



Need to prevent online child abuse: Karnika Seth

Saurabh Gupta | 14 May, 2015

Speaking about her latest book "Protection of Children" on Internet, an Internationally acclaimed Cyberlaw expert, Author and Jurist, Karnika Seth told *SME Times* that the access of internet by children is growing in India at an alarming rate and the immediate attention required to protect children, families and enhance role of law enforcement and NGOs in creating cyber awareness.

Excerpts of the interview...

Please tell something about your book "Protection of Children" on Internet.

Karnika Seth: Protection of children on Internet is a guidebook for parents, educators, children, law enforcement, legislators, lawyers, law students, government agencies, NGOs, international organizations on how to promote cyber safety and security for children using Internet and communication devices.

What is the objective of the book?

Karnika Seth: The objective of the Book is to equip all stakeholders on how to prevent online child abuse and safeguard children who use internet from threats they may face online. It aims to give safety tips and best practices for online cyber safety of children.

What do you mean by child abuse on the Internet? How you explore the relationship between child abuse and the Internet?

Karnika Seth: Child abuse on Internet can be present in various forms such as cyber pornography, cyber bullying, cyber grooming, cyberstalking and cyber harassment. Internet is often chosen as a medium to commit crime by criminals who take advantage of anonymity it offers. Parents and children often do not have the knowledge to realize dangers that prevail on internet due to misuse of internet by cyber criminals. As a result innocent children get enticed into sexual abuse rackets, child pornography or become victims of online child abuse.

What are various means by which the Internet may be a source of the abuse or exploitation of children and young people?

Karnika Seth: Social network platforms are active platforms where strangers could attempt at befriending young children with a view to abuse them sexually. Web cameras could be activated illegally by malware and pictures or videos could be recorded without consent of child or even without him knowing that such pictures are being captured. Cyber criminals indulge in grooming activities wherein through sexting or messaging of sexually explicit content a child may be enticed into child pornography.

Children and young people, in particular, have readily embraced the new communication medium. Despite this, media reports that a very small percent of children in India had access to the Internet. Your views. How you relate the timings of release of your book in compare to present scenario?

Karnika Seth: A recent survey of Tata consultancy services reveals that 7 out of 10 children shop online, 76 percent children use facebook, and 9 out of ten children own a mobile- Tata 2014- TCS Gen Y 2013-14 survey reveals that urban teenagers are hyperconnected. Retrieved from <http://www.tata.co.in/article/inside/TCS-GenY-2013-14-survey-reveals-urban-teenagers-are-hyper-connected> (accessed on 23 July 2014). In my view if we see latest reports from surveys conducted in India, the access of internet by children is growing at alarming rate.

I think the book is quite timely and infact was written to meet the imperative need for knowledge in this area and the immediate attention required to protect children, families and enhance role of law enforcement and NGOs in creating cyberawareness. The book also discusses existing lacunae in cyber enforcement of extant laws to protect children and how we can strengthen our law enforcement teams.

Use of the Internet promises many benefits for society. The Internet has also been found to have particular benefits for children, who claim that its use facilitates social contacts, improves their writing and language skills and makes them "better students". What is your assessment on this?

Karnika Seth: No doubt internet is good use has several benefits but abuse of internet has many evils too. We need to make children aware of these dangers and mentally equip them with safety practices and knowledge so that they avoid getting entrapped into such crimes or become victims of such attempts made by criminals.

Does your book cover the preventative measures on the issue? Please share.

Karnika Seth: Yes, book covers both best practices to prevent becoming targets of cybercrime and what to do incase a child becomes victim of cybercrime. For example, incase a child is interacting on social media he should not disclose personal or private information such as he is alone at night or that day in the house , or upload any personal pics he would not want to share with friends without choosing right privacy feature, do's and don't's of using cell phones, blogging are also discussed.

How you see the role of the government as well as of any family guardians in this regards?

Karnika Seth: Role of government is extremely important as is role of parents. We need a multipronged coordinated approach to combat online abuse against children. New rules can be drafted to safeguard children on internet, legal enforcement mechanisms can be strengthened and parents can actively speak with child to explain do's and don't's on internet.

In direction to 'Save the Children' how you see the issue of Child Labour in India?

Karnika Seth: Unfortunately despite lot of awareness, child labour continues to be a major problem both in rural and urban India. It is important to give children necessary education to equip them to face the world boldly and not make them slaves at the young threshold of



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their life when they do not even understand what life has to offer and what they can achieve!

How you see the kids who are working in entertainment industry (TV, Films)? Do you think there is need to upgrade our law in this regards?

Karnika Seth: Kids working in entertainment industry should continue with their education. Through them we can express and spread social messages better. Yes certain laws to regulate employment of children for serials, films must be made so that their engagement does not disrupt their studies or compel them to discontinue studies to be able to participate in a role by virtue of a contract.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE), is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4 August 2009, which describes the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. India is one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child.