SECOND REPORT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL AND CHAT GROUPS

This report is a brief summary of an investigation conducted by Nitish Chandan from Cyber Peace Foundation into the proliferation and spread of CSAM through apps and chat groups. In a very short span of time, we made some extremely disconcerting findings.
After an initial report about chat groups on WhatsApp being used to disseminate and share CSAM, the applications hosting invite links to these groups were removed from the Play Store by Google in December. This, however, did not stop the apps or the promulgation of content which was reported in our report earlier.

Platforms have since then started adopting sophisticated technology and removed thousands of accounts that were found to be disseminating CSAM but in a follow up investigation, it was found that groups are still being created regularly and active solicitation is also happening. The same application that hosted chat invite links is still active. A screenshot of the same is added alongside.

*First report can be found at the end of this file.*
Some of the groups get full the moment they are added on the app, while some take some time. Some of the invite links are no longer valid because they have been revoked (either as an action from WhatsApp or the group administrator).

Some of the groups are spam that solicit people to join with links to CSAM in their group description itself. These links are mostly found loaded with malicious content not CSAM.

Interesting to note that most of these groups have group icons that are obscene and sexual and don’t just show adults but children in sexually explicit activity directly. This presents potential for technical tools to identify and remove such groups.

Many of these groups lay emphasis on the fact that only “Child Pornography” videos are to be shared and no other links or any things. The disclaimers in group descriptions say that if someone doesn’t send a specified number of videos daily, they will be removed from the group.

There are several groups that also solicit physical contact with both children and adults at a price with things like coverage areas, timing etc.
Reports about these groups along with the invite links and screenshots have been shared by Cyber Peace Foundation with WhatsApp, NCPCR and MHA as well. While CSAM is a pressing concern on these groups, even obscenity in the form of pornography is actively being shared.

One of the state police agencies is investigating these groups currently and have found that these groups get created and filled very fast, making it difficult to enter the groups and identify content.

On one such group that was created by a person from India, participants were asked to share CSAM videos. The admin would then in turn share the videos that he had. As proof of the fact that he did have CSAM videos and those of Indian children, the admin also posted a screenshot from his phone’s gallery.

It doesn’t stop there. The admin actually goes on to message people from the group in personal chats asking for CSAM. When asked as to why is he soliciting CSAM only, he blatantly says, “yehi chahiye bas mujhe” (That is all I want)

Post this, he also goes on to share content on a direct message which was not downloaded but it is quite evident from the thumbnail that involves minors in sexual activity.

As stated earlier, active investigation is underway into this specific matter but the creation of new groups, solicitation and sharing of abuse material is continuing.
What follows is a brief narrative from a recent investigative research into the problem of Child Sexual Abuse Material. While most of these incidents become police cases on being reported, most others go unreported and unnoticed. Technology has empowered this generation but also brought in elements of disruption like never before. It may look like CSAM and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children are remotely related but it seems now that the lines are blurring by the day. With the heavy risks of operating in hotspots of trafficking, pimps have also gone online, perhaps even newer ones have come up soliciting conversations for money. In this investigation into some apps and groups about CSAM, I came across tens of accounts soliciting both conversations and sexual contact for different amounts in several currencies.

This started from a recent investigative article by TechCrunch available on https://techcrunch.com/2018/12/27/funding-filth/ where apps housing links to several CSAM WhatsApp groups were exposed. Although as per the report these apps were then removed from the PlayStore, the apk files were going to be readily available- all that was
needed was a Google search. So that is where I headed and downloaded not too many but just one out of these applications called Unlimited Whats Groups.

I had no idea what was on these apps or the groups that they pointed to. What the app did offer was a button to search and before I would turn on the investigator mode to use some catch phrases and jargon for CSAM, I thought of just typing “child”. Yes, this search led to hundreds of groups like Only Child Pornography, Cool Child Pornography Group, Gay Kids Sex Only, ****** (redacted), Kids Ass etc.

Each of these groups has hundreds of members and some of them are full, so are unable to accept more participants. On some of the groups almost everything- yes everything starting from their group icons, names to group description and content is disturbing and grossly obscene. This creates a huge pool of investigative leads for law enforcement. The content being shared on the groups is not put in this document but that also ranges from videos and pictures of Child Sexual Abuse and Physical Violence against Children to messages offering services like video chat with children at Rs. 500 for 10 minutes and sexual intercourse at Rs. 5000 (sometimes even blatantly written as status and display name on WhatsApp accounts).

In many discourses in India that CSA is discussed with law enforcement and other actors, prevalence is always a question and answered in the affirmative- Indian users are consuming and maybe creating CSAM but what came next was even a shocker given the conversations that were being had.

On most of these groups, the group descriptions are in Hindi as seen in the screenshots. Not just that, a huge majority of the users is Indian with their real numbers and real profile pictures. On numbers that are not Indian, some of their profile pictures are images of Indian boys and girls most likely on virtual numbers of the United States. The rest of the user majority is from Pakistan and middle east along with the United States.

One group that stood out in this investigation last just a day was called ****** (Redacted) This was one group with the maximum number of participants who were Indian, created using a
virtual number of the United States and the biggest aggregator of CSAM where people readily posted messages like CP Bhejo, CP send karo, Bacho ke video dikhao etc. And videos did follow as well. To validate, a list of the member numbers is attached as well.

What is strange is that many of these users perhaps have real images of their own children as their profile pictures and some have their expensive cars with the registration plate. Proactive investigation into these groups is needed in order to bring in deterrence against even consumption of CSAM content which is an offence in India.

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