



By Tom Pettifor

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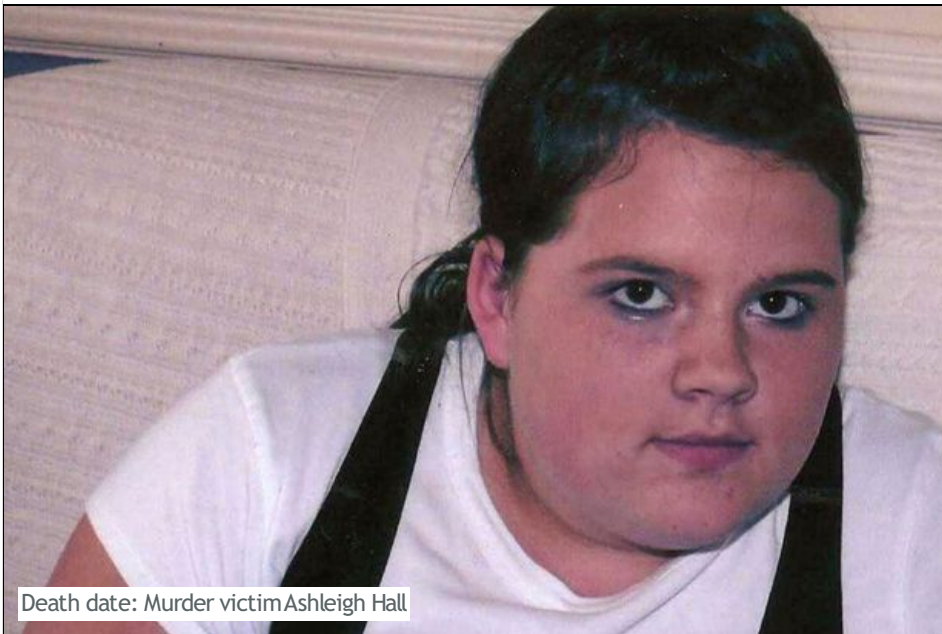
1 Apr 2013 08:50

Facebook sex crimes soar: Offences via social networks more than quadruple in last four years

And in another alarming trend, paedophiles are increasingly logging on to the social networking sites to target children

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Death date: Murder victim Ashleigh Hall

Sex offences linked to Facebook or Twitter users have rocketed in the last four years, a Mirror investigation reveals.

And in another alarming trend, paedophiles are increasingly logging on to the social networking sites to target children.

A total of 1,642 cases since 2009 have been reported to police where the sites played a part in the commission or aftermath of a crime.

Statistics obtained under freedom of information laws show the number has more than quadrupled from 139 four years ago to 614 last year.

Worryingly, more than half the 1,395 victims of all offences - apart from rape - were under 16.

And the number of alleged rapes involving Facebook and Twitter rose from 22 in 2009 to 117 last year.

Detectives say personal information on the sites is being used by predators to identify vulnerable girls or women and gain their trust.

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One senior officer said: "Sex offenders, and particularly serial sex offenders, are adept at seeking out people who are perhaps more likely to let their guard down. We know that some sex offenders will wander the streets looking for vulnerable people late at night. But there is absolutely no reason to think they won't spend time online doing exactly the same."

The figures, released by 25 police forces across England and Wales, suggest that some victims only found out what had been done to them from gloating messages left on Facebook by their attackers. Offences rising steadily year on year include online child grooming, child prostitution and possession of child sex abuse images.

Figures show the vast majority appear to involve Facebook.

The dangers have been spotlighted following a number of high-profile cases in recent years.

Tragic Ashleigh Hall, 17, was murdered in October 2009 after secretly arranging to meet a stranger posing as a teenager on Facebook.

She had told her family she was going to sleep at a friend's house. But within hours she had been kidnapped, raped and killed by Peter Chapman, 36, at Sedgefield, Co Durham.



Killer: Peter Chapman

After Chapman was jailed for 35 years, Ashleigh's mum Andrea, 41, [pleaded for tougher safeguards on Facebook and other sites](#).

She said: "It is about time somebody looked at ways of introducing controls which stop people putting up false pictures and false information."

In 2011, Humberside police revealed that Nicholas Bull - jailed for nine years for raping a 12-year-old he met on Facebook - had contacted at least 40 girls online.

Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children's Commissioner for England, warned last year how the



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internet was enabling the sexual exploitation of children. She said: "Parents may think that they can control what's going on. But the reality is children can get anything they like on their mobile phones. And they do."

Under current terms and conditions, no one under 13 is permitted to hold a Facebook account. And those aged 13 to 18 are given protection limiting what details they can post.

But a survey of 4,000 children carried out by Prof Andy Phippen, of Plymouth University, found that nearly 40% of primary school pupils are already on Facebook.

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Vicky Lee

2:08 AM on 4/4/2013

Girls and women are not the only victims.

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Gail Allison Reedy

3:26 AM on 3/4/2013

I am thoroughly disgusted with this. When will we ever be safe! Our kids Safe. Parents monitor those computers.grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr



0

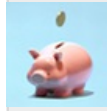


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Nicola Marie Jackson
11:39 AM on 1/4/2013



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What isn't being mentioned is that this man had been sentenced to 9 years for raping a child he met on facebook but did didnt serve them or he would still be in prison. I just don't get this thing we have of telling someone they will go to prison for 9 years but if your good you can be out in 4.5. Good? are u sodding kidding me? He raped a child! Even if he found God in prison and turned into a saint, that shouldn't wipe out the bad he caused.

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Carolyn Riley
12:40 AM on 1/4/2013



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This doesn't surprise me, i cannot speak about Myspace or Twitter as i very rarely go on those sites, but i know Facebook is full of paedophiles and groomers. Facebook does very little to safeguard children, they even ignore users reporting of convicted paedos!, even though it against Facebook's T and C's for a convicted paedophile to have a facebook account!. facebook needs to be held more accountable for the users and the content shared by users!

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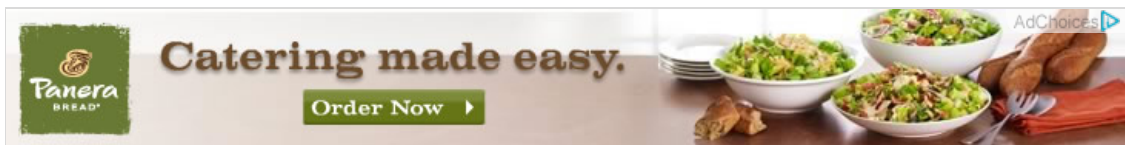
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