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WHY CRIMES ON SKYPE LEAVE WITNESSES BUT NO EVIDENCE

Skype is a program to communicate online. With it you can make video calls, hold video conferences, mail and transfer files. There are a lot of crimes and suicides committed via skype in the modern world and they are difficult for investigators to solve them.

A woman in custody in Norway is accused of murdering her child while her boyfriend allegedly watched on Skype in the UK. It is the latest in a series of incidents witnessed on Skype or webcams. But how much does this help investigators?

One night in April last year a 23-year-old university student in Canada was chatting to a friend in China on a video link. Suddenly there was a knock on the door of her Toronto apartment and she stepped away from the webcam to open it. The friend watched in horror as a man lunged towards her and they began struggling. His helplessness was compounded seconds later when the webcam link was cut. A few hours later the girl's half-naked body was found in

her room on the campus of York University in Toronto. A 30-year-old student who lived in nearby, was arrested and faces trial later this year. The case was the most graphic illustration of a recent phenomenon: horrific acts committed on what is known in the trade as Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

In November a British sales executive died in India. The Daily Mail reported he had committed suicide live on Skype while his girlfriend watched in England. The police confirmed they were called to an address where they found the dead body. His inquest is still pending in the UK.

It is not surprising that crimes are witnessed on Skype, given the number of registered users - 560 million - and the amount of time they spend using it.

A Skype expert, says: "There are more minutes of Skype usage per month than the total of international phone calls. The highdefinition audio in Skype gives you a sense of the other person being with you and that is what people want, that sense of presence." Skype is by far the biggest and best-known of the VoIP providers, but there are others - Ooma, Viber, Viataalk. But while investigators may get witnesses thanks to Skype, they do not get footage.

In October 2010 Norwegian paramedics were called to a flat in Oslo and found a 20-month-old girl whose mother said she had accidentally fallen into a bucket of water. The child died the following day. A year later the mother changed her story and said she had held the child underwater after her boyfriend in the UK told her it would be a good way of disciplining her. A prosecutor told the BBC: "He was not arrested but was interviewed as a suspect. He confirmed he witnessed it on Skype but not that he had instructed her to do it. Unfortunately there is no record of what happened on Skype, no footage. In fact there is no record of the text between them that night either, but there is from other occasions."

An expert explains: "Skype is just a piece of software and just as you don't expect the internet to remember every computer game you have played so you can't expect it to record your conversations. There may be some forensic tracks left on the computer that made the call, bits of memory that were cached, but it is unlikely there will be evidence of what was said or written."

But a forensic computer examiner, told the BBC: "While the video is not recorded, chat sessions are and they are not easy to delete." He, whose company Forensic Control specialises in examining computers, says: "If you have access to one of the computers involved you can use a programme to find a text record of the Skype chat. It's really good evidence and it can give you clues about what happened on the video. This police officer is sometimes employed as an expert witness in trials and recently testified for the defence in a case in which a man was acquitted of organising drug imports from Brazil using Skype."

Users can record Skype calls, but for this they need to buy add-on software. This tends to provide the ability to record up to 15 minutes of conversation at a time.

People use this sort of software to record for business purposes or to record family calls for people who can't be there themselves. In some cases medical professionals will record their discussions with patients and colleagues to protect themselves in case of litigation. But in most cases if you witness something on Skype - as with any webcam system - there will be no video evidence to back you up. This lack of a forensic trail is quite attractive to some groups. Anything people can do, for good or bad, they will do with Skype.

In 2013, it was reported that organised criminals, arms and drugs traffickers, and prostitution rings in Milan, Italy, were using Skype in order to frustrate investigators who regularly tapped their phones.

The expert says the encryption of Skype has brought about a "fundamental change in the balance of power between governments and people" because they cannot tap or bug VoIP calls. That may explain why India, China and Saudi Arabia have been threatening to close down Skype services. Other countries too want the power of lawful intercept for anti-terror purposes or, like Germany, for local police reasons. But Skype is resisting. Skype is trying hard from a regulatory perspective not to be treated like a phone company.

In future, the expert foresees Skype or one of its rivals developing a record button which would allow a witness to record images from the other side of the world in an emergency situation. Video takes up a lot more space on a computer than text and it would

take up an enormous amount of space on Skype's servers if they were to offer a record facility. But for now Skype and all these other companies are getting away without having to address the ethical and moral issues, which they like to brush under the carpet.

But a Skype spokesman said: "We are not able to comment on law enforcement-related matters, including specific police investigations."

Список використаних джерел:

1. <https://www.getsafeonline.org>
2. <http://www.bbc.com>