From Peacekeeping to Child Counselling: Using Story-Based Serious Games for Soft Skills Learning

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Content Advisory

There is no explicit content today, but we will talk about child trafficking and exploitation (including sexual exploitation/coercion)

There will be fictional (but realistic) conversations between fictional children and a fictional (player-controlled) counsellor working for a helpline

What are soft skills?

"Personal qualities that enable you to
communicate well with other people"
(Oxford Dictionary)

But! They are qualities that can be learned.

Case Study 1:

Gaming for Peace: Kusam (2019)

2.5-year Horizon 2020 project (1/9/2016–28/2/2019)

H2020-EU.3.7 – Secure societies – Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens

€2,035,437.50 total budget, 15 partners

Website and game download:
https://gap-project.eu

Develop a curriculum for training novice peacekeepers (military and police) in soft skills: Communication, Cultural Awareness, Gender Awareness

Key training component: a visual novel game

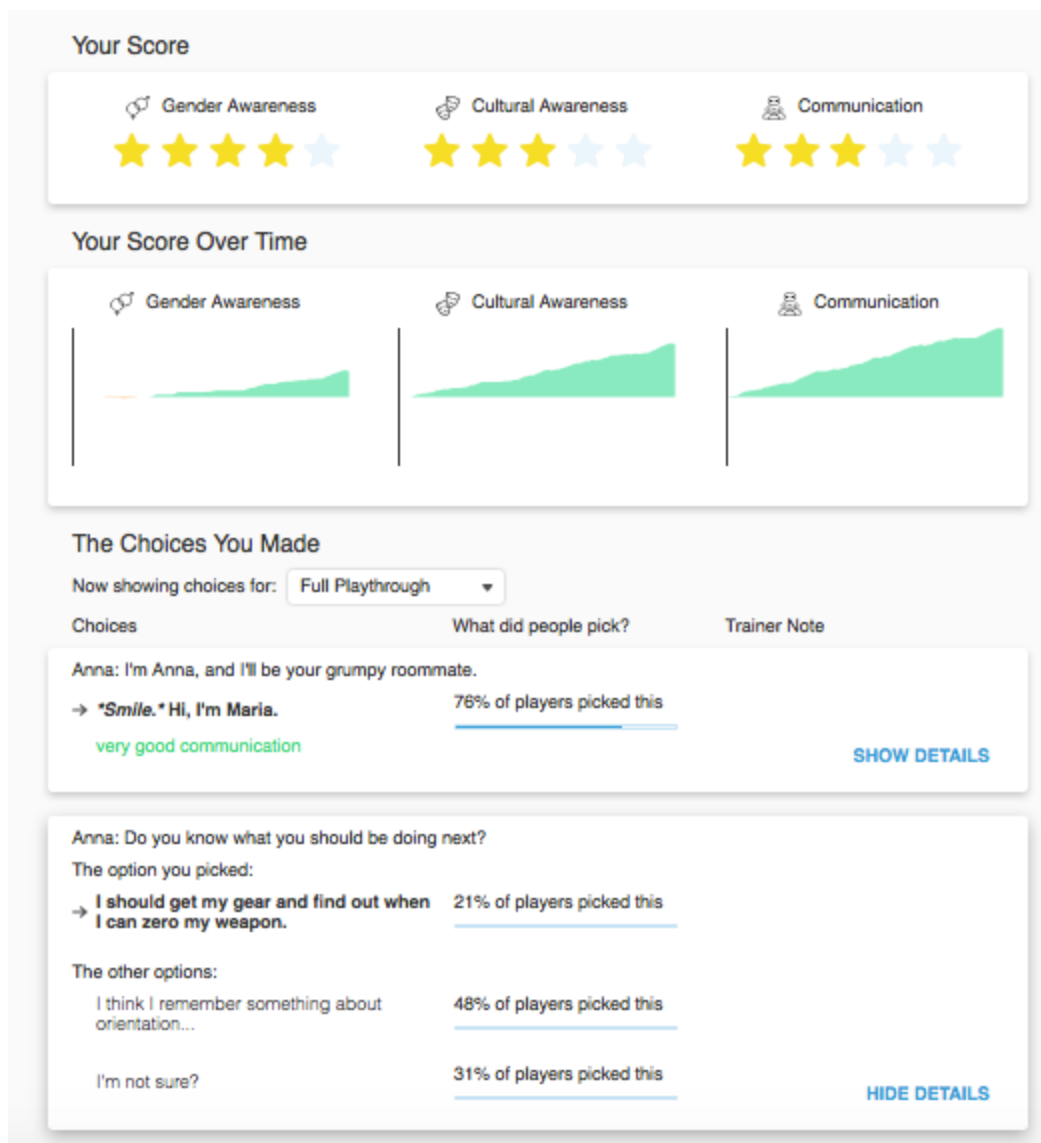Game story and characters based on ~150 interviews with experienced peacekeepers

Learning Objectives and player choices identified through workshops with end users

Visual novel gameplay

Hi, I'm Lieutenant Korhonen.

Ah... I just wanted to apologise for my colleague before.

Leave them to their conversation.

You approach the Indian officers with a smile, but they don't seem too happy to see you. They nod and then continue to speak to each other in Hindi.*

Post-game
assessment
portal

Your Score

Gender Awareness	Cultural Awareness	Communication
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

Your Score Over Time

Gender Awareness   Cultural Awareness   Communication

The Choices You Made

Now showing choices for: [Full Playthrough ▼]

Choices	What did people pick?	Trainer Note

Anna: I'm Anna, and I'll be your grumpy roommate.

→ *Smile.* Hi, I'm Maria.

very good communication

76% of players picked this

SHOW DETAILS

Anna: Do you know what you should be doing next?

The option you picked:

→ **I should get my gear and find out when I can zero my weapon.**

21% of players picked this

The other options:

I think I remember something about orientation...

48% of players picked this

I'm not sure?

31% of players picked this

HIDE DETAILS

Design Challenge: Believability

How do we create a believable story experience?

Significant and irreversible of confidence in the game as a learning tool if details were not correct!

Setting: Kusam is a lightly fictionalized version of a real place (Lebanon).

Narrative: Game narrative was based on anonymized stories collected from senior peacekeepers during ~150 interviews.

Soundscape: Binaural street recordings from our team in Lebanon help to make the scenes feel real.

I'm Anna, and I'll be your grumpy roommate.

Setting: What does a peacekeeper barrack look like? An office? A streetscape?

Photos, photos, photos!

Characters: Interesting, believable, with personality.

Farah

Do you think we are in trouble?

Clothing: Which headwear does a Muslim policewoman use in different professional contexts?

Military and police insignia: Accuracy of type, colour and placement crucial.

Photos, photos, photos!

Scene details: Does a carpet seller drink tea from a cup or a glass?

More broadly: Would this ever happen? Are character actions believable?

What's believable in Iraq could be completely unbelievable in Afghanistan.

Ask, ask, ask!

I made my way to the main hall, where the Battalion Commander addressed us.

'Honoured to serve with you,'
'tremendous responsibility,'
'expect absolute professionalism,'
'opportunity to make a real difference.'

It was not his first time giving that speech.

Next

Balancing act: Capture reality in a way that is realistic but not disrespectful to the mandate of the missions.

Capture the challenges and benefits of international collaborations.

Anna

But the Irish like to do things one way, the Italians like to do things in a slightly different way - then there are the police, the NGOs, and of course the local people themselves.

Capture the crucial importance of translators.

Abdullah

Like our languages - they are different. Here, let me teach you something to help you make friends. Ok, say after me, As-salamu Alaykum.
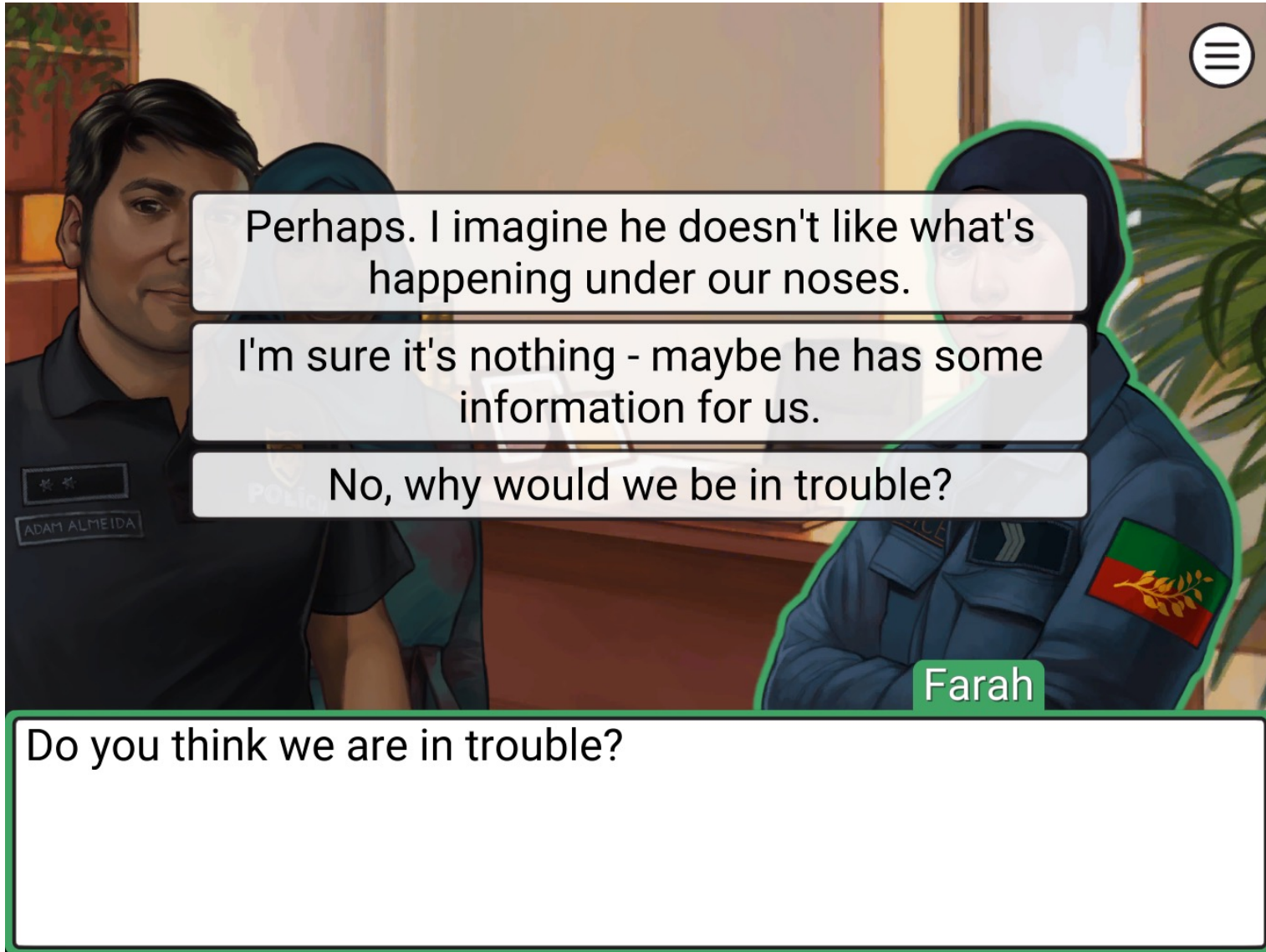
Example scene:

Navigating a difficult space between cultural awareness and gender awareness.

Perhaps. I imagine he doesn't like what's happening under our noses.

I'm sure it's nothing - maybe he has some information for us.

No, why would we be in trouble?
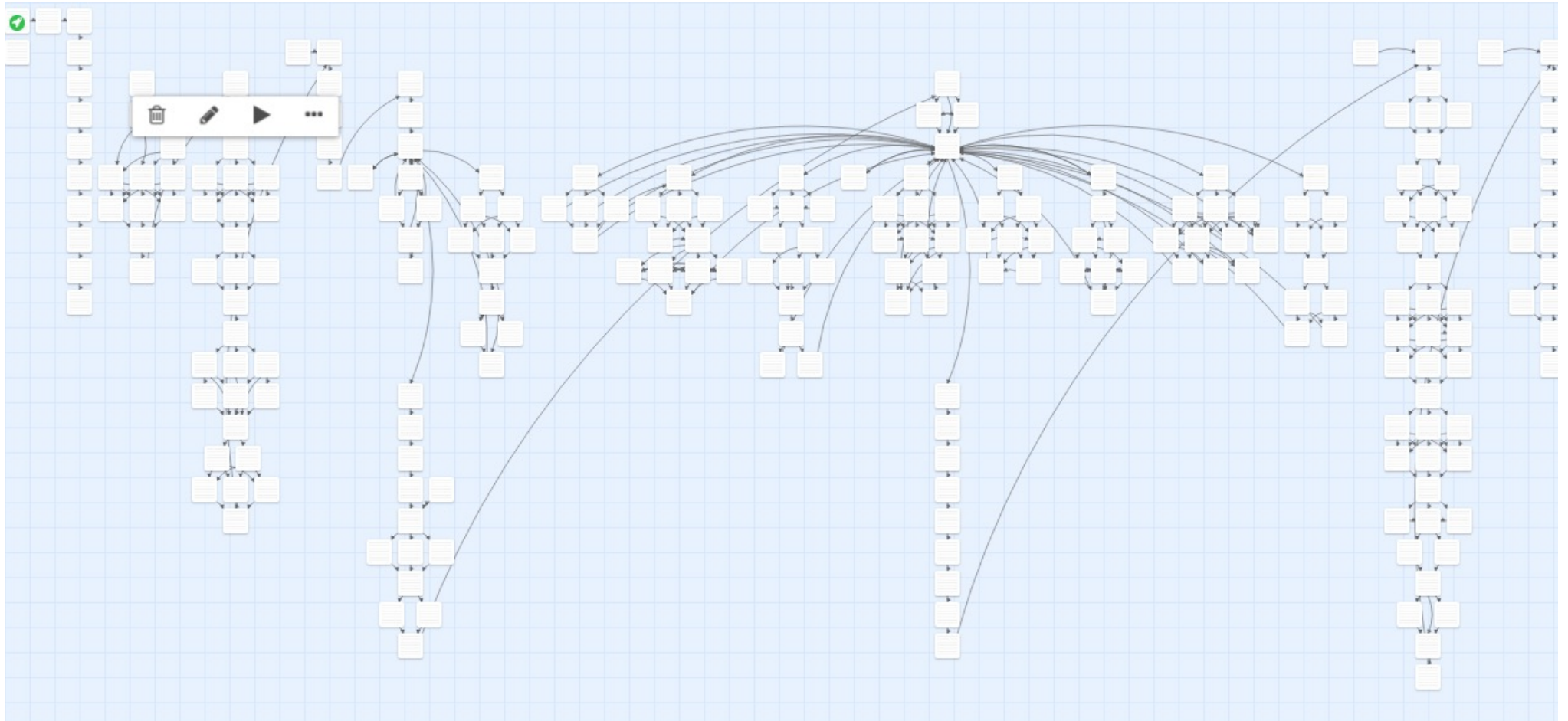
Farah

Do you think we are in trouble?

Adam

Whatever you can say to me, you can say to her. We are both police officers.

Resulting story structure
Branch & Bottleneck with Re-enterable Conversation Node

Deployment

Technology Readiness 5
(TRL5):

"technology validated in a
relevant environment"

Deployment with European Security
and Defence Council (ESDC):

Used across the world to train novice
peacekeepers

Case Study 2:

Child Helpline Game (2023)

Child Helpline International

Child Helplines   About Us ▾   Our Work ▾   Resources ▾   Blog   Events   **eLearning**

Every child has a voice.
We believe that no child should be left unheard.

NEED HELP?

WELCOME TO

Child Helpline International

Human Trafficking in the context of the Ukrainian War

UN General Assembly 2022

"During war and conflict, sexual violence and trafficking in persons increase [...] the Russian aggression against Ukraine is regrettably no exception in this regard"

- Minister of Foreign Affairs Sweden.

"We stand on the verge of an unprecedented trafficking crisis in Europe"

- Special Representative OSCE

"In Ukraine, the risk of Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes has multiplied"

- Director UN Women

"Too many children are left behind, at risk of becoming victims of trafficking [...] in the ongoing Humanitarian crisis, the War in Ukraine"

- UN Special Representative of Violence Against Children

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in the context of the war against Ukraine

WHEN: 6 October 2022, 15:30 - 16:30
WHERE: Sofitel Victoria Warsaw and via live stream
ORGANIZED BY: United States Mission to the OSCE and Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

(OSCE)

Since 24 February 2022, unprecedented numbers of people seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine, most of them women and children, have been received by many OSCE participating States. While undertaking their journeys or upon reaching a destination, they are targeted by criminals and are at acute risk of trafficking for various purposes, including for sexual exploitation.

The OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the U.S. Mission to the OSCE are organizing a side event on the margins of the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference to discuss the need for more effective prevention strategies to mitigate the risks faced by the Ukrainian women and children

Watch
Event
Recording

1.1. Defining THB (Trafficking in Human Beings)

01	02	03
ACT	**MEANS**	**PURPOSE**
✓ Recruitment	✓ threat	✓ exploitation
✓ Transportation	✓ use of force	
✓ Transfer	✓ coercion	
✓ Harbouring	✓ fraud	
✓ Receipt	✓ deception	
	✓ abuse of power	
	✓ payment to achieve consent	

How does conflict facilitate THB?

Desperation (economic)

Restriction of access to financial resources and opportunities to generate income

Disruption (rule of law)

Breakdown of state institutions creates opportunity and vulnerability both during and after conflict

Displacement

Being forced to leave ruptures safety nets, worsened by large numbers in the same situation

Discrimination

Amplification of existing discrimination and marginalisation

Types of THB in Conflict

Macro

Meso

Micro

Direct	Indirect
In	Into	Out
Sexual Exploitation	Forced Labour	Child Soldiers	Organ Trafficking

✓ Directly related to the conflict
✓ Part of the armed hostilities
vs.
✓ Opportunistic abuse of vulnerable individuals
✓ indirectly resulting from the conflict

✓ THB in the conflict zone
✓ THB into the conflict zone
✓ THB on the fringes of the conflict zone

✓ Different **PURPOSES**

Indicators for helpline counsellors

Recruitment and Migration Experience – Indicators	Some Guiding Questions
☐ Come from a place known to be a source of human trafficking	→ Why and how did you leave your country/ home?
☐ Inconsistencies in the description of the migratory journey, blanks in the story, lack of awareness of the travel route from place of origin to destination	→ What happened since you left your country/ home?
☐ Changing her/his migration story, evasiveness, denial, minimizing the situation, telling exactly the same story as other migrants from the same area	→ What other countries did you cross before arriving here?
☐ If traveling as a part of group, do not appear to know the other members of the group	→ Did you choose/ know your destination?
☐ Not knowing what country, they are in	→ How did you get to this country/ place?
☐ Has unrealistic or false expectations about life in the country of destination, has been deceived by false promises	→ Has anyone taken and kept your personal documents such as I.D. card or passport?
☐ Have had the fees for their transport to the country of destination paid for by traffickers, whom they must pay back by working or providing services in the destination	→ How did you pay for the travel costs?
☐ A person presenting another person's identity and travel documentation at a border crossing or other checkpoint	→ Did you or someone else arranged your travel?
☐ Lack of documentation or travel documents on a suspected victim and fraudulent identity or travel documentation	→ What did you expect before you came here?
☐ The claim made by an adult that he or she has "found" an unaccompanied child OR Child presenting the accompanying adult as a relative different than his/ her parents (uncle, cousine, etc.)	→ What were the promises made to you about your living conditions or about a job here?

Means of Control used by Traffickers - Indicators	Guiding Questions
☐ Always accompanied by a person or a group, reluctant to one-to-one interviews (for minors, permanent accompaniment by adults and prohibition to speak to unknown adults)	→ Were you forced by someone to perform certain tasks or offer services against your will?
☐ Signs of control by another person (limited freedom of movement, someone else possesses the person's personal documents or s/he has been given false documents)	→ Has anyone threatened you or your family if you try to leave or if you disclose about your work?
☐ It seems that the person previously received instructions on what to say	→ Have you been injured in any way?
☐ Cannot speak alone and freely, always is accompanied by someone who speaks on their behalf	→ Do you have access to the money you earn?
	→ Is it used to repay a debt?
☐ Show fear or anxiety / Shows signs that her/his movements are being watched, constantly looks at someone who seems to be watching her/him	→ Do you have a mobile phone? Who has bought the SIM card? Can you change the SIM card whenever you want?
☐ Be unfamiliar with the local language	→ Are you allowed to go out by yourself or talk to other persons? If yes, are there any conditions?
☐ Signs of visible injuries (bruises, cuts, burns, specific tattoos, work related injuries etc.) without previous access to medical care to treat them, reluctant or unable to explain how s/he had been hurt	→ Can other people visit your workplace or is the access restricted?
☐ Isolation, confinement or surveillance	→ Are the doors and windows locked so you are unable to leave by yourself from the place you work/live?
☐ Threat of denunciation to authorities /Threats to inform family, community or public	→ Are you hosted by someone? If yes, are there any conditions? Have you been deprived of food, water, or sleep? Do you have to ask for permission to eat, drink, sleep or go to the bathroom?
☐ Have no access to their earnings	

Concept

Interactive story simulating a conversation between a helpline counsellor and a child calling the helpline

Based on anonymised transcripts of actual conversations between children and counsellors

Narrative branching with choices of different quality, but not too obvious which are "good" and "bad"

Learning Objectives

1. Adequate verbal communication skills
2. Ability to build a rapport with the child
3. Demonstrating empathy, warmth & genuineness
4. Supporting the reframing of a child's negative thoughts & feelings
5. Ability to identify and understand the child's daily life problems or needs
6. Applies problem solving techniques for the child's daily life problems
7. Ability to safely identify child abuse, exploitation and violence.

- Andriy is a 16-year-old Ukrainian boy brought to the UK with promises of a job.
- Finds himself working long construction shifts, has no access to his earnings.
- Is staying in a dormitory with other workers and has no way to leave.
- Slow to trust others after his recent experiences.
- He blames himself for the situation he is in and feels anxious and hopeless.

Child Helpline International

WebChat

hi

im andriy

Hello Andriy. Are you in a safe place to chat?

Welcome to the counselling helpline. We are here to assist with any psychological problems you may be experiencing.

Hi Andriy, my name is Natalya. I'm a counsellor here.

Stay silent.

Story #1

The counsellor must earn Andriy's trust to learn about his situation, and then work with him to find a solution - in this case to have him contact a direct crisis line for young people affected by labour trafficking.

- Ilya is a 13 year old Ukrainian boy who moved to Germany with his mother.
- Their landlord has become demanding, threatening to call the police and accuse Ilya's mother of stealing and has also recently begun sexually exploiting her.
- Ilya is reaching out via his mobile phone which he has kept hidden from the landlord.
- On the surface he puts on a brave face, but beneath this facade he is anxious and traumatised.
- He is desperate for some help to change his situation.

Story #2

The counsellor must establish if Ilya is physically safe, then work with Ilya to help him understand what his options and next steps might look like. The counsellor can then connect him with a local domestic violence shelter who are able to assist in his case.

- Olga is a 15 year old Ukrainian girl who met her "boyfriend" Mike playing a video game, although they have never met in person.
- Mike was kind to her and flattered her at first, sending small amounts of money to help out her family.
- Olga sent Mike nude photos in the past, however, now he is pressuring her to send more photos, threatening to show the original photos to her family and school if she refuses.
- Olga feels deeply ashamed of sending the original images to him. She feels like she should be able to handle this situation herself, but she is frightened of Mike and of the consequences if her family finds out.

Child Helpline International

WebChat

Hello?

Is someone there?

I'm Olga, from Ukraine.

Please help me, I really need help.

Hi Olga, I'm Natalya. What's going on for you at the moment?

I can help you. What's happening?

Hello Olga. I'm here for you. My name is Natalya and I'm a counsellor.

Welcome to the child helpline. How can we help you today?

Story #3

The counsellor will discover that Olga's mother can likely be relied on to support her. The counsellor can let Olga know that Mike is exploiting her, and reassure her that it's not her fault. They can encourage her to talk to mom about her situation, and can also - with Olga's agreement - arrange for her to connect with local police about her situation.

Reflection

Review with simulated supervisor after each story is used to evaluate the performance and encourage reflection

Intended to be used either (a) as standalone; or (b) as part of a 2-3 day workshop with other learning components

Once the counsellor has concluded their conversation with the child, they are "connected" to an in-game supervisor, who offers feedback on their responses during the chat. While the child's immediate reactions to a response can offer some limited direct feedback, the supervisor provides a more structured and instructional analysis of the counsellor's conversation

WebChat

Connected to Supervisor

Hi Natalya!

So how did your chat with Olga go?

I'm happy with it.

Me too! I think you were a great help to Olga.

So, let's take a look at my notes from the chat.

Let's start at the beginning, where your main goal was to build rapport with Olga.

Continue

Through repeated intentional practice in a simulated environment, counsellors can develop or refresh their skills at will without fear of harmful consequences for a real child. The intent is not to replace, but rather to supplement or augment additional learning.

Demo!

Design Considerations

Four options, instead of the usual three

Some choices that might look okay, but have flaws that mean they are not actually good practice, e.g., language isn't easy enough to understand; or presenting blaming, shaming or guilt in a subtle way (e.g., "have you thought about how your mum must feel?")

Counsellors might be bound (depending on the region they're working in) to break confidentiality and report a situation to the police

Deployment

Deployed by Child Helpline International
to train helpline counsellors in Eastern
Europe

Formal validation in progress

Forthcoming Paper

Eva Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová and Róisín Cotton and Charlene Putney and Maggie Brennan and Mads Haahr. "The Use of Serious Games in Knowledge- and Skills-based Digital Counselling: Applications to Trafficking in Persons in the War in Ukraine." In *Proceedings of the Joint Conference on Serious Games (JCSG)*, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, 26-27 October 2023.

https://jcsg2023.scss.tcd.ie
Trinity College Dublin, 26-27 October 2023
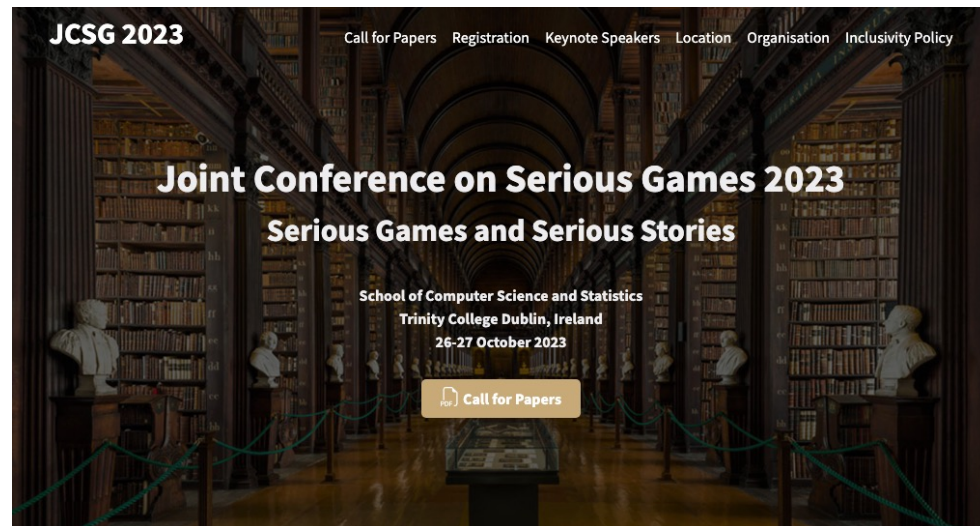
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Thank you!

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(iOS, Windows, Mac)

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