanging reports legally, sharing best practices, and supporting each other.

Regarding the situation in Hong Kong, NCMEC's CyberTipline received 16.9 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation in 2019. 7114 reports came from Hong Kong. For the cases identified in INHOPE's ICCAM system, 66 reports were received relating to the hosting in Hong Kong in 2018, and it was increased to 258 reports in 2019. However, there is no hotline in Hong Kong at the moment, and Hong Kong as a city with good internet infrastructure, which might lead to hosting. It serves as another reason for establishing a hotline in Hong Kong.

About CSAM trends in the context of the pandemic, Samantha pointed out that the World Health Organization stated that the Internet Industry must do more to detect and stop harmful activity against children online in April 2020. Europol and INTERPOL Reports also identified that online CSAM in the European Union had increased. It's one of the top cybercrime threats as a result of the lockdown measures put in place during the COVID19 pandemic. Increasing numbers of activities relating to child sexual abuse and exploitation happened on both the surface web and the dark web. Findings were also presented from Victim and Offender perspectives. In the Victim context, confinement measures increase the amount of time children spend online, it may lead to increased risk-taking, for example, the sharing of self-generated materials. Besides, the circulation of viral contents is then leading to continuous re-victimisation. In the Offender context, transnational child sex offenders may transit their offending to the online environment due to the travel restrictions. The economic hardship from COVID19 might lead to the potential increases in CSAM material trading, produced for payments. Offences continue to take place across multiple online channels and platforms, for example also lead to new types of live-streaming offences.

Samantha ended the sharing by emphasizing that "there is no silver bullet. It takes a village, in this case, a world, nationally, internationally, to raise a child, but also to raise this whole

generation safely". Everyone should work together and collaborate nationally and globally. It is a must to continue to raise awareness and raise the bar in all countries to protect children.

Roundtable Interaction Session

Mr. David Ng, welcomed the participants from different NGOs, tech companies and law enforcement agency, as well as eHelp advisors (Witman, Nick and Wingco) joining the roundtable. Participants were coming from organisations including Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, Save the Children Hong Kong, Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights, Hong Kong Council of Social Services, New Home Association, Psychotherapist in Action, iProA, Google and Hong Kong Police Force.

Prof. Witman Hung, Advisor of eHelp Association and Hong Kong Deputy to 13th National People's Congress (NPC) of the People's Republic of China, shared from a law maker's point of view about the current amendment on the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors". He highlighted the areas including i) the protection of children's privacy information (aged under 14) with the safeguard from parents and guardian, ii) Broadcasting platform should not provide service and allow account registration for people aged under 16, iii) Everybody should protect the younger generation from experiencing cyberbullying by reporting to Internet Service Provider (ISP) and law enforcement agency, while ISP should establish complaint mechanism to serve such purpose and iv) ISPs should bear the responsibility when discovering content bringing harm to children, they should stop the broadcasting and take necessary actions including deleting, hiding, closing of link, keeping records and reporting to the law enforcement agencies. Prof. Hung has pointed out that there is no specific law in Hong Kong for ISPs to take the responsibility in protecting the minors online, it is worth thinking about the obligation of ISPs by taking the newly amended Law in China as reference.

Mr. Nick Chan, Advisor of eHelp Association and Hong Kong Deputy to 13th National People's Congress (NPC) of the People's Republic of China, has stated that the jurisdiction in Hong Kong, unlike the United States, does not regulate ISPs or OSPs (Online Service Providers). ISPs are not obligated to keep a proper record for law enforcers to take action in response to the CSAM case. Besides, the Hong Kong operation of social media platforms are more on the Sales and Marketing side, it's very hard for law enforcement agencies to serve them a Hong Kong court notice against a Hong Kong group company whichever separate legal standing from the actual hosting company that hosts the content outside of Hong Kong. With regards to privacy laws, they are also generally weak and not specifically protecting minors. Perhaps, the roundtable is a good learning exercise to learn from each other for addressing the mentioned issues.

Mr. David Ng, mentioned the current operating online reporting mechanism by eHelp Association for addressing the public reports in related to cyberbullying, cybercrime and child sexual abuse cases. This reporting mechanism is a joint-effort with NGO partners including, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, Hong Kong Family Welfare Society and New Home Association.

Ms. Bob Lee, from Youth Crime Prevention Centre of The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, shared her observations about the current child online safety cases during the pandemic period. It has been discovered that there is an increase in the cases about making friends online and earning “fast money”. While primary school students are spending more time playing online games, they use the chat function on the game platforms interacting with online friends, some of them have even exchanged self-generated inappropriate (nude) images with others, it leads to certain risks. Interacting with the Police Force and other colleagues, Bob stated that these cases quite commonly happened, and drew attention from them. Therefore, they have been putting effort into conducting Zoom seminars to raise the awareness of the younger generation when interacting with online friends. Besides, It has also been identified that there is an increasing trend of more teenagers committed to cybercrime, for example selling drugs online, hoping participants would be aware of the potential cases around and fight against these issues together.

Mr. Elvis Ng, from Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, echoed what Bob had mentioned about the risks for children during the pandemic, however, he also highlighted that the use of technology could enhance the learning experience of students. Nevertheless, there is an income disparity in Hong Kong that some children from poor families cannot afford the purchase of digital devices, therefore their organisation has provided those to them for free, but at the same time, they require the eligible students to firstly take the information literacy course conducted by them.

About the worries of parents regarding the online risks their children are facing, it was discovered that 71% of parents concerned about CSAM, and 81% of them concerned about Internet addiction of their kids. The data was collected in their workshop with around 900 parents conducted with the Education Bureau and EduCity in late Nov.

He has also pointed out that teachers are one of the important stakeholders in detecting the problem in the school setting, nevertheless, due to the face-to-face class suspension, teachers are not able to perform such a role in detecting the cases. In Oct to Nov 2020, more abuse cases at home or in the community were identified and handled in the Multi-disciplinary Case Conference on Child Abuse (MDCC). In this view, It is crucial to raise awareness and sensitivity to online safety among children and parents.

Some CSAM cases have also been identified in new social media platforms. However, social workers, teachers and parents are hard to keep track of all these new and fast-developed social media platforms and technologies, it creates difficulties for caregivers to detect the online safety issues children are facing.

Ms. Maggie Chung, from Family Conflict and Sexual Violence Policy Unit of Hong Kong Police Force, reported the figures on 3 offences, which they had seen a drastic increase since the pandemic started. Firstly, about nude chat, it has surged from 6 cases in 2009 to 115 cases in 2020, involving children under 18 years old. It has been observed that more young people

aged from 12 to 19, getting to know people online through dating apps or social media platforms. They were then enticed to perform nude chat and being blackmailed. The situation is alarming. Secondly, about offences related to children pornography, there is an increase of 14 cases when compared to 2019, given that more children are connecting to the internet nowadays, and there should have unreported hidden cases, the situation worth paying attention to. Lastly, about unlawful sexual intercourse with children aged under 16, it has been reported that victims have got to know the strangers on social media, online games, mobile phone Apps, Games Apps etc., and had been raped by or conducted consensual sex with the strangers. A case was shared about a 15-year-old girl who met a stranger at the motel, and the sex scene was videotaped, and then the girl was focused on having sexual behaviour with another stranger. Some of the cases could be as worse as that.

Maggie ended her sharing by calling for social workers' support to urge the victims reporting the cases to the Police Force, reporting the cases could help to stop these offences, where they could catch the offenders.

Ms. Suzanne Wissenburg, Training and service manager of INHOPE, responded to the question in the chat box about protecting children on live-streaming platforms. She has highlighted that the work of the INHOPE network is removing the CSAM content from the Internet, meanwhile, efforts should also be made to create awareness among children of not putting inappropriate content on these platforms.

Workshop Summary

Ms. Samantha Woolfe, has stressed that INHOPE is looking forward to supporting different stakeholders to perform the work for intervention, grateful to know everyone is heading toward the same goal on child online protection. Normally, there would be a few days of discussion to go depth for the discussions, hoping this would be the first of a number of roundtables where INHOPE and everyone can be together.

Ms. Elaine Cheng, Co-founder of eHelp Association, would like to thank everyone for joining this roundtable discussion. She also thanked the support from Police Force on following-up on the reported cases from eHelp Association, case files were opened at the district level. In addition, this roundtable had also identified areas for improvement in the policy level, for example, live-streaming platforms and self-generated inappropriate content, hoping to explore cooperation with everyone on such areas to better create a safety net for our next generation.

Mr. David Ng, concluded the workshop by emphasizing the importance of cross-sectoral and cross-boundary collaboration. Multi-stakeholders cooperation is the key. He also echoed the comment of Billy, from the Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights, about hearing the voice of children. The practice of conducting roundtables will continue and look forward to seeing every participant online soon again.