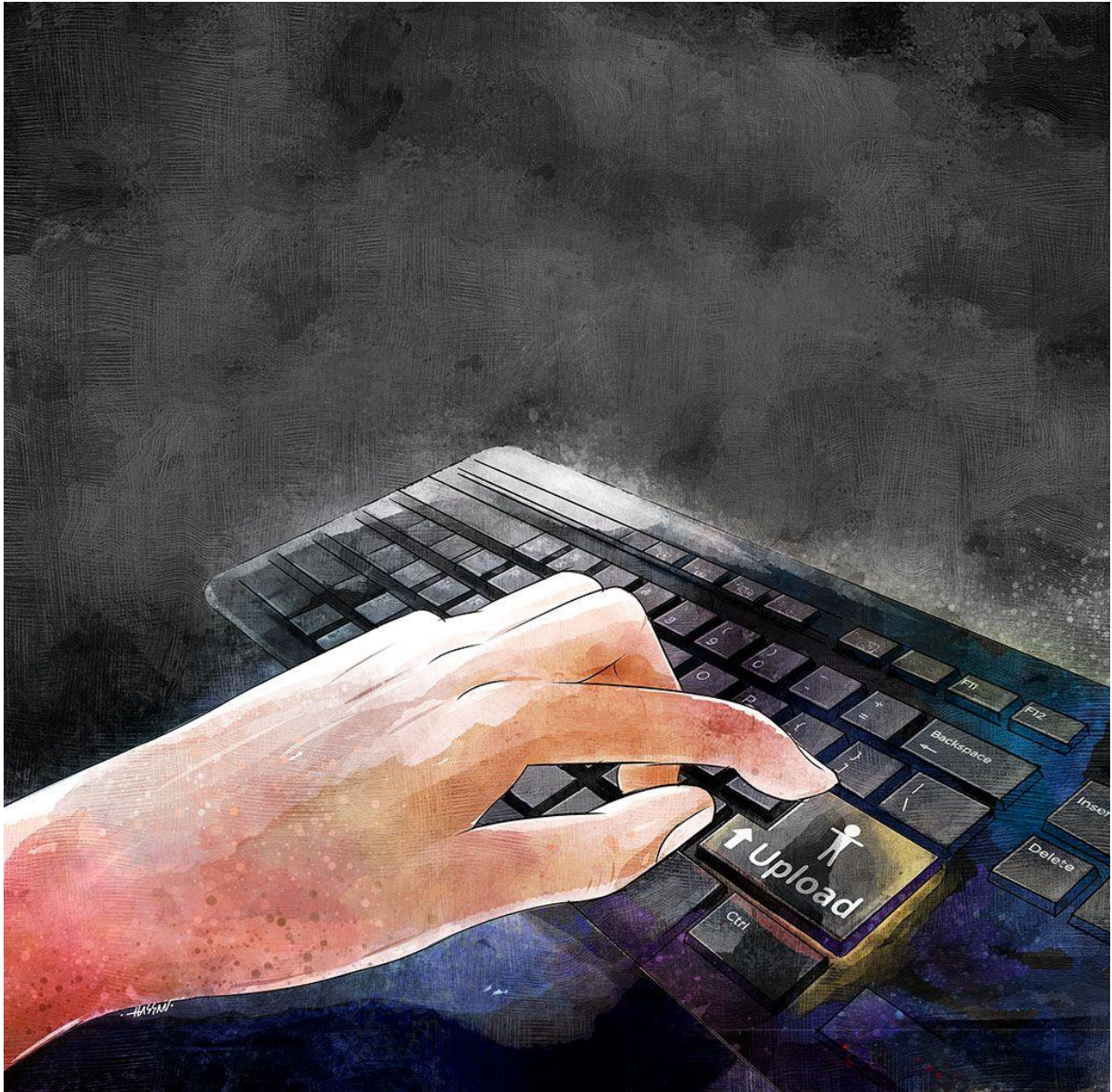


More accessing child porn in Malaysia

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The rising child pornography cases involve online users who accessed pornographic material, including viewing, downloading, sharing and uploading pictures or videos.

THE figures tell a sickening tale: cases related to child pornography are on the rise in Malaysia.

Our police are dealing with more incidents of such child sex crimes: from opening 631 cases in 2018, the number spiked by 99.5%, or nearly doubling to 1,259 last year.

Most of these cases involve online users who accessed pornographic material, including viewing, downloading, sharing, and uploading pictures or videos.

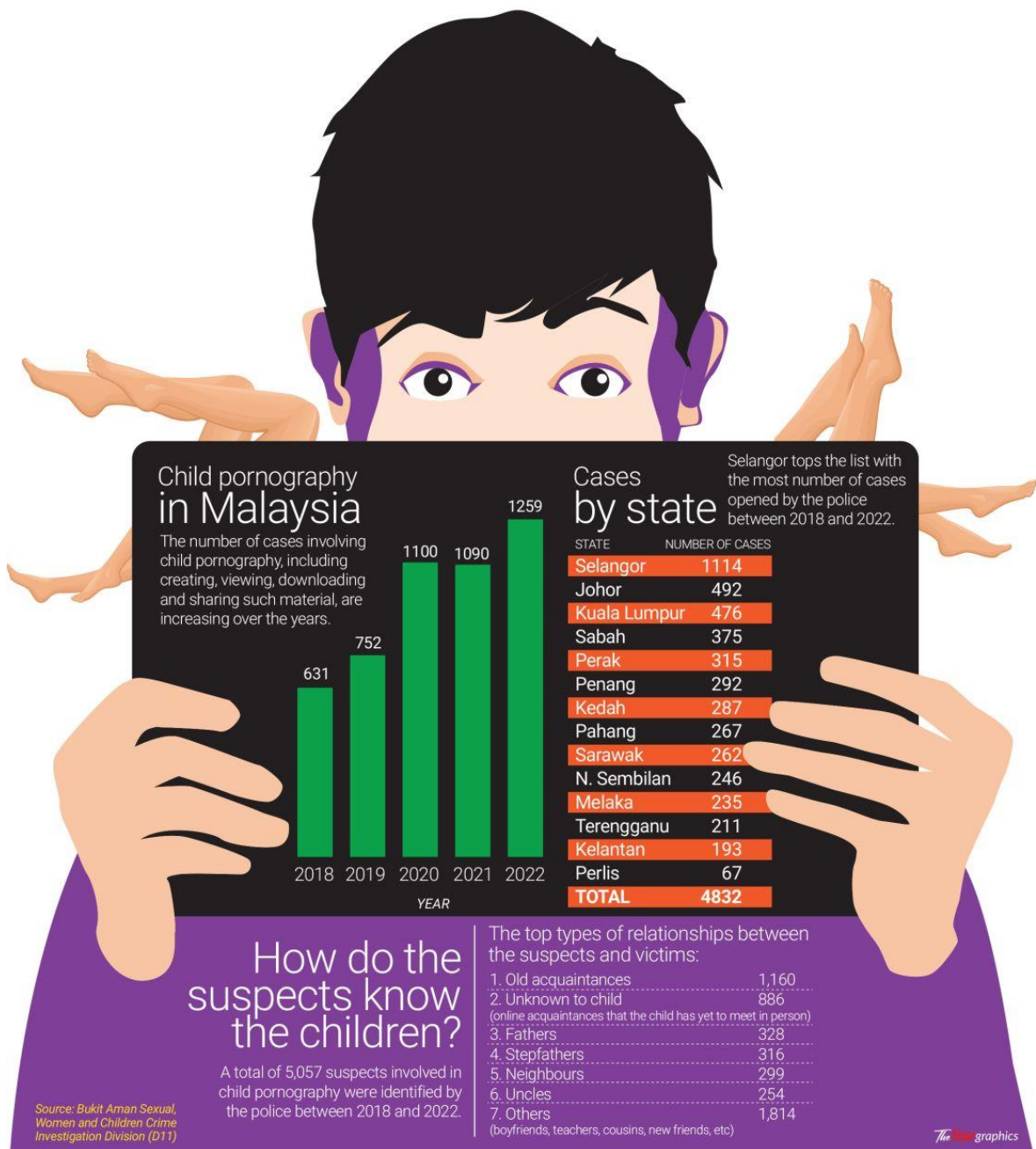
And then there are those who are despicable enough to create child pornography by manipulating or grooming young victims to send nude or compromising visuals of themselves.

Others also have sex with these child victims while recording the acts.

The number of Internet protocol (IP) addresses in Malaysia found to be involved in these crimes totalled 136,993 between 2018 and January this year, based on police data made available to Sunday Star. "It's troubling that some of the victims are as young as five to seven years old," shares Bukit Aman Sexual, Women and Children Crime Investigation Division (D11) principal assistant director Asst Comm Siti Kamsiah Hassan during an interview.

An IP address is an identifier for every device or network that connects to the Internet.

Another worrying fact is that there's a growing trend of accessing and sharing such exploitative content online over the years, including during the pandemic.



“From 9,017 IP addresses being involved in child porn in 2019, this number doubled to 18,508 in 2020 when the movement control order to curb the spread of Covid-19 began,” ACP Siti Kamsiah says.

The numbers continued to shoot up to 48,752 IP addresses in 2021 and 49,621 last year. As of January this year, 8,435 IP addresses had been identified by the police.

More are also downloading the material: the number of IP addresses found to be doing so rose from 147 in 2020 to 9,507 last year.

Some 167 raids and 73 arrests were made by the police during the past six years.

“But our biggest challenge is this: It’s easy to delete evidence, and it’s tough to get victims to talk.

“Because they are children and don’t fully understand the situation, they don’t feel the act is wrong and hence, don’t remember it.

“Sometimes, we only find out when they get caught like when the child gets pregnant,” she shares.

It is then another hurdle to prosecute the suspects because digital data can be easily wiped out.

She says identifying the person behind the IP address is the most important factor in the police’s efforts to track down offenders.

The police are assisted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission and telecommunication companies, but problems happen when there’s incomplete information.

“Offenders also constantly change accounts and come up with fake personal details to cover their tracks,” ACP Siti Kamsiah says.

How it happens

It’s harrowing but child pornography victims are not chosen at random – the perpetrator has already honed in on their target, doing “homework” on their interests and hobbies before approaching them.

“Knowing what they like enables the perpetrator to show that they like the same things too, making them bond and making the child feel inclined to follow what they say,” explains ACP Siti Kamsiah.

About 90% of perpetrators in child pornography are people who are known to the children, like family members, neighbours and relatives. The remaining 10% are people the victims have not met in person, such as online acquaintances.

Most child pornography victims are aged between 13 and 15, says ACP Siti Kamsiah – a particularly vulnerable time when they are going through puberty.

“As such, there is a tendency for them to be easily influenced.

“Parents must be vigilant because the crime can happen even as they are alone in their room as almost everything is online these days,” she says.

Perpetrators will reach out to victims through social media and online platforms the children often use like TikTok, Insta-gram, Litmatch and even dating apps.

For boys, a common modus operandi is to get to know them through online mobile games, often played in groups.

“The perpetrator will entice the victim by offering them in-game rewards like extra ‘abilities’ or ‘weapons’ for game characters in exchange for a picture of their private parts,” she reveals.

For girl victims, the offender tries to befriend them by offering them a listening ear and getting to know their likes and dislikes.

“The perpetrator also often showers them with praises and sweet words, like telling them they are beautiful while asking them to share pictures of themselves.

“After that, the perpetrator takes it a step further by saying they would look even more beautiful without clothes.

“If the girls decline, the perpetrator uses manipulative tactics like pressuring them, making them feel guilty or pretending to feel upset that their request was turned down,” ACP Siti Kamsiah says.

Some children develop feelings for the offender and become afraid of losing them, leading the child to obey the perpetrator. “In cases where the victims and offender meet in person, the latter entices the child by giving them presents to encourage the relationship,” she says.

Revealing more, ACP Siti Kamsiah says when the children grow older, some do not seek justice because they are “in love” with the offender.

In cases where the child refuses to send any more material to the offender, an element of sextortion happens: the perpetrator demands money from the child to not spread the compromising visuals online.

Save our kids

With the growing problem at hand, there’s a need to do more to protect our children.

ACP Siti Kamsiah believes the first line of defence should be parents, who must be aware of the current safety risks and trends affecting their children today.

“Parents need to monitor their child’s activities because such cases can occur even if the child is at home.

“There’s also a need for children to be educated on what is safe and what red flags to look out for with people, such as the way people touch them or make requests of them.

“This must be taught as early as preschool,” she stresses.

As the police continue to beef up their enforcement as well, ACP Siti Kamsiah says the men and women in blue also run campaigns to spread awareness of how to prevent such crimes.

“We are also increasing our engagement and capacity building with law enforcement agencies overseas like the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and Homeland Security investigations in the United States,” she says, adding that other collaborations with non-governmental organisations are also lending strength to the battle against child pornography.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2023/06/25/more-accessing-child-porn-in-malaysia>