



Bundeskriminalamt



**Crime Scene Internet –
A Global Challenge for Internal Security**

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Virtual Worlds and Their Victims

Summarised presentation

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Hardly any technological development has changed everyday life and leisure-time behaviour as rapidly and, at the same time, as profoundly as the electronic media. Internet access, E-mail traffic, electronic entertainment media such as PC games and world-wide communication in virtual networks (chat rooms, forums) have developed at a pace rarely seen before. Currently, the number of Internet connections worldwide is estimated at half a billion, having increased more than fivefold since 2000. The PC games market has in the meantime reached a larger sales volume than the international film industry. This development is mainly due to the behaviour of young people who shift a considerable part of their leisure-time activities and their social life into digital worlds.

This contribution first presents current data about the use of electronic media and data concerning contacts of children and juveniles with digital worlds, depicts a system of Internet-based forms of dissocial behaviour and provides an overview of new phenomena of victimisation in digital worlds.

The effects of the consumption of violent PC games have been examined relatively well thus far although this area, too, constantly faces new developments due to the technological progress of hardware and software. Research overviews and meta studies available show relatively unanimously that the use of such games promotes aggression-related feelings and cognitions and increases general excitement. These effects are particularly pronounced in children while less marked in older players. Recent studies (examining newer games) show stronger effects, also confirmed by studies of higher methodological quality. However, up to now proof of these effects has been furnished for rather short periods only, and significant interdependencies can be found between certain characteristics of a person (e.g. attention deficit disorders, inclination to aggression) and the use of such games.

A newer branch of research is concerned with the threats posed to the users of so-called virtual social networks (e.g. chat forums and platforms such as MySpace or SchülerVZ). Most recent studies report considerable rates of victimisation by cyberbullying or sexual harassment and stalking. At the same time, these studies indicate that users are rather uncritical and careless in handling personal data and show a low degree of threat awareness. Moreover, the connection between one's own risk behaviour and the extent of victimisation, which is well known in criminology, is reflected in the Internet as well. The contribution concludes with information on recent developments of new phenomena in virtual social networks and a number of recommendations for victim-oriented prevention work.