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# PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:AN ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

Augarde, Sophie

*Award date:*
2020

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# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:
# AN ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

Sophie Augarde

North Wales Clinical Psychology Programme

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology

June 2020

**Acknowledgements**

Someone once said, “Teamwork is the ability to work as a group towards a common vision, even if said vision becomes extremely blurry”. There have been countless times during this research when things have become very blurry, but I have been fortunate enough to have a fantastic team around me to help get things back into perspective.

Firstly, my research team: Michelle and Chris. Thank you for unwavering patience in the face of enormous word count wobbles and thematic freak outs. Michelle, I am in awe of your superhuman abilities to be an amazing researcher, supervisor and practicing clinician. Your supervision throughout this research has been priceless, not just for your knowledge on the subject and superb editing skills but also for keeping things grounded, calm, and most of all fun. Chris, I want to thank you for your humour, your dedication, and your trust when it came to this research. I think it’s safe to say that originally this research idea was not everyone’s cup of tea, but you stood by me and have helped make it into a reality. You truly are the biggest asset on the NWCPP.

Secondly, I need to thank my cohort. I could not have asked for a more compassionate, supportive, and hilarious bunch of people to train with. You have all been my little rocks during this research. Thanks for the rants.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my family and friends who have been so understanding of my AWOL state during the writing of this thesis. I promise to finally ‘stop being a student and get a real job’ soon. Honestly.

Finally, I would like to thank Kevin James. Thank you for all everything you do for me. I’m not a massive Elvis fan but whenever I hear this, I always think it sums up your unflinching kindness, patience, and love rather nicely:

*"When no one else can understand me*

*When everything I do is wrong*

*You give me love and consolation*

*You give me strength to carry on*

*And you're always there*

*To lend a hand*

*In everything I do*

*That's the wonder, the wonder of you"*

*The Wonder of You*, Elvis Presley, 1970

I would like to dedicate this thesis to lovely Mo who sadly passed away this year. She was one of the most generous, kind, and caring women I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. She truly looked after me when I needed it the most and I will be forever grateful for this.

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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:

AN ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

## Thesis Summary

'Through the looking glass' refers to the book by Lewis Carroll in which the character Alice steps through a looking glass into another reality. Interestingly, the terms 'through the looking glass' and 'down the rabbit hole' (another Carrollian phrase) were raised by several of the participants in the empirical study presented in this thesis. Both terms relate to a reality which is atypical, nonconforming, easy to get lost in and often doesn't make sense. It was rather poignant then that those who have committed sexual crimes against children used these phrases when describing their experiences.

Chapter one of this thesis reviews the literature on female child sex offenders over the past 20 years, presenting an update to an influential review paper by Grayston and DeLuca in 1999. This review, presented in the same narrative format as the original 1999 review, provides research updates to offender, victim, and offence characteristics, alongside a summary profile of female child sex offenders, aimed at assisting professionals working with this cohort. This update also includes new developments in the field relating to organisational abuse and the role of technology facilitated sexual abuse.

Chapter two explores the lived experiences of individuals charged with Indecent Images of Children (IIOC) offences. 12 participants were interviewed regarding their experiences of arrest and police interaction, as well as engagement with support services around their offending behaviour. Using Thematic Analysis, resulting themes highlighted the impact of arrest, motivations for offending, support seeking behaviours and prevention of IIOC

offences. These were explored in relation to current literature, and implications for police practice and support services were discussed.

The third chapter explores ways in which both the literature review and empirical paper in this thesis can contribute to theory and clinical practice in the field of child sex offending.

# Chapter one

# Literature Review

# Female perpetrators of child sexual abuse: A review of the clinical and empirical literature – a 20 year update

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*"Well, now that we have seen each other,' said the Unicorn, 'if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?"*

*Through the Looking Glass,* By Lewis Carroll

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The aim for this paper is submission to the Journal of Aggression and Violent Behaviour, and therefore follows the journal's guidelines; see https://www.elsevier.com/journals/aggression-and-violent-behavior/1359-1789/guide-for-authors

## Abstract

A comprehensive and well cited review on the topic of female child sex offenders was published by Grayston and DeLuca in 1999. Over the past twenty years, the clinical and empirical literature relating to female child sex offending has grown. In particular, more is now known about the characteristics of female child sex offenders, and the nature, type, and context of offences, as well as motivations underpinning offending. The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the current clinical and empirical literature on female child sex offenders, and to update the summary profile on these offenders as originally proposed by Grayston and DeLuca (1999). Of particular note are updates to the co-offending literature and new research regarding the use of technology, organisational abuse and recidivism in female perpetrated child sexual abuse. Implications for assessment and treatment of this offender cohort are also discussed, alongside limitations.



**Keywords:** Child sexual abuse, female perpetrator, female child sex offender, female sex offender

## Introduction

Whilst research examining adult female child sex offenders (FCSOs) remains limited, over the past twenty years, researchers and clinicians have steadily added to our understanding of this group of offenders. In particular, recent larger-scale studies (McLeod, 2015; Williams & Bierie, 2015) have reported on the prevalence, offence, and personal (i.e. demographic, clinical, and psychological) characteristics of FCSOs, as well as offering insights into the motivations underpinning female child sex offending (Brown & Kloess, 2019, Nathan & Ward, 2002). Similarly, theoretical and empirical work has developed and evaluated theories of typology for these offenders (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2008; Gannon et al., 2014; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Within the current literature, there is an expanding focus on the specific contexts (e.g. schools) within which female child sex offending can occur. Furthermore, with the exponential growth in internet child sex offending, there is now growing recognition amongst professionals and researchers (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008) that FCSOs also use on-line platforms to facilitate their offending.

A comprehensive review on the topic of FCSOs published by Grayston and DeLuca in 1999 noted that small uncontrolled case studies and descriptive summaries dominated the literature. Consequently, they stated that given the methodological limitations inherent in such studies, results should be interpreted with caution. However, within their review, and based upon the limited empirical and clinical literature available, Grayston & DeLuca (1999) offered a tentative 'summary profile' of FCSOs. Since this initial review, a considerable number of further studies relating to FCSOs have been published. As such, the aim of this paper is to offer an updated review of the literature on female-perpetrated child sex offending over the past twenty years since the publication of Grayston & DeLuca's (1999) paper. In particular, this review will update the 'summary profile' of FCSOs, with the aim of offering a further and developing understanding of females who sexually abuse children.

## Method

This paper explores clinical and empirical literature on adult FCSOs from 1998 to 2020. Large and small scale studies were included along with quantitative and qualitative analyses. Excluded studies include those focused solely on the analysis or review of non-adult FCSOs (<18 years old); FCSOs with only adult victims; non-sexual female offenders; or studies reporting solely on victim experience. Studies which had mixed samples of adult and juvenile offenders, or adult and child victims, were included if there was significant information or results regarding our target cohort (adult FCSOs).

The following search string was employed to perform the literature search in PsycInfo, Criminal Justice Database, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, and Web of Science:

("female sex* offend*" OR "female Sex* abuser" OR "female perpetrator" OR "female p?edophil*" OR "wom?n sex* offend*" OR "wom?n sex* abuser" OR "wom?n perpetrator") AND (Child* OR infan* OR baby OR babies OR "School age" OR pre-pubescent*) AND ("sex* abuse*" OR rape OR "sex* assault*" OR porn OR "indecent images" OR molest*)

For all the above searches, further criteria were added: a year range from 01/01/1998 to 01/01/2020; English language only; and journal or peer reviewed articles only. The cut-off date of 1998 was used to ensure that earlier research was not included in this review as this research had been explored in detail in Grayston and DeLuca's 1999 review. It was felt that using the date range of January 1998 to January 2020 would ensure that relevant research (particularly research produced in 1998 that may have missed the inclusion period for the Grayston and Deluca review) following on from the 1999 review would be included in this

updated literature review. Grey literature was chosen not to be included in this study. The primary reason being that grey literature has not undergone a peer-review process and it is therefore difficult to ascertain whether the content of the grey literature is based on source expertise or has been produced or moderated with a significant knowledge base behind this. Without such stringent processes as those involved in peer-review, grey literature is at a greater risk of potentially being biased, inaccurate or incomplete. Given the sensitivity and emotional charge to the topic of child sex offenders, it was felt that there was the potential for even greater bias, inaccuracies and potentially harmful/opinionated information to come from the grey literature which would have impacted on the quality of the overall review. Also, the relevance and checking of inclusion and exclusion criteria can be more difficult and time consuming (through often having to review and entire document) due to grey literature often lacking a clear formatting of the content (e.g. no abstract). Given the time constraints to produce this review, it was felt that this also led to the conclusion that grey literature would not be included. Non-English language articles were also not included in this literature review due to the time and cost of acquiring and translating these articles. It was felt that the potential bias of not including these articles did not outweigh the time and cost issues that would have been required to access them.

After duplicate removal, a total of 255 results was retrieved. A Population, Exposure and Outcome (PEO) framework was employed to screen these initial search results, checking against the inclusion criteria (adult female perpetrator, sex offence committed against child, demographic and characteristic information for victim, offender and offence, or treatment and clinical practice implications with FCSO cohort); and exclusion criteria (juvenile female perpetrator, male perpetrator, adult victims or non-sexual offence). This screening excluded 135 results, with 120 articles remaining. These 120 articles were read and assessed for further eligibility, with a further 50 articles excluded, leaving 70 papers to be included in the review.

Finally, to ensure that relevant studies were not missed, an additional search of the references of eligible studies was undertaken. This additional search strategy returned a further 16 studies eligible for inclusion, bringing the total papers included in this review to 86. See Appendix 1 for a PRISMA flow diagram of this procedure. See Appendix 2 for a table summarising the characteristics of the included studies.

A quality assessment tool was not implemented in this review. The decision not to use a quality assessment tool reflects the heterogeneity of research in this field; from large secondary data review studies to small qualitative studies, chapters and review studies; each with important contributions to consider in this under-researched topic area. Quality assessment tools tend to be specific to a type of study and therefore the implementation of one in this review would therefore not have been appropriate. This review has considered the methodological factors of the material included and further discussion regarding this can be found in the 'Discussion' section of the paper.

## The prevalence of female-perpetrated sexual abuse of children

More recent empirical data indicates that prevalence estimates for FCSO varies between 5% (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Cortoni, 2010; Sandler & Freeman, 2007) and 20% (McLeod, 2015). According to recent figures from the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS, March 2019), 4% of child sexual abuse (CSA) was perpetrated by men and women together, while a further 4% was committed by women alone. These figures are commensurate with those reported in the empirical literature, suggesting that females in the general population are responsible for up to 5% of reported child sex offences in the UK (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Cortoni, 2010; Sandler & Freeman, 2007). However, Peter (2009) reported a higher prevalence rate of 10.7% for female perpetrated sexual abuse in Canada,

consistent with a similar study in the UK (Cortoni, et al., 2017). In one of the largest US studies to examine the prevalence estimates of FCSO, McLeod (2015) indicated that 20% of substantiated CSA cases reported to child protection services was perpetrated by a female.

It is likely that obtaining accurate prevalence data for FCSO remains problematic due to factors such as discrepancies in the reporting and recording of such offences and differing legal frameworks for categorising sexual offences according to jurisdiction (Cortoni et al., 2015). For example, Cortini and colleagues (2017) in a meta-analysis examining the prevalence of FCSOs across 12 countries (including the UK) over a 13-year period, reported that 2.2% of sexual offences reported to the police were perpetrated by a female. However, this figure increased six-fold (11.6%) when self-report data was examined. Similarly, Lambert and Hammond (2009) reported that 60% (*n*=52) of a sample of 86 healthcare professionals, social workers, and volunteers working with victims of CSA in Ireland had contact with victims of FCSO, whilst 44% had contact with FCSOs themselves. As such, the true prevalence of FCSO likely remains underreported (Cortoni et al., 2017; Denov, 2003b; Gannon & Rose, 2008). It is possible that in addition to problems in the reporting and recording of FCSO, issues relating to long-standing cultural and societal views regarding females as nurturing and protective underpin difficulties in obtaining accurate prevalence data (Denov, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004).

## The nature of female-perpetrated sexual abuse of children

This section will review the literature from the past 20 years in relation to identifying the characteristics of FCSO victims, and the characteristics of and context in which the offences committed by FCSOs took place.

### Characteristics of victims

*Gender*

The majority of research indicates that FCSOs do not have a preferred victim gender (Colson et al., 2013; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2006, 2009; Lewis & Stanley, 2000). However, some studies report a preference for male victims (Bader, et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2006; Peter, 2009; Williams & Bierie, 2015). Conversely, McLeod (2015), and Tardif et al., (2005) reported a preference towards female victims. According to Colson and colleagues (2013), it is possible that the gender of the victim is immaterial, and it is simply the opportunity to engage in abuse. This may explain some of the differences reported in the research. Additional factors, such as whether the female perpetrator is accompanied by a male co-offender may also determine gender choice (Muskens et al., 2011). For example, Ten Bensel and colleagues (2019a) reported that the majority of solo FCSOs were more likely to sexually assault male victims, whilst those who co-offended with a male accomplice were more likely to have female victims.

*Age*

Based upon the empirical evidence, the age of the victims of FCSOs appear to broadly fall into two groups: from infancy to 9, and 11 to 17-year-olds. McLeod's (2015) large US study found that the mean victim age for female perpetrators was 9.4. years, whilst for male perpetrators it was 10.7. Other studies have noted younger victims. For example, Peter (2009) reported that up to 92% of her sample sexually offended against children under the age of 9, whilst up to 64% of victims were under the age of 6 in Moulden's (2007) study. As with gender, opportunity was identified as a possible reason for these younger victims, as they were more likely to have increased contact with a female caregiver compared with older children (Curti et al., 2019). In contrast, other studies have reported that up to 67.7% of

FCSO victims fell between the ages of 11 and 17 (Ferguson & Meehan, 2005; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004;).

*Relationship to the offender*

Overall, research indicates that FCSOs tend to sexually offend against children that are related and/or known to them (Comartin et al., 2018; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) in a sample of 31 convicted FSCOs found that 58% were biologically related and known to their victim compared to 23% in a male comparison group. Miccio-Fonesca (2000) found that 70% of FCSO victims were family members, whilst McLeod (2005) reported that in cases of parental perpetrated sexual abuse, women were 4.5 times more likely to be the perpetrator. As previously noted, it is possible that these results reflect the increased opportunity for females to offend against children with whom they have a relationship and/or caregiving role. Indeed, as McLeod (2015) and Curti and colleagues (2019) noted, females who may be unrelated to a victim but in a position of care are also likely to be perpetrators of CSA.

**Characteristics of offences**

Grayston & DeLuca (1999) made the distinction between 'passive' or 'indirect' offending (e.g. procuring/introducing the child to a known sexual offender [Morgan & Long, 2018], providing alcohol/illicit substances [Bader et al., 2010]), and more 'active' patterns of offending (i.e. perpetrating physical sexual acts including masturbation, penetration, and intercourse [Morgan & Long, 2018]). More 'active' patterns of sexual abuse may also be perpetrated via 'extending' daily childcare tasks, such as bathing or applying creams to covertly abuse the child. Curti and colleagues (2019) found that this was particularly applicable to younger children (<5 years), who are likely to be more dependent on their caregiver. According to Ferguson and Meehan (2005), FCSOs may also use physical force to

commit sexual abuse. They reviewed the data of 279 convicted FCSOs and reported that 86.1% of the offences involved physical force of various severity ranging from 'simple assault' in 64.% of cases, genital mutilation in 17.3% of cases, and in one case the death of the victim. Similar results, including the death of the victim, were reported by Moulden and colleagues (2007). Ferguson and Meehan (2005) found that younger FCSOs were more likely to use verbal coercion than physical force in the commission of acts of abuse. Conversely, increased severity of physical force was more characteristic of older females (>30 years). Moreover, there is some research to suggest that the severity of sexual acts relates to whether a female is acting alone or with a co-offender. For example, Vandiver and Kercher (2004) reported that more intrusive forms of sexual abuse, such as object penetration, was more prevalent among solo FCSOs. Conversely, Nathan and Ward (2001) found FCSOs were more likely to play an indirect role in aiding and abetting their male co-offender during joint abuse. In comparison to male sex offenders, Peter (2009) reported a lower incidence of completed or attempted penetration and oral abuse carried out by FCSOs, and that the most common form of abuse for both MCSOs and FCSOs involved touching or fondling of the genitals.

Findings also indicate that FCSOs may abuse more than one child (Peter, 2009). In a sample of female sex offenders—90% of whom had sexually abused a child—Comartin and colleagues (2018) reported that 34% of FCSOs had abused more than one victim, whilst just under half of the sample reported repeat offences against the same victim, ranging from two to 12 occasions. Furthermore, 56% of offending continued for up to 11 months, with some occurring for one year or longer.

*Solo vs co-offending FCSOs*

Over the past 20 years, research has continued to corroborate the finding that a significant number of FCSOs will victimise children in conjunction with an accomplice.

Typically, the co-offender is a male, (Budd et al., 2017; Ten Bensel et al., 2019a; Vandiver, 2006; Wijkman et al., 2010; Williams & Bierie, 2015), who the FCSO is romantically involved with (Gannon et al., 2008; Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Ten Bensel et al., 2019a), and in a relationship characterised by coercion (Comartin et al., 2018; Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2008; Vandiver, 2006). However, coercion cannot always be assumed. For example, a study conducted by Nathan and Ward (2002), 75% of FCSOs in their sample offended in conjunction with males, yet only half reported feeling coerced by their male co-offender. The remaining females reported playing an active role in the offence, citing jealousy, power and sexual arousal as motivators. Within the co-offending relationship, other factors such as high dependency, needing to please, and fear of rejection have all been identified as potential drivers for female-perpetrated CSA (Gannon et al., 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2001; Vandiver, 2006).

Notably, research indicates that women who co-offend tend to have a history of abusive relationships (Comartin et al., 2018), psychological problems including difficulties regulating emotions and impulsivity (Williams et al., 2019), unstable lifestyles (Elliott et al., 2010), and mental health disorders (Ten Bensel et al., 2019b; Williams et al., 2019). These women may also have lower intellectual functioning, making them more vulnerable to grooming by a male accomplice (Wijkman et al., 2010). With regards to victim choice, if there is a male accomplice, the victim is much more likely to be female and related to the female offender (Muskens et al., 2011; Ten Bensel et al., 2019a; Vandiver, 2006). For example, Ten Bensel and colleagues (2019a) reported that 52% of the co-offences in their sample were mothers who had abused their own children.

Emerging data also indicates that FCSOs can engage in group-based abuse (Budd et al., 2017; Morgan & Long, 2018; Wijkman & da Silva, 2020). In contrast to single victim abuse, group child sex offences were perpetrated by older women (Morgan & Long, 2018;

Wijkman & da Silva, 2020) and characterised by increasing levels of physical violence (Budd et al., 2017; Wijkman & da Silva, 2020), including the use of weapons (Morgan & Long, 2018). Victims of group-based sex offences are likely to be older (Budd et al., 2017; Morgan & Long, 2018), female (Wijkman & da Silva, 2020), strangers (Budd et al., 2017; Morgan & Long, 2018) and have substance misuse and mental health problems (Morgan & Long, 2018).

## Context specific female-perpetrated child sexual abuse

### *Abuse in the organisational context*

Over the past decade there has been increasing focus on females who commit CSA within organisational contexts. Recent research estimates the prevalence of CSA within such contexts at 25.9% (Ratliff & Watson, 2014). This is corroborated by earlier research, which reports prevalence rates of 4-43% (Hunt, 2006; Shakeshaft, 2004). In terms of demographic characteristics, research indicates that females who abuse children within the organisational context are typically in their early to mid-thirties (Darling & Antonopoulos, 2013; Darling et al., 2018; Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019), have a higher socio-economic status and level of education, (Darling et al., 2018; Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019), and have no prior history of convictions (Christensen & Darling, 2020; Darling et al., 2018).

Existing data suggests that FCSOs who offend within an organisational context tend to offend alone and are more likely to abuse a sole victim who is an older male student around the age of 15 (Darling & Antonopoulos, 2013; Darling et al., 2018; Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019). Furthermore, recent research indicates that such females may engage a child in sexual activity by targeting existing vulnerabilities, such as troubled family relationships (Darling et al., 2018) in order to become closer to the child (Darling & Hackett, 2020). Additionally, using bribes or rewards such as awarding better grades, or building upon a

casual relationship as a family friend for example (Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019) have been reported as methods used to facilitate sexual abuse within organisational contexts. Often, these relationships are further facilitated via the use of technology, such as texting and social media. Darling et al (2018) found that two-thirds of female teacher CSA cases used electronic communication to facilitate contact with the victim

Similar to FCSOs who offend more generally, the motivations underpinning offending in organisational FCSOs appear to centre on the need for intimacy, sexual gratification, and emotional support (Christensen & Darling, 2020; Darling et al., 2018; Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019). Organisational FCSOs also appear to have additional difficulties in their lives such as unstable relationships (Steely & Ten Bensel, 2019), emotional lability and low self-esteem (Darling et al., 2018; Darling & Antonopoulos, 2013), and mental health issues (Christensen & Darling, 2020)

Unlike non-organisational FCSOs and MCSOs, the nature of the abuse perpetrated by FCSOS in an organisational setting is reported as less severe (less likely to engage in intercourse and a higher rate of non-contact abuse compared to male counterparts) and lasts for a shorter duration (Christensen & Darling, 2020). For example, in a study by Darling and colleagues (2018) less severe sexually abusive acts such as kissing, hugging, and handholding were common (46% of the entire sample of FCSOs reported engaging in such acts, *n*=33); and abuse typically lasted between one and six months (41% *n*=29). Emerging data also appears to indicate that FCSOs in the organisational context very rarely end the abuse and in the majority of case, are exposed through 'unofficial' streams such as peers, partners/spouses or family members, rather than the organisational setting itself (Ratliff & Watson, 2014). It is currently unclear whether these findings reflect the generally reported bias towards male teachers as engaging in sexual abuse (Mackelprang & Becker, 2017). Indeed, Christensen and Darling (2020) reported that whilst a third of male teachers in their sample received prior

warnings due to sexualised behaviours towards students, none of the female teachers did, possibly indicating what the authors term a "gender blindness" towards FCSO in the organisational context.

*Technology assisted female-perpetrated child sexual abuse*

Research examining the use of technology by FCSOs to facilitate abuse has predominantly focused upon: 1) FCSOs who use technology to initiate inappropriate relationships with children to fulfil sexual needs i.e. "grooming" (with or without contact offences taking place); 2) FCSOs who engage in CSA as part of an online relationship with a partner/co-offender; and 3) FCSOs who create, produce, and share child pornography and engage in pro-abuse online communities.

Currently, there is little research examining how FCSOs use technology to 'groom' or initiate sexual contact with children. However, Finkelhor and colleagues (2000) using a national telephone survey found that 19% of the 1,501 surveyed children aged 10-17 in the USA were approached for sex by a female through the internet at least once in a 1-year period. Nevertheless, research indicates that very few of these FCSOs are identified in 'real life' by the police (Martellozzo et al., 2010). Darling and colleagues (2018) found that FCSOs used online concealing methods such as fake profiles to avoid getting caught, perhaps indicating that there is an even greater amount of virtual female-perpetrated CSA taking place behind veiled profiles (Stanley, 2001).

Only a small number of studies have examined the nature of female perpetrated CSA, which occurs within the context of an adult on-line relationship. The available studies suggest that these females experience multiple vulnerabilities, including low self-esteem, insecurity, and high dependency in relationships, which could be exploited by MCSOs in online

relationships with the aim of accessing the female's child/ren (Elliott & Ashfield, 2011). This may be more common in online adult relationships where it is possible that the virtual element of the relationship gives the perception that less harm is caused to the child/ren (Martellozzo et al., 2010). Furthermore, FCSOs may be motivated to engage in this type of abuse in order to gratify their male partner (Bickart et al., 2019; Gannon, et al., 2008; Gannon et al., 2012; Prat et al., 2014). Elliott and colleagues (2010) further note that in some cases, FCSOs in co-offending relationships may become conditioned to this sexual arousal and may seek to initiate abuse independently to meet their own sexual desires.

As Bickart and colleagues, (2019) note, there is a dearth of research regarding female-perpetrated online child pornography offences. In the UK, recent data from the Ministry of Justice (Parke & Karsna, 2019) indicates that in 2017, 98% of convictions for CSA were male. Of the 2% (n=103) of females convicted, a significant number (n=23) were involved in creating, distributing, or publishing indecent images of children (IIOC). Bickart and colleagues (2019) reported that in their sample of females convicted for online sexual offences, two-thirds (n=65) co-offended with a male. In the solo offending group (n=33), 17 of the females reported collecting child pornography for their own private viewing. FCSOs may also access internet facilities to meet, correspond and share pornography on pro-abuse/paedophilia websites (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008). In a small, qualitative study analysing the personal stories of six women (and the FAQ page) on a pro-paedophilia website for women, Lambert and O'Halloran (2008) found encouragement to share child pornography, to fulfil sexual needs, and to seek validation from those with similar desires and beliefs. Lambert and O'Halloran discussed that women engaging with such online material were likely to reinforce pro-abuse beliefs, heightening the risk of contact abuse for sexual gratification or the production of child pornography.

## The characteristics and dynamics of female child sex offenders

The review of literature in this section will cover demographic and personal characteristics and experiences of FCSOs.

### Demographic characteristics

Empirical and clinical literature suggests that the majority of adult FCSOs are in their 20s or early 30s (Darling et al., 2018; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Ten Bensel et al., 2019b; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). However, in a sample of 11 victim cases reported for suggestive indications of CSA by a female, Curti and colleagues (2019) reported that the mean age of FCSOs was 54.4 years. Additionally, females who sexually abuse within organisational settings also tend to be older (Darling et al., 2018). In McLeod's (2015) study, both male and female CSOs were of a similar age (33.2 and 33.7 years, respectively). However, despite the *mean* ages being similar, McLeod found the distribution of perpetrator age varied between male and females, suggesting that in comparison to MCSOs, FCSOs showed a smaller window of offending in their lifespans (although this may also reflect lack FCSO identification in the early stages of offending). Research indicates that the majority of FCSOs are white, followed by a smaller population of black offenders (Comartin et al., 2018; Ferguson & Meehan, 2005; Ten Bensel et al., 2019b; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Moreover, FCSOs tend to have few qualifications and minimally required education levels (Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Nathan & Ward, 2001, Tardif et al., 2005; Wijkman et al., 2010). Several studies have also reported a higher proportion of FCSOs are mothers in comparison to female violent offenders, and the general population (Fazel et al., 2010; Ten Bensel et al., 2019b).

### Personal characteristics and experiences

*Previous victimisation*

Consistent with Grayston and De Luca (1999), current research indicates that FCSOs are commonly victims of sexual abuse. A significant proportion of FCSOs have histories of being sexual abused during childhood (Bickart et al., 2019; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Levenson et al., 2015; Wijkman et al., 2010) with incidence rates of up to 80% (Lewis & Stanley, 2000). This is higher than in non-sexual female offenders (Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Strickland, 2008), and male sex offenders (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000; Oliver, 2007), and three-times that of the general female population (Levenson et al., 2015). Similarly, research indicates that in comparison with these groups, FCSOs with a history of childhood sexual abuse experienced abuse over a longer period, of greater intensity and severity (e.g. multiple perpetrators, incest and violence) and from an earlier age (Christopher et al., 2007; Miccio-Fonesca, 2000; Oliver, 2007; Rousseau & Cortoni, 2010; Strickland, 2008; Wijkman et al., 2010).

*Mental health, substance misuse and cognitive difficulties*

Over the past twenty years, several studies have examined the association between childhood experiences of abuse and later mental health problems in FCSOs. Research supports the association between these early experiences and a range of mental health problems in adulthood, including borderline personality traits (Christopher et al., 2007), mood disorders, psychotic disorders, and difficulties with substance misuse (Bickart et al., 2019). Experience of childhood sexual abuse may also impact self-esteem (Ten Bensel et al., 2019b), lead to problematic attachment patterns in adulthood (Ten Bensel et al., 2019b, Wijkman et al., 2010) as well as difficulties in psychological adjustment (Levenson et al., 2015, Ten Bensel et al., 2019b; Wijkman et al., 2010). Problems with illicit substances and alcohol use appear prevalent in FCSOs (McLeod, 2015; Strickland, 2008). Women who sexually offend against children also appear to experience a co-morbidity of complex problems. For example, Wijkman and colleagues (2010) reported that in a sample of 85

FCSOs, 64 of the women reported problems with mental health, drug use, violence, and past sexual, physical or psychological abuse.

*Mental health*: In a recent study of 98 women serving a sentence for online CSA, Bickart and colleagues (2019) found that prior to custody, 47% OF FCSOs had received outpatient mental health treatment, whilst 15% had a history of inpatient mental health treatment. Moreover, 35% of the sample had been treated with psychotropic medication and 25% had a documented history of suicide attempts. Similarly, Fazel and colleagues (2010) found that 34 of their sample of 93 FCSOs had received psychiatric inpatient care. They reported that the risk of developing psychosis was 16-times greater in the FCSO group compared with non-offending controls, but there were no significant differences in the prevalence of psychotic disorders between the FCSO group and other non-sexual female offenders. A number of other studies have also reported similar findings (DeCou et al., 2015; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Strickland, 2008). More recent research also indicates that in comparison to co-offending FCSOs, those who abuse alone experience greater levels of psychopathology, mood disorders, and have a history of mental health and substance abuse difficulties (Gillespie et al., 2015; Muskens et al., 2011).

Strickland (2008) found that FCSOs displayed other features of mental health difficulties such as greater inferiority and insecurity. In a large study of 128 FSOs and 136 MSOs, Miller, Turner and Henderson (2009) found that compared to MSOs, females had more extensive and significant psychopathology (including elevated scores for anxiety, depression, BPD and psychosis). Williams and colleagues (2019) found FCSOs showed lower levels of self-esteem, assertiveness and increased levels of loneliness compared to MSOs. Interestingly, Vandiver and Walker (2002) found that FCSOs were more likely to initiate psychotherapy than their male equivalents.

*Substance misuse*: McLeod (2015) found that FCSOs are nearly three-and-a-half-times more likely to be using drugs than their male counterparts. Fazel and colleagues (2010) reported that their sample of FCSOs were 23-times more likely to be hospitalised with substance abuse problems compared with a non-offending control group. However, they did not find any group differences in substance abuse rates between FCSOs and non-sexual female offenders, which is commensurate with earlier studies (e.g. Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Strickland, 2008). Interestingly, Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) reported that FCSOs abused substances less than male and other non-sex offender comparative groups; but found that those who did, reported more drug than alcohol abuse compared to their male counterparts.

*Cognitive and neurodevelopmental difficulties:* Wijkman and colleagues (2010) reported that 75 of 111 (68%) FSCOs in custody had borderline or below average intellectual functioning. McLeod (2015) found that a perpetrator is twice as likely to be female if they have a learning disability or difficulties. Furthermore, difficulties in cognitive functioning (Bickart et al., 2019) and the presence of seizure disorders (Lewis & Stanley, 2000) have been noted in FCSOs. However, specific problems with executive functioning have not been reported (Plfugradt & Allen, 2010), indicating that female-perpetrated sex offending may not necessarily be underpinned by deficits in impulsivity, response inhibition, nor cognitive rigidity. However, given the paucity of research in this area, these findings require replication. Similarly, there appears to be very little research regarding the role of neurodevelopmental disorders, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and female child sex offending.

*Deviant perceptions regarding sexual abuse*

In the past 20 years more research has focused on FCSOs cognitions, schemas and beliefs regarding sexual abuse, particularly in developing typologies of offenders and models of offending (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2008; Gannon et al., 2012; Gannon et al., 2014; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004;). The findings from these more recent studies suggest that a number of motivational schemas (Implicit Theories - IT) underlie FCSO such as uncontrollability; viewing their actions in the context of a dangerous world; viewing children as sexual beings, and minimising the nature of harm caused by their abusive behaviour towards children (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012). Of particular interest is the IT viewing children as sexual beings, which Elliott et al (2010) found was more prominent in solo offending FCSOs, and in offenders who may have been sexually abused themselves. Cognitions placing the child in the 'seducer' role (Darling et al., 2018; Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008), and which regard intergenerational sex as natural and an opportunity to provide a sexual education to the child (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008) have been identified and may be important in supporting the ITs (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012).

In an update of Grayston and DeLuca's review, there is a greater emphasis on how FCSO's beliefs about relationships with men impact their perceptions of CSA. Research has found that FCSOs reported idealising children and wanting to nurture them, viewing their sexual behaviour with children as less harmful or abusive than MCSOs' (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008; Lawson, 2008). Some FCSOs have identified with the IT of uncontrollability in their offending (DeCou et al., 2015), particularly when feeling threatened by a male partner (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016) or sexually abusing a child in order to 'protect' the child from the abuse of the male co-offender (Beech et al., 2009). However, some FCSOs believe that men are entitled to behave how they wish towards women and children (Gannon et al., 2012) and, if co-offending, would place their partner's needs above their own and the child's (Elliott et al., 2010).

*Deviant arousal and interest patterns*

Although a small study (n=12), Nathan and Ward (2002) reported that women who abused with a co-offender were not always the victims of coercion and could play an active role, enjoying the experience. They also found that solo FCSOs were motivated by and experienced sexual arousal (41.7%) during the committal of the offence. Other studies show similar findings of the presence of sexual interests and motivations in females that perpetrate CSA (Beech et al., 2009; Cortoni, 2018; Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008; Moulden et al., 2007; Pflugradt & Allen, 2015). It is unclear whether the significance and frequency of paraphilic interests is present in many FCSO cases (Cortoni, 2018) or restricted to a certain subset (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008).

The nature of the relationship between the FCSO and her co-offender may also impact motivations to offend. Nathan & Ward (2002) found that jealousy, rejection, and revenge were the primary motivations for offending reported by FCSOs in co-offending relationships. FCSOS would use these motivations to 'teach' their partners or their victim 'a lesson' (Nathan & Ward, 2002). The women in this study reported power and affection as motivators, which was also seen in Lawson (2008) where the FCSOs referenced emotions and relationships when explaining reasons for offending. Women in co-offending relationships may use the partner as an excuse to blame or to try to avoid responsibility for their actions. This is possibly an attempt by the FCSO to hide deviant arousal and interests and brings into question the true role of coercion in co-offending relationships (Martellozzo et al., 2010).

*Domestic violence*

Research shows that a significant proportion of females who perpetrate CSA have a history of, or are in, violent and abusive relationships (Bader et al., 2010; Burkey & Ten

Bensel, 2015; Comartin et al., 2018, Gannon et al., 2008). Gannon and colleagues (2008) reported that 91% of their sample of FCSOs had experienced some type of domestic abuse prior to offending and Wijkman et al (2010) found that of the women who had partners in their sample (72%), a quarter had experienced physical abuse, a third reported ongoing violence, and a small number reported rape by their partner. The abuse perpetrated by violent partners towards FCSOs ranged from physical violence, intimidation, sexual abuse, including rape, and stalking (Comartin et al., 2018, West et al., 2011). Intimate partner abuse (IPA) was more prolific in FCSOs who reported coercion by their male co-offenders and were forced to participate in sexual criminal behaviours (Burkey & Ten Bensel, 2015). It has been hypothesised that IPA may have led directly to females sexually abusing children if the co-offender was coercing or forcing them to do so using threat and violence. Less intense forms of abuse such as verbal threat and dominance have created or exacerbated existing vulnerability factors leading to sexually abusive behaviour (Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2008).

*Family and marital dysfunction*

Studies have shown that a significant number of FCSOS have experienced past trauma of family dysfunction. Comartin and colleagues (2018) found in their sample of 50 FSOs that nearly 90% reported at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) and 81% reported instances of abuse or neglect during childhood. Other studies found high ACE scores in FCSOs relating to sexual abuse (Levenson et al., 2015; Wijkman et al., 2010), parental separation or divorce (Pflugradt et al., 2018), parental domestic violence (Levenson et al., 2015; Wijkman et al., 2010), severe parental psychopathology (Levenson et al., 2015; Wijkman et al., 2010), and incarcerated family members (Levenson et al., 2015; Pflugradt et al., 2018). Disruptions in parental attachment and parental rejection have also been identified in FCSOs (Elliott et al., 2010; Tardif et al., 2005), which has been found to increase the

likelihood of the female having a co-offender by three-fold (Comartin et al., 2018). However, other studies have failed to find differences in solo and co-offending FCSOs regarding such personal factors (Gillespie et al., 2015).

A small but detailed study by Tardif and colleagues (2005) found that FCSOs who had been married or cohabited did so at a relatively young age (20.9 years) and that these relationships had significant problems including substance misuse (46.2% of the sample), and violent behaviour (38.5%). 23.1% had committed incest with their children. FCSOs from dysfunctional homes who are now raising their own children may be more at risk of violence, vulnerable to coercion from partners, and unable to protect their children from abuse (Comartin et al., 2018; Gannon et al., 2008). They may also find it difficult to care for their child (Comartin et al., 2018; Levenson et al., 2015) and may be known to childcare services for concerns regarding abuse and neglect of their children (Bader et al., 2010; Elliott et al., 2010). FCSOs have difficulties relating to family, social relationships and their local community (Williams et al., 2019) and their interpersonal problems may lead them into deviant or co-offending relationships in order to meet their social needs (DeCou et al., 2015).

*Past offending behaviours and recidivism*

Grayston and DeLuca's (1999) review did not cover this area. However, there are a growing number of studies exploring its importance when profiling FCSOs. The majority of studies investigating prior offences in FCSOs found that they have rarely committed previous **sex** offences; between 1% (Bickart et al., 2019) and 5% (Elliott et al., 2010; Ten Bensel et al., 2019a). However, between 16% (Elliott et al., 2010) and 63% (Bader et al., 2010) have committed a prior **non-sexual** crime, but they are still less likely than MSOs to have a prior criminal history (Ten Bensel et al., 2019a; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). This is important

because unlike MSOs, previous convictions for violent or sexual crimes may not be a key marker to predicting offending in females (Elliott et al., 2010).

Re-offending (recidivism) rates for FCSOs appears to be very low – approximately 1% (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Freeman & Sandler, 2008). Cortoni and colleagues (2010) performed a meta-analysis of 10 studies regarding FCSO recidivism and found that those who re-offend are 10-times more likely to be convicted of a non-sexual crime than a sexual crime (although this is still less re-offending rates for MSOs - Freeman & Sandler, 2008). FCSOs who re-offend are more likely to have prior convictions (Sandler & Freeman, 2009) and to have experienced traumatic events (Bader et al., 2010). It may be that FCSOs respond positively to the criminal justice system and do not re-offend. However, some researchers have argued that the true prevalence of FCSO recidivism isn't recognised due to stigmatisation resulting in a lack of victim reporting (Denov, 2004) as well as the justice system not convicting FCSOs due to predisposed biases and beliefs (Denov, 2001).

## Discussion

### A summary profile of female sex offenders

FCSOs are a heterogenous group of offenders with no 'typical' profile and caution is needed when interpreting any FCSO profile due to limitations of the research in this area (see 'Limitations' section for further detail). Despite these considerations, common characteristics were reported which can offer a tentative summary profile of FCSOs. Findings from this review are consistent with the profile described by Grayston and DeLuca in that the majority of FCSOs are in their 20s or early 30s, are white, and have few qualifications. Another consistent theme from the 1999 profile is the likely presence of abuse, either in childhood or adulthood, and that this may have been severe and enduring in nature. The woman is likely to have experienced other adverse childhood experiences such as witnessing parental domestic

violence, neglect and had a generally disrupted or dysfunctional upbringing. Like Grayston and DeLuca (1999), this review found that FCSOs tended to marry early in life and had intimate relationships that were punctuated by conflict, violence, and abuse. This may act as a factor in the sexual abuse of children by women, particularly in co-offending partnerships. The woman is likely to have difficulties forming and maintaining general relationships and may be isolated from friends and the local community. Building on Grayston and DeLuca's findings, this review found that FCSOs' current lifestyle may also be dysfunctional and chaotic, and if they have children, there may be social care reports of poor parenting, neglect and sexual behaviours.

Similar to Grayston and DeLuca's profile, FCSOs are likely to have mental health difficulties and may be diagnosed with personality disorders, depression and anxiety rather than acute disorders such as psychosis. They also may present with more generalised difficulties in self-esteem, greater insecurities and poor coping skills. Substance misuse may be present. Also similar to Grayston & DeLuca, FCSOs may present with learning difficulties, but this review does not necessarily support the 1999 finding of difficulties in judgement or impulse control in FCSOs.

Consistent with the 1999 profile, there still appears to be no typical pattern concerning the motives of FCSOs in their offending behaviour. However, factors such as sexual desire and meeting one's own sexual needs, which in the past may have been dismissed, should be considered. Similar to the findings of Grayston and DeLuca, this review found FCSOs are motivated by sexual arousal and other factors such as power, rejection and jealousy. Claims of coercion by FCSOs in co-offending relationships should be considered with caution as they may mask true sexual deviancy in order to protect themselves. In contrast to Grayston and DeLuca, this review found FCSOs may not admit guilt and may not appear to regret offending, apart from about the consequences to themselves. They may hold supportive

beliefs such as the sexual acts being consensual, educational or the child initiating this in some way.

Similar to Grayston and DeLuca's profile, this paper found that FCSO victims are likely to be either males or females, across a spectrum of ages. However, the victims are likely to be related or known to the offender and the victim choice will most likely depend on opportunity to offend. This review supports some of Grayston & DeLuca's (1999) findings, such as a large proportion of FCSOs engaging in abuse of a moderate intensity, that FCSOs often had more than one victim and committed multiple sexual abuse offences. However, unlike Grayston and DeLuca, this review finds that physical force, violence, and threats were frequently used by FCSOs, particularly with older victims. This paper found that although there is a significant number of offences committed by FCSOs in the presence of an accomplice (especially in comparison to MCSOs), solo offending is still the most prevalent form, accounting for a large proportion of overall female-perpetrated CSA. The presence of a co-offender may also warrant investigation into FCSO involvement in the creation, production or sharing of IIOC.

Grayston & DeLuca did not discuss a previous offending profile, but it would appear that FCSOs have few prior convictions, and these were more likely to be for non-sexual offences. Recidivism in FCSOs is low, although this is only considered when looking at official reports/conviction rates.

FCSOs are a heterogenous group of offenders, however, certain characteristics were common among this cohort and represented in this summary profile. These characteristics may indicate to clinicians and professionals those potentially at risk of offending. However, there will be a cohort of offenders who do not share these characteristics and there will be a cohort of females that have multiple risk factors associated with FCSO who do not go on to

sexually offend. Research into motivational factors and examining individual differences regarding FCSO is progressing, however there is still a lack of understanding around this. The summary profile of FCSOs should be interpreted with this in mind, and to use additional sources of information when considering the likelihood of offending behaviour.

## Assessment and treatment implications

### *Assessment*

Risk assessment of FCSOs show there are specific gender differences in offending rates, recidivism and criminal behaviour but unfortunately assessment tools acknowledging this are limited (Cortoni & Gannon, 2013, 2016; Cortoni, 2018). There is currently no validated tool for assessing risk of re-offending in FCSOs. Low baseline rates for initial offending and re-offending seen in FCSOs make it difficult to identify the risk markers needed to develop such tools (Cortoni, 2010; Cortoni & Gannon, 2013, 2016). The tools used by clinicians working with FCSOs are aimed specifically at MCSOs, which may lead to inaccuracies in assessing risk and may also overlook key or unique factors related to recidivism in FCSOs (Cortoni & Gannon 2013, 2016; Cortoni, 2018).

Evidence indicates that gender matters when considering tools for assessing treatment needs, but again such assessment tools are limited (Cortoni & Gannon, 2013, 2016). Studies have recommended a more systemic and comprehensive needs assessment, particularly regarding well-being, for FCSOs (Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver, 2006). Gannon et al (2008) developed the Descriptive Model of Female Sexual Offending (DMFSO), which identified three preliminary patterns for female sexual offending: Explicit-Approach (women who actively planned their offending, experienced sexual gratification and required little/no coercion to offend); Directed-Avoidant (women who did not want to offend but were

intensely coerced into doing so, finding it a negative experience); and Implicit-Disorganised (highly impulsive, little planning and mixed affect in experiences of perpetrating the offence).

An Offence Pathway Checklist has been developed alongside the DMFSO to help identify basic offence style (Gannon et al., 2012). The DMFSO and checklist may help to guide professionals when assessing FCSOs' treatment needs. For example, co-offending FCSOs may require assessments which focus on environmental issues such as domestic violence. Solo-offending FCSOs may need an assessment focussed on mental health difficulties and past sexual abuse (Gillespie et al., 2015).

*Treatment*

As discussed by Cortoni and Gannon (2013, 2016), the understanding of FCSOs criminogenic needs is still in its infancy and specific treatments have not yet been developed. However, research has highlighted specific treatment needs of FCSOs regarding offence support cognitions, relationship difficulties (e.g. dependency), difficulties in regulating emotions and unhelpful coping strategies, and deviant or inappropriate sexual interests (Cortoni & Gannon, 2013, 2016; Wijkman et al., 2010). Other factors such as goals/motivations due to financial benefits, wishing to seek revenge, jealousy or wishing to cause harm, also need to be considered.

The DMFSO may be used to inform the treatment needs for each FCSO sub-type. For example, Directed-Avoidant may need treatment around relationships and assertiveness, and Implicit-Disorganised may need support in regulating emotions and developing helpful coping skills (Gannon et al., 2008). Past and current trauma is a consistent feature in the lives of FCSOs and may be a starting point for treatment in some women (Elliott et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Turner et al., 2008; Wijkman et al., 2010). Support to identify positive reasons not to reoffend, treating mental health disorders and substance

addiction, learning about relationship patterns and how to have healthy non-abusive or coercive relationships, more effective coping strategies (rather than substances) and how to manage stress and sexual needs in a positive way are examples of possible treatment (Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon & Rose, 2008; Miller et al., 2009; Pflugradt & Allen, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). Interestingly, Gannon & Rose (2008) suggest that the Good Lives Model (GLM), which is already used with MSOs, may be beneficial to FCSOs as it is individualised to the offender's needs, focuses on rehabilitation rather than punishment, and supports offenders to learn the skills they need to live a meaningful life which satisfies their needs and values without re-engaging in maladaptive and criminal behaviours.

Research into patterns, specific or predictive markers, and factors of offending for FCSOs is still in its embryonic stages. Clinicians should be careful of making assumptions or conclusions regarding this cohort, and should be wary of using tools designed for MSOs (Cortoni & Gannon, 2013, 2016; Oliver, 2007). Neglecting the gender specific aspects of this offence and the individual factors of female offenders may lead to a narrow view of this group's treatment options. Another important aspect for clinicians to consider is awareness of their own feelings and potential biases around females who sexually offend against children, and to consider whether this may influence their practices (Denov, 2004).

### Limitations

This review has aimed to capture the findings of current clinical and empirical research in an area that is under-researched. It has aimed to present these findings in a narrative style focusing predominantly on the outcome of the research, updating the previously well cited and comprehensive work of Grayston and DeLuca (1999) with a view to provide researchers and clinicians in this area an accessible overview of female child sex offenders. However, this aim and the methodology of attempting to implement a systematic review was not always

complementary to one another, as the procedures required for a stringent systematic review may have compromised the quantity and detail of the research currently included in this review. One of the key difficulties in trying to compare studies, carried out in a more traditional systematic review, was in the heterogeneity of the research studies themselves and thus their implicit limitations. For example, the sample of these studies may cause biases in the data e.g. FCSOs in many studies are incarcerated or detained in mental health facilities, perhaps skewing data to reflect the seriousness of their crime or psychological disturbance (Oliver, 2007; Vandiver, 2006). They may also participate in research for secondary gains. In addition, few studies include FCSOs that were highly suspected but not convicted, or those who may be under a community order, so significant factors about these FCSOs may be overlooked. Although larger scale studies are appearing (McLeod, 2015), many still involve a small localised sample, which are predominately located in the Western world, adding to generalisability difficulties (e.g. Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009) (Vandiver, 2006). This review noted that studies of FCSOs sometimes used unclear criteria and categories for their samples. For example, combining FCSOs with female adult sex offenders, or mixing adult abusers with juveniles. Often it was not clear in the methodology whether the sample had committed sexual crimes against children or children and adults. This needs to be considered when discussing the specific profile of an adult FCSO. Equally methodologies may lack a clear definition of what the sexual abuse being studied constitutes, as CSA encompasses a wide range of behaviours.

These variations and limitations in the research studies this review is based on has to be considered, and caution advised in the interpretation of the summarised findings, particularly the summary profile of female sex offenders. The authors of this review felt that the priority lay in the presenting of the findings from the research studies and reviews due to the relatively limited number of these, and the importance and significance of this topic area.

It was felt that the stringent approach necessary to meet all requirements of a full systematic review would have led to the loss of these important research findings due to the limitations discussed above. Therefore, the authors chose to stay loyal to the more narrative systematic review approach as used in the original Grayston and DeLuca review (1999) in order to systematically explore the relevant research but also not hinder likelihood of inclusion too greatly. It is hoped that as more research emerges in this field, the opportunities to carry out further reviews will be present and achievable.

**Disclosure of interests:** The authors report no conflict of interest.

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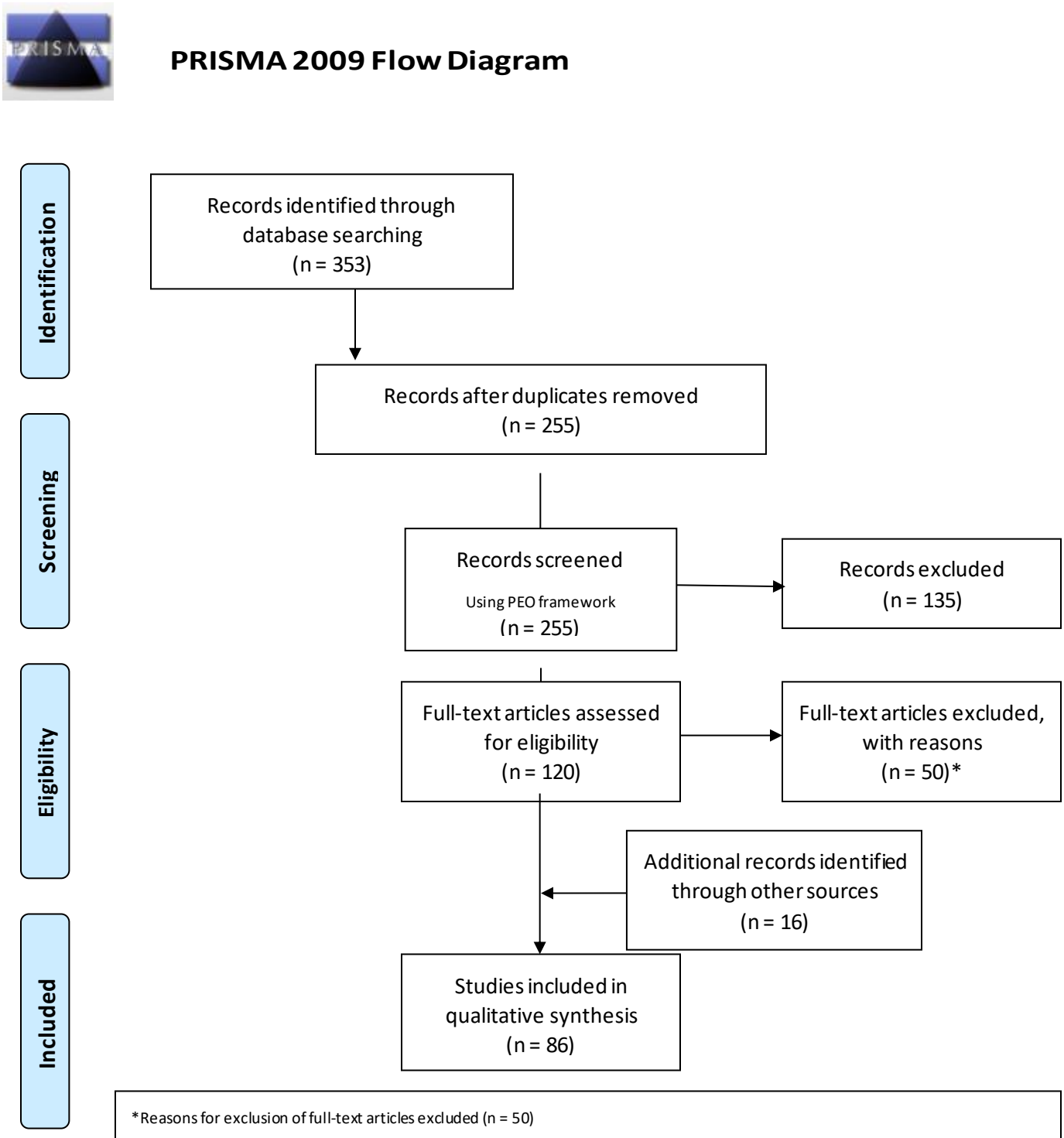
## Appendices

**Appendix 1:** PRISMA flow diagram mapping out the different phases of a systematic review, such as records identified, included and excluded.



**Appendix 2:** A table summarising the characteristics of the included studies

| Author | Date of publication | Country | Sample information | Methodology employed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bader, S. M., Welsh, R., & Scalora, M. J. | 2010 | USA | N = 57 cases<br>Pop. = Female child molesters who paroled or were released between 1994 and 2004 in Nebraska after incarceration | Multiple record reviews and comparisons using two outcome measures for recidivism |
| Baker, A. J. L., Curtis, P. A., & Papa-Lentini, C. | 2006 | USA | N = 399 cases<br>Pop. = child victims of sexual abuse (including female perpetrated) within the welfare system | Case review and data base analysis assessing variables related to child sexual abuse |
| Beech, A. R., Parrett, N., Ward, T., & Fisher, D. | 2009 | UK | N = 15<br>Pop. = incarcerated female child sexual abusers | Semi-structured interviews carried out and analysed. |
| Bickart, W., McLearen, A. M., Grady, M. D., & Stoler, K. | 2019 | USA | N = 98<br>Pop. = Female online sexual offenders in the standing population of the federal prison system in November 2012. | Data collected from pre-sentence reports for the offenders and coded for presence of the study's variables. Descriptive analyses reported. |
| Brown, K. M., & Kloess, J. A. | 2019 | UK | N = 13 articles<br>Pop. = Child (<18) contact sexual offences by adult female offender (>18) | Systematic literature review |
| Budd, K. M., Bierie, D. M., & Williams, K. | 2017 | USA | N = 47,287 sex crime incidents<br>Pop. = solo female sex offenders (n = 29,238), co-offending pairs consisting of | The National Incident-Based Reporting System data was used to analyse incidents of sexual offending committed by the four female |

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| | | | one male and one female sex offender (n = 11,112), all-female groups (n = 2,669), and multiple perpetrator groups that consist of a combination of three or more female sex offenders and male sexual offenders (MSOs; n = 4,268) | groupings sex offenders through descriptive statistics, bivariate comparisons and multinomial logistic regression model. |
| Burkey, C. R., & Ten Bensel, T. | 2015 | USA | N = 55<br>Pop. = female sex offenders convicted in a southern state from 1999 to 2005 | Data collected through semi-structured interviews and file reviews. Deductive and inductive coding was used to analyse the transcripts. Key themes and subthemes were presented as results. |
| Christensen, L. S., & Darling, A. J. | 2020 | UK | N = 40<br>Pop. = Females (n = 20) and males (n = 20) who had sexually abused students whilst working as teachers. | Data was collected from the professional conduct panel outcome decisions (public information) and analysed using quantitative (descriptive statistics) and qualitative (conventional content analysis using an inductive approach) methods. |
| Christopher, K., Lutz-Zois, C., & Reinhardt, A. R. | 2007 | USA | N = 142<br>Pop. = women who had sexually victimized or aided in the sexual victimization of another person (n = 61) and woman had committed | Data was collected through self-report measures. Descriptive analyses were carried out alongside ANCOVAs (testing group membership), calculating |

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| | | | crimes other than sexual victimization (n = 81). All inmates residing in a women's correctional facility in the Midwest (US). | correlations, calculating a discriminant function analysis and Chi square analysis; relevant to the hypothesis being tested. |
| Colson, M. H., Boyer, L., Baumstarck, K., & Loundou, A, D. | 2013 | France | N = 61 studies (6,293 female sexual offenders)<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Systematic literature review |
| Comartin, E. B., Burgess-Proctor, A., Kubiak, S., & Kernsmith, P. | 2018 | USA | N = 60<br>Pop. = Incarcerated female sex offenders | Self-report surveys completed by offenders and analysed using descriptive statistics, bivariate level analysis (including independent groups t tests and chi-square tests) and logistic regression. |
| Cortoni, F., & Hanson, R, K. | 2005 | Canada | N = 17<br>Pop. = Female sexual offenders as identified in official police or Court reports<br>(N = 5 reports), victims of female sexual offending through victimization surveys (N = 6), and published and unpublished literature regarding recidivism of female sex offenders (N = 6 sources). | Systematic literature review |
| Cortoni, F., Hanson, R. K., & Coache, M.-È. | 2010 | USA | N = 10 studies<br>Pop. = Adult female sex offenders (N = 2,490) | Meta-analysis of studies investigating recidivism of female sex offenders. |

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| Cortoni, F., & Gannon, T. A. | 2013 | Canada | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Narrative literature regarding clinical and empirical evidence regarding female sex offenders. Published as book chapter. |
| Cortoni, F., Sandler J. C., Freeman, N. J. | 2015 | USA | N = 94<br>Pop. = Adult female sexual offenders (N = 6 had promoting prostitution of a minor as the sole sexual offense in their criminal histories. N = 88 had at least 1 conviction for a more traditional type of sexual offending against a child or an adult). | Data on the participants from the New York State Office of Mental Health was reviewed to give demographic variables and analysed using parametric (ANOVA) and nonparametric (Kruskal-Wallis) tests, as well as Chi Square analyses. |
| Cortoni, F., & Gannon, T. A. | 2016 | Canada | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Narrative literature regarding clinical and empirical evidence regarding female sex offenders. Published as book chapter. |
| Cortoni, F., Babchishin, K. M., & Rat, C. | 2017 | Canada | N = 17 samples extracted from studies (from 12 countries between 2000 - 2013)<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders. Eleven samples were based on official records (i.e., arrests, charges, and/or convictions), and six were | Meta-analysis to find the prevalence rate of female sexual offenders and factors which influence this. |

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| | | | based on victimization surveys. | |
| Cortoni, F. | 2018 | USA | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Narrative literature review regarding assessment and recidivism of female sex offenders (published as book chapter) |
| Curti, S. M., Lupariello, F., Coppo, E., Praznik, E. J., Racalbuto, S. S., & Vella, G. D. | 2019 | Italy | N = 11 cases<br>Pop. = Children sexually abused (N = 11) and their alleged female sex offenders (N = 8 within total of 11 cases). | Retrospective review of identified case files to create a database of clinical and judicial data. Descriptive analysis carried out on data set. |
| Darling, A., & Antonopoulos, G. | 2013 | UK | N = 10<br>Pop. = Females considered by employment safeguarding schemes in England and Wales between 2008 and 2013 following their involvement in sexual activity with children whilst in a position of trust. | Systematic qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse the documents contained in the case files. |
| Darling, A. J., Hackett, S., & Jamie, K. | 2018 | UK | N = 71<br>Pop. = Women who had sexually abused children whilst working in organisational contexts | Data was collected from reports, records and data bases regarding these offences. A detailed content analysis of the source documents relating to identified cases was carried out. Collection and analysis employed both quantitative (bivariate and multivariate) |

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| | | | | variables and qualitative categories |
| Darling, A. J., & Hackett, S. | 2020 | UK | N = 136 cases<br>Pop. = women who had sexually abused children whilst working in organisational contexts | Data was collected from reports, records and data bases regarding these offences. Qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative (descriptive analyses) content analysis was used to analyse the data sources. |
| DeCou, C. R., Cole, T. T., Rowland, S. E., Kaplan, S. P., & Lynch, S. M. | 2015 | USA | N = 24<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders held at a medium-security women's correctional facility in a Northwestern State (US). | Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data (transcripts) were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Modal and key themes were presented as findings. |
| Denov, M. S. | 2001 | Canada | N = 23<br>Pop. = police officers working in a sexual assault unit (n = 13), and psychiatrists working as specialists in sexual offending (n = 10) | The data was derived from semi-structured interviews with police officers and psychiatrists, and, in the case of police officers, direct observation, and an analysis of police reports. |
| Denov, M. S. | 2003a | UK | N = 14<br>Pop. = males (n = 7) and females (n = 7) who were victims of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators. Recruited through professional referral or advertising campaign. | The data was derived from one-to-one semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. |

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| Denov, M. S. | 2003b | Canada | N = 15 studies/statistical reports<br>Pop. = Female sexual offending | Literature review of research regarding prevalence and traditional sexual scripts (e.g. perceptions of females as sexually passive or harmless) in relation to female sex offenders |
| Denov, M. S. | 2004 | UK | N = 14<br>Pop. = males (n = 7) and females (n = 7) who were victims of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators. Recruited through professional referral or advertising campaign. | The data was derived from one-to-one semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis |
| Elliott, I. A., Eldridge, H. J., Ashfield, S., & Beech, A. R. | 2010 | UK | N = 43<br>Pop. = adult females referred to the Lucy Faithful Foundation on the basis of criminal convictions (n = 24), or family court legal findings and/or admissions relating to child sexual abuse (n = 19). | Data was collected from the analysis of clinical files. Subsequently, each file was thoroughly examined using and adapted version of the Beech & Ward (2004) coding framework to indicate presence of risk factors. |
| Elliott, I. A., & Ashfield, S. | 2011 | UK | N = Total number unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Literature review and clinical case study discussion |
| Fazel, S., Sjöstedt, G., Grann, M., & Långström, N. | 2010 | Sweden | N = 34,142<br>Pop. = women convicted of a sexual crime between 1988 and 2000 from the Swedish National Crime | Data collected from the crime register and total population register at Statistics Sweden. Comparisons between the |

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| | | | Register (n = 93), control groups consisted of all females convicted of non-sexual violent offences (n = 13,452) and a random sample of general population women (n = 20,597). | sexual offenders and control group were made using inferential statistics (standard $\chi 2$ and t-tests, and logistic regression analyses). |
| Ferguson, C. J., & Meehan, D. C. | 2005 | USA | N = 279<br>Pop. = Convicted female sexual perpetrators | Records underwent descriptive data analysis for demographic information, with further variable analysis using a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis and Pearson correlation distance measures to search for latent behavioural clusters among these offenders. |
| Finkelhor, D., Mitchell, K. J., & Wolak, J. | 2000 | USA | N = 1,501<br>Pop. = Young people aged 10-17 years old (males, n = 796; females, n = 705) who were regular internet users (identified through a previous large household survey). | Data collected through telephone interviews using the Youth Internet Safety Survey and specific screener questions. Descriptive analyses performed on questionnaire outcome data. |
| Freeman, N. J., & Sadler, J. C. | 2008 | USA | N = 780<br>Pop. female sex offenders listed on the New York State registry as of August 2005 (n = 390), and (n = 390) matched | Data collected on the offenders from the registry and from criminal history files. Demographics and descriptive statistics were utilised with further inferential statistical |

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| | | | male registered sex offenders. | analyses performed on the data (Chi square and MANOVA tests, and Cox regression analysis). |
| Gannon, T. A., & Rose, M. R | 2008 | UK | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female child sex offenders | Narrative literature review of clinical and empirical research |
| Gannon, T. A., Rose, M. R., & Ward, T. | 2008 | UK | N = 22<br>Pop. = Incarcerated or under probation females convicted of a sexual offense against either an adult or a child (n = 20)<br>Females who had not been formally convicted of a sexual offense but whose file information strongly indicated a sexual element to their offending (n = 2) | General offense-related information and demographic details were obtained using both offender self-report and file records.<br>Semi-structured interviews carried out and analysed using Grounded Theory. |
| Gannon, T. A., Hoare, J. A., Rose, M. R., & Parrett, N. | 2012 | UK | N = 16<br>Pop. = Females convicted of a sexual offence (recruited from prisons and probation in England). | Data collected through semi-structured interviews. Transcripts were coded based on Ward & Keenan's (1999) Implicit Theory and results presented as numbers of offenders falling into these categories. |
| Gannon, T. A., Waugh, G., Taylor, K., Blanchette, K., O'Connor, A., Blake, E., & Ó Ciardha, C. | 2014 | USA | N = 36<br>Pop. = Women convicted of sexual offending recruited | Offense narratives collected through interview and analysed using the Offence |

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| | | | from two North American prisons. | Pathway Checklist (Gannon et al., 2012) |
| Gillespie, S. M., Williams, R., Elliott, I. A., Eldridge, H. J., Ashfield, S., & Beech, A. R. | 2015 | UK | N = 40<br>Pop. = female sexual offenders referred to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (UK) | Case files reviewed and coded using specific sex offender framework for the presence or absence of specified clinical characteristics. MANOVAs were conducted on the data to examine the differences between solo and co-offenders. |
| Grayston, A. D., & DeLuca, R. V. | 1999 | Canada | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female child sex offenders and their victims | Narrative literature review of clinical and empirical research |
| Hunt, L. | 2006 | Australia | N = Total number of articles unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female perpetrators of child sexual abuse, their victims and attitudes and beliefs held about female perpetrators. | 3 stages of analysis:<br>1 - literature review regarding the characteristics of female perpetrators of CSA and current attitudes and beliefs held by the community regarding this topic<br>2 - review of current available statistical data on female perpetrated CSA from the Australian criminal justice system.<br>3 - review of literature that offers a description of |

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| | | | | victim-perpetrator relationships. |
| Johansson-Love, J., & Fremouw, W. | 2006 | USA | N = 13 studies<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Systematic literature review |
| Johansson-Love, J., & Fremouw, W. | 2009 | USA | N = 124 case files<br>Pop. = Adult female sex offenders (n = 31), male sex offenders (n = 31), male offenders (n = 31) and female offenders (n = 31). All incarcerated across 3 West Virginia state prisons. | Chart review comparing female sex offenders to other cohorts of offenders. Data analysis included 2 by 2 ANOVA, Chi square and demographic. |
| Lambert, S., & O'Halloran, E. | 2008 | Ireland | N = 6<br>Pop. = women using a website that is written by women for women with a sexual interest in children | Qualitative data material was gathered from: female paedophilia website (data corpus); including the FAQ pages (data set); and personal stories ×6 (data set). This data was analysed using Deductive Thematic Analysis to identify themes and patterns of behaviour. |
| Lambert, S. & Hammond, S. | 2009 | Ireland | N = 86<br>Pop. = social workers, counsellors and psychologists working in private, public and voluntary organisations. | A questionnaire was constructed and given to participants, then coded and analysed to ascertain Irish perspectives on female sexual abusers and/or their victims. |
| Lawson, L. | 2008 | USA | N = 20<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Interviews as part of risk assessment in offender records were analysed using inductive content analysis. |

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| | | | | Descriptive statistics also produced. Overarching themes and subthemes presented as findings. |
| Levenson, J. S., Willis, G. M., & Prescott, D. S. | 2015 | USA | N = 47<br>Pop. = Adult female sex offenders in outpatient and secure sex offender treatment programs across the United States. | Data collection through survey designed for the study. Descriptive statistics are reported for each of the survey items. Binomial analyses and odds ratios were used to examine differences between groups, and bivariate correlations were used to examine relationships between variables. |
| Lewis, C. F., & Stanley, C. R. | 2000 | USA | N = 15<br>Pop. = women charged with a sexual offense referred to William S. Hall Psychiatric Institute, Columbia, South Carolina, for a criminal responsibility/competence to stand trial evaluation from1987 to 1997. | Retrospective chart review including psychiatric records, police incident reports, medical records, and extensive social history obtained from interviews with the evaluee's next of kin. Victim, offender and crime characteristics and demographics obtained. |
| Mackelprang, E., & Becker, J. V. | 2017 | USA | N = 432<br>Pop. = Undergraduate students at a large southwestern (US) university | Data collected using questionnaires (Likert scales). The data was analysed using two-way independent MANOVAs. |
| Martellozzo, E., Nehring, D., & Taylor, H. | 2010 | UK | N = Total sample size unclear | Data collected through interviews and analysis of |

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| | | | Pop. = Female sex offenders (post-arrest interviews, n = 15), practitioners in the criminal justice field (expert interviews, n = 6). + unreported number of police reports. | police reports on cases of female and online child sexual abuse. Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts and reports. |
| McLeod, D. | 2015 | USA | N = 66,765 cases<br>Pop. = cases of child sexual abuse where abuse "Substantiated (n = 62,643)," "Indicated or Reason to Suspect (n = 4,118)," or "Alternative Response–Victim" (n = 4) and where the gender of the perpetrator was known. | Secondary data analysis was performed on the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) |
| Miccio-Fonesca, L. C. | 2000 | | N = 565<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders (n = 18) were compared with male sex offenders (n = 332) and with females who were not sex offenders (n = 215) | Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and self-report measures. Descriptive analyses along with Chi square analyses and one way ANOVA analyses were performed on the data. |
| Miller, H. A., Turner, K., & Henderson, C. E. | 2009 | USA | N = 264<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders (n = 128) and male sex offenders (n = 136) either currently or previously incarcerated in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and had been | Data collected through file reviews (risk assessments and self-report measures). Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was used to categorize offenders based on their responses on the Personality Assessment |

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| | | | selected to receive treatment on the Sex Offender Treatment Programme. | Inventory (PAI). Covariates and group membership were also analysed. |
| Morgan, L., & Long, L. | 2018 | UK | N = 47<br>Pop. = Victims who attended the Havens Sexual Assault Referral Centres (London) within a week of alleged sexual assault by a female perpetrator (solo or in a pair/group) between 1st July 2011 and 30th June 2016. | Retrospective review of case-notes analysed for descriptive statistics of variables. |
| Moulden, H. M., Firestone, P., & Wexler, A. F. | 2007 | Canada | N = 305<br>Pop. = Care providers who were involved in a sexual offence against a child or adolescent. Adult male (n = 163) and female (n = 14), along with juvenile male (n = 100) and female (n = 28) | Descriptive analysis of the offender reports and production of demographic and criminal characteristics for the offender, as well as information about the victim and offence. |
| Muskens, M., Bogaerts, S., van Casteren, M., & Labrijn, S. | 2011 | Netherlands | N = 60<br>Pop. = convicted adult female sexual offenders referred to Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology (NIFP) between January 1999 and December 2008 | Between-subjects case–control design assessing victim characteristics previous convictions and mental health. A logistic regression was also conducted to assess whether offender type predicted recidivism. |

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| Nathan, P., & Ward, T. | 2001 | Australia | N = Total number of studies unrecorded<br>Pop. = Female child sex offenders | Narrative literature review of clinical and empirical research |
| Nathan, P., & Ward, T. | 2002 | Australia | N = 12<br>Pop. = Adult (>18) Female prisoners convicted of sex offences against children referred to Victorian Institute of Forensic Health for forensic evaluation, pre-release or post-release, between 1996-2000 | Structured or clinical interview and analysis of the results.<br>Analysis of sentencing comments.<br>Administering of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2) and analysis of results. |
| Office for National Statistics. | 2019 | UK | N = Total number of data sources unreported<br>Pop. = Mixed population (undefined numbers): adult victims of child abuse, child victims of abuse and individuals who contacted child abuse support services | Synthesis of individual data sources. Data collected by self-report measures and service reports. Descriptive analyses of data. |
| Oliver, B. | 2007 | USA | N = Total number of articles unrecorded.<br>Pop. = Adult and juvenile female sex offenders | Narrative literature review |
| Parke, S., & Karsna, K. | 2019 | UK | N = 7,018<br>Pop. = Individuals convicted of child sexual abuse (male, n = 6,915; female, n = 103) | Data collected from Ministry of Justice 'Outcomes of Offence' data tool (2017). Descriptive analyses to find prevalence of defendant gender and ethnicity. |

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| Peter, T. | 2009 | Canada | N = 345<br>Pop. = male sexual abusers (n = 308) and female sexual abusers (n = 37) | Data from the 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) was analysed using bivariate tests of significance to compare male and female perpetrated sexual abuse. |
| Pflugradt, D. M., & Allen, B. P. | 2010 | USA | N = 35<br>Pop. = Incarcerated female sex offenders | Data obtained through psychometric testing. Participants were categorised based on offender typology and descriptive statistics produced for the individuals and each typology. A nonparametric analysis (Kruskal-Wallis test) was conducted to test for significant differences between the Stroop and Trail Making Test scores across the typological categories. |
| Pflugradt, D. M., & Allen, B. P. | 2015 | USA | N = 29<br>Pop. = female sexual offenders incarcerated in a Midwest (US) medium/maximum security prison during 2007–2010. | Content analysis on court ordered investigation reports and a sex offender assessment reports for each offender was carried out to indicate presence or absence of specified characteristics. Descriptive analyses along with further |

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| | | | | inferential analyses (two-tailed Fisher Exact Probability Test and the Mann-Whitney U test) were carried out on the data relative to the research questions. |
| Pflugradt, D. M., Allen, B. P., & Zintsmaster, A. J. | 2018 | USA | N = 75<br>Pop. female offenders incarcerated in a medium/maximum security prison, whose index offense was first-degree intentional homicide (n = 28). A secondary sample of adult female sex offenders (n = 47) obtained from the study published by Levenson and colleagues (2015). | Data was collected from self-report measures completed by the offenders. The data was analysed using odds ratios to compare differences between groups of offenders and controls. |
| Prat, S., Bertsch, I., Chudzik, L., & Réveillère, C. H. | 2014 | Canada | N = 2<br>Pop. = women charged with sexual offences concerning minors, including the production of child pornography material. | Case study analysis |
| Ratliff, L., & Watson, J. | 2014 | USA | N = 431<br>Pop. = certified public school educators (male, n = 319; female, n = 112) in the Southeastern United States who were arrested and charged with sexual misconduct offenses | Cases files reviewed and coded. Cross-tabulation tables were constructed to examine relationships and the significance of these relationships was measured by Pearson chi-square test computed for a pairwise |

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| | | | between the years of 2007 and 2011. | comparison. Phi coefficients were computed as a measure of effect size. |
| Rousseau, M. M., & Cortoni, F. | 2010 | UK | N = Total number of studies unrecorded.<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Narrative literature review regarding mental health needs of female sex offenders. Published as book chapter |
| Sandler, J. C. & Freeman, N. J. | 2007 | USA | N = 390<br>Pop. = Registered adult female sex offenders in New York | (Repeat of Vandiver & Kercher's 2004 study)<br>Data for the participants held on the New York State sex offender registry was reviewed for demographic details and analysed using Hierarchical Loglinear Modelling and Cluster Analysis. |
| Sandler, J. C. & Freeman, N. J. | 2009 | USA | N = 1,466<br>Pop. = Females convicted of a sexual offence in New York State between January 1, 1986, and December 31, 2006. | Data extracted from the criminal history files of the offenders to give offender demographics and categories regarding presence of recidivism. t tests and<br>chi-square tests were conducted to analyse for group differences and a series of logistic regressions were conducted to assess for predictive variables. |

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| Shakeshaft, C. | 2004 | USA | N = Total number of articles unrecorded.<br>Pop. = Staff in US schools committing sexual abuse and sexual misconduct against students | Literature review and synthesis of existing literature. |
| Stanley, J. | 2001 | Australia | N = Total number of articles unrecorded.<br>Pop. = Victims of child sexual abuse and perpetrators of child sexual abuse | Narrative literature review regarding child abuse and the role of the internet. |
| Steely, M., & Ten Bensel, T. | 2019 | USA | N = 35<br>Pop. = convicted female sex offenders who used their "position of trust" as teachers in primary and secondary educational institutions to engage in sexual abuse of a student, in a southern US state between 1995–2016. | Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, plus case files and documentation on the offenders. Qualitative analysis through grounded theory approach. |
| Strickland, S. | 2008 | USA | N = 130<br>Pop. = Female child sex offenders (n = 60) and non-sexual offenders (n = 70) incarcerated in the State of Georgia. | Data collected through a number of self-report measures. The data was analysed using Chi-Square to determine if significant differences existed between the two comparison groups; Bivariate analyses, using independent samples t tests, to test |

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| | | | | for significant relationships among the variables; and Pearson's r was used to assess the strength of the correlations. |
| Tardif, M., Auclair, N., Jacob, M,. & Carpentier, J. | 2005 | Canada | N = 28<br>Pop. = Adult females (n = 13) and juvenile females (n = 15) who sexually abused children and adolescents, treated by the Institut Philippe Pinel de Montreal | Descriptive analysis of standardised interview grid for each client consisting of data regarding legal situation, delinquency history, medical and psychiatric antecedents, substance abuse, description of offences, sexual development, victimization history, familial and relationship history. |
| Ten Bensel, T., Gibbs, B., & Burkey, C. R. | 2019a | USA | N = 223<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders convicted in the state of Arkansas from 1995 to 2013 | Statistical analysis: Two stage analysis – first stage, bivariate analysis comparing differences between offender cohorts. Second stage, multivariate analysis using logistic regression models to analyse offender and offense characteristics. |
| Ten Bensel, T., Gibbs, B., & Raptopoulos, K. | 2019b | USA | N = 263<br>Pop. = Convicted female sex offenders from 1995 to 2017 in a southern state of the US | Data collected through offender file reviews, face-to-face interviews and personal history questionnaires. Data was coded and analysed using multinomial logistic |

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| | | | | regression for relationship analysis, as well as producing descriptive statistics. |
| Tozdan, S., Briken, P., & Dekker, A. | 2019 | Germany | N = Total number of articles unrecorded.<br>Pop. = Female child sex offenders | Literature review |
| Turner, K., Miller, H. A., & Henderson, C. E. | 2008 | USA | N = 90<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders currently or previously incarcerated in the Texas Department of Clinical Justice and who had been selected to receive treatment at the Sexual Offender Treatment Program | Data was collected through self-report measures and data coding from archival offender records. Two Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) were performed on the data to estimate the probability that an individual belongs to a subgroups present in the data and provides an index of certainty of classification. |
| Vandiver, D. M., & Walker, J. T. | 2002 | USA | N = 40<br>Pop. = Registered female sex offenders in the State of Arkansas. | Review of cases to extract relevant data. Descriptive analyses and further comparative statistical analyses (Chi square analysis, Fisher's Exact Test and Mann-Whitney U Test) carried on data. |
| Vandiver, D. M., & Kercher, G. | 2004 | USA | N = 471<br>Pop. = Registered adult female sexual offenders in Texas | Data for the participants held in the Texas Department of Public Safety's (DPS) sex offender registry was reviewed for |

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| | | | | demographic details and analysed using Hierarchical Loglinear Modelling and Cluster Analysis. |
| Vandiver, D. M. | 2006 | USA | N = 227<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders: females who were solo offenders (n = 123) and those who were co-offenders (n = 104) | Statistical analysis using Chi square and t tests were employed to assess group differences. Logistic regression was used to assess predictive factors of solo or co-offending. |
| West, S.G., Friedman, S.H. & Kim, K.D. | 2011 | USA | N = 24<br>Pop. = Alleged female sex offenders evaluated in a Midwestern Court Psychiatric Clinic (n = 12), and counterpart alleged male sex offenders selected by matching age and date at evaluation (n = 12). | Data collected through reviewing reports which were abstracted (and coded) for study specific factors. Descriptive analyses and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were performed on the data. |
| Wijkman, M., Bijleveld, C., & Hendriks, J. | 2010 | Netherlands | N = 111<br>Pop. = Female sex offenders | Court files analysed producing descriptive statistics of characteristics for perpetrators, victims and offences. Bivariate analysis used to measure differences between offenders and homogeneity or multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to examine typologies |
| Wijkman, M., & da Silva, T. | 2020 | Netherlands | N = 246 | Court files were analysed and the offender and |

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| | | | Pop. = Adult female sexual offenders who had been convicted of at least one hands-on sexual offence between 1994 and 2011. | offense variables were scored, using a scoring tool for sex offenders. Data was analysed to give descriptive and inferential statistics regarding characteristics of offenders, offences, victims and offender groups, as well as differences and predictive variables. |
| Williams, K. S., & Bierie, D. M. | 2015 | USA | N = 802, 150 incidents<br>Pop. = incidents of sexual assault reported to police across 37 US states between 1991 and 2011 (male and female offenders) | Secondary data analysis performed on the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Data used from years 1992-2011. |
| Williams, R., Gillespie, S. M., Elliott, I. A., & Eldridge, H. J. | 2019 | UK | N = 80<br>Pop. = Three different groups of individuals who had sexually offended against children who had been referred to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (UK): female solo offenders (n = 20), female co-offenders (n = 20), and male solo offenders (n = 40) | File review and item coding using specialist sexual offending framework. Items were scored as present or absent and item present totals were calculated for each subscale within the framework. Further analysis using MANOVA was employed to measure differences within the scales of the framework. |

# Chapter two

# Empirical Study

# ‘Down the rabbit hole’: Arrest and support seeking experiences of individuals who have committed Indecent Images of Children offences.

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*“…and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge…The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well”*

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll

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The aim for this paper is submission to the Journal of Sexual Aggression, and therefore follows the journal’s guidelines; see https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=tjsa20#prep

## Abstract

To date, there has been limited research regarding the experiences of individuals who have committed Indecent Images of Children (IIOC) offences. To our knowledge, this is the first study exploring IIOC offenders' experiences of arrest and police interaction, as well as their experiences and views regarding support and offence prevention. 12 individuals charged with IIOC offences were interviewed and their responses analysed using Thematic Analysis. Key themes were developed from the data reflecting the immediate experience and psychological impact of arrest. Themes reflected individual's pathways to offending and the barriers they experienced in attempting to access pre-offending support. These themes also reflected offender views regarding prevention, early intervention and reducing recidivism of IIOC offences. It is hoped the findings from this study can help inform arrest procedures and police interactions with this cohort, as well as provide feedback to support agencies regarding barriers in seeking support, particularly pre-offending.

**Keywords:** Indecent Images of Children offenders, child sexual abuse, abuse perpetrator support

## Introduction

In 2019 the Internet Watch Foundation found 132,676 webpages with confirmed child abuse images or videos, the majority of which were hosted in Europe and North America. This equates to a webpage showing child sexual abuse being found every four minutes. Of the 132,676 URLs, 20% were recorded as 'category A' abuse which includes rape and sexual torture (IWF, 2019). Within the UK alone 22,724 Indecent Images of Children (IIOC) offences were committed between 2017 and 2018 – approximately one offence every 23 minutes (NSPCC, 2018). There is understandable concern regarding the rise in IIOC offences and the demand these additional offences are placing upon police forces due to the increasing complexities and seriousness of these crimes and the time/manpower it takes to investigate and charge suspects (Guerin, 2019). Police have expressed a desire to understand more about how these offenders seek support and their interactions with police, to consider their role in reducing recidivism and potential early intervention with 'at risk' individuals (J. Salisbury, personal communication, 4 December, 2018).

The initial contact by police is often the first time the offence has been formally acknowledged and presented directly to the offender, their family/friends, and the general public. Initial contact is usually made by police attending the offender's home (or workplace) to arrest the suspect and remove potential evidence. Due to the nature of the offence, it is likely that this first engagement with the police is associated with heightened emotions including shame, guilt, and possibly anger, both for the offender and those around them. Sugie and Turney (2017) found that the point of arrest for general offender populations has a significantly negative impact on mental health. Studies have reported that those who are arrested (or on remand for, or convicted of IIOC) are at particular risk of suicide due to the nature of their offence (Hoffer et al., 2010; Lester & Danto, 1993). Brophy (2003) found the risk of suicide for those under investigation for sexual offences against children to be 1 in 24

compared to 1 in 1,644 in individuals sexually offended against adults. The authors note that shame, loss to reputation and social standing due to the offences were possible factors in increasing suicidal ideation in this group of offenders. Similarly, Pritchard and King (2005) found that the suicide rate for convicted male child sexual offenders was 183 times higher than the general population. Sex offenders, particularly those who have committed the offence against a child, are also at increased risk of severe physical violence from vigilante groups. For example, Cubellis and colleagues (2019) reported that over 70% of vigilante assaults were aimed at child sex offenders.

Furthermore, the way in which the initial police contact is managed is also likely to have implications on investigation procedure, including offender cooperation and rapport with officers (Collins & Carthy, 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). As such, it is important to consider *how* initial contact is made with those arrested for IIOC offences. In particular, the approach adopted by police forces in terms of operating processes and procedures in relating to arrest for IIOC offences, is likely to play a key role in reducing risk to the offender and increasing the likelihood of a more positive interaction with the police. More recently, police forces have begun to develop standardised operating processes for managing the welfare of suspects in relation to IIOC during arrest. These aim to reduce the risks associated with arrest of this cohort (e.g. suicidality, vigilantism) and promote a positive interaction with the police from the initial meeting. These welfare Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) may include a focus on maintaining discretion for the suspect through using unmarked police cars and non-uniformed officers. Other procedures may include building rapport with the suspect, keeping suspects and their families informed of the next steps, and signposting to support services (A. Pendleton personal communication, 27 October 2019)

Limited research has been conducted into the experiences and the opinions of IIOC offenders regarding support. Currently, there is limited support for individuals who are

concerned about their sexual interest in children (i.e. pre-offence). Often interventions are offered only after an offence has been committed and the offender has contact with the criminal justice system (Grant et al., 2019). Of the limited support available, one of the primary services is called 'Stop it Now.' Stop it Now was founded in the U.S in 1992 as an organisation to prevent child sexual abuse (CSA) through supporting the potential adult perpetrators and has been used as the model for Stop it Now services in the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany (Grant et al., 2019). Stop it Now aims to provide information, support, resources and signposting for individuals who are concerned about their own sexual interest in children. It also provides support for those concerned about the behaviours of others and for professionals. This support was initially delivered through a free, anonymous and confidential telephone service but has now expanded into online and text message support. Providing services for those concerned about committing CSA has been shown to be an important preventative measure (Cantor & McPhail, 2016; Grant et al., 2019).

Findings from studies of offender experiences regarding support have highlighted potential barriers for people wishing to seek support prior to arrest for child sex offences. These have included fear of the supporting service breaching confidentiality (Levenson & Grady, 2018), fear of legal consequences (Levenson et al., 2017), shame and guilt (Levenson & Grady, 2018), as well as external barriers such as accessibility and lacking awareness of available supportive services (Levenson et al., 2017; Levenson & Grady, 2018). Studies discussing successful interventions pre-arrest reference prevention services such as the Dunkelfeld Project in Germany, which advertises via public media campaigns and provides confidential support and interventions to individuals with sexual preferences for children (Beier et al., 2015). A pilot study by Van Horn et al (2015) researching the limits and benefits of providing a free telephone service reported that the Stop it Now telephone service in the UK and Netherlands had engaged with 3,410 individuals, approximately half of which made

contact regarding concerns about their own sexual feelings or behaviour towards children. However, further analysis found that the majority of callers were seeking help after, rather than prior to, offending.

The majority of the studies exploring the help seeking behaviours of individuals with a sexual preference for children have used samples of participants in treatment for sexual offending (Levenson et al., 2017) or log data of individuals who have accessed services such as Stop it Now (Beier et al., 2009; Grady et al., 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2018; Van Horn et al., 2015). Few studies have researched the support seeking behaviours of those who are not already involved in a support or treatment service. In particular, no studies could be found on the help seeking behaviour, experiences and opinions regarding support and prevention specifically for individuals looking at IIOC.

### Aims of the Study

This qualitative study recruited a sample of men who had convictions for IIOC offences and aimed to explore their experiences of arrest for these offences. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore what support, if any, individuals had accessed during their pathway to offending, and what future support could be offered in order to reduce and stop this type of offending.

## Method

This research was carried out with support from the North Wales Police (NWP) Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT). All participants recruited for this research were known to NWP for offences regarding IIOC under Section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 (PCA 1978); and Section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (CJA

1988). As such, NWP created a pool of potential participants deemed suitable for this research based on their knowledge of the offender's engagement and risk.

**Participants**

In total, 12 participants were identified by the NWP and all agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this research. All participants had been convicted for IIOC in the past 10 years, four of whom received community sentence orders, four received suspended sentences and four received custodial sentences. Participants were all white males. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the age of participants was not asked in order to preserve anonymity. Participants received a £10 voucher for their time in addition to travel expenses to the interview venue.

**Data Collection**

Access to participants was granted by NWP following ethical approval by Bangor University School of Psychology Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). Participants were approached to consider taking part in the research via a dedicated NWP contact, who distributed a pre-interview briefing pack (available in English and Welsh). The pack contained a participant information sheet detailing confidentiality and information storage procedures, as well as a consent form, which was completed prior to interview and handed directly to the NWP contact in order to preserve participant confidentiality. A further consent form was completed on the day of interview between the participant and researcher, which only required a first name or pseudonym. It was made clear to participants that this research would have no bearing on any ongoing legal involvement within the limits of confidentiality and safeguarding (whereby confidentiality may be breached if there is a risk posed to

themselves or others). Participants were also explicitly informed prior to interview not to divulge identifying personal details within the interview in order to protect anonymity.

*Interviews*

Participants were interviewed in a neutral location. The data was collected through 1-1 semi-structured interviews by the first author. Participants were given a 2-hour time slot for interview and debrief. Each interview was digitally recorded before being transferred to an encrypted hard drive for transcription. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Participants were given an information sheet at the end which detailed sources of support, should they require. The interview schedule was developed in collaboration with NWP, and from reviewing empirical literature relating to IIOC offences. The interview schedule asked about individuals' initial experiences of arrest for IIOC, particularly in relation to risk of suicide, and the potential impact on family members and friends. The schedule also included questions on the type of support individuals may have accessed during the initial stages of their offending, and the impact this had upon subsequent offending. Finally, the schedule asked about views regarding what support they felt was needed to prevent initial IIOC offences or re-offending from taking place.

**Analysis: Thematic Analysis**

The interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA). This method of analysis was chosen as TA is flexible in exploring the lived experiences of particular groups - identifying views, factors and patterns of meaning behind processes or phenomena (Braun et al., 2018). As such, TA allows for identification, analysis and reporting of rich data, such as that from interviews, to be translated into organised themes. These can then be interpreted and discussed further in attempt to answer the proposed questions of a study (Braun et al.,

2014). TA is not wed to a particular epistemological stance, and can be essentialist, constructionist, or, as in the case of this study, contextualistic. This stance seeks to understand the participants' experiences and the way they make sense of these, and dialectically, how social context can also shape this sense-making. As such, the analysis took a 'codebook' approach to TA, where codes developed initially from the research goals and questions were applied to the data. This type of approach allows for circularity in the data, with data driving evolution of the initial codes and development of additional codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006) the data collected underwent a six-step thematic analytical procedure as outlined in the table below:

| Step | Example of procedure for each step |
|---|---|
| 1) Familiarising oneself with the data | Transcribing the data; reading and re-reading, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2) Generating codes | Coding relevant (structural-driven) and interesting (data-driven) features of the data in a systematic fashion, across the dataset, collating data relevant to each code. (See Appendix 2 for an example) |
| 3) Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4) Reviewing themes | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset; generate a thematic 'map'. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5) Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis to define the specifics of each theme; generation of a clear name for each theme. |
| 6) Producing the report | Final opportunity for analysis. Selection of compelling extract examples, final analysis relating back to research questions and literature. |

*Table 1.* Six-step model of TA procedure

## Results

Six super ordinate themes emerged from the data, with three subthemes each. Some themes correspond direct to the questions asked in the interview, while other themes evolved from shared participants' experiences. It is important to acknowledge the influence of the researcher in the development of these themes, due to the presence of a double hermeneutic (how the researcher made sense of how the participants were making sense of their experiences).

Figure 1 shows a tabularised representation of the superordinate and sub themes and they will be discussed in turn. The headings on the left are the superordinate themes, with the right-hand section representing the sub themes that emerged from these.

*Figure 1.* Results table of superordinate and sub themes from the Thematic analysis

Due to the significant amount of data, there is a supplementary table in Appendix 3 with additional quotations to evidence and support the subthemes presented below.

## 1. Here and now – immediate experience of arrest

This superordinate theme captured the experiences of the participants at the moment of being arrested for IIOC offences. These include the initial reaction to the arrest, their emotional response and acute impact on their mental wellbeing, as well as factors that exacerbated or provided support, or were considered helpful during the arrest.

### *a. Initial reactions*

The participants spoke about how the initial 'knock on the door' by the police was often shocking and frightening, while also describing the realisation of the true impact of this police presence. This impact could either be participants experiencing overwhelming shame,

anxiety and fear; and others experiencing a sense of relief at the consequences of the police being there.

> 'And it's like, 'how do I get out of this situation?'. So, um. Do I at the first opportunity top myself? What are people going to think of me? Um, you know, friends, family, people that I know professionally, you know, and it's all goes through your head' – Jorge[1]

Several of the men spoke about how this dawning realisation of the consequences of their offending (triggered by this initial police contact) led to suicidal ideation, as seen in Jorge's quote above and the quote from Jason below.

> 'iiiii wanted to, yeah, kill myself there and then, and I think I remember knocking my head on the floor trying to knock myself out because I just couldn't understand what was going on. But understanding exactly what was going on at exactly the same time but just not, it was the realisation' – Jason

This sub-theme is linked to the 'Emotional response' sub-theme, and demonstrates that at the time of the initial arrest, there was an immediate emotional and cognitive appraisal by the participants. Therefore, from the moment the police approach to arrest, they are managing a potentially challenging/risky reaction from this cohort of offenders e.g. suicidality.

***b. What helped and what exacerbated the situation***

This subtheme explores the police approach and other factors which can exacerbate or mitigate the arrest experience that were identified by the participants.

[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity if the participants

The majority of the participants spoke about how the approach from the arresting officers significantly impacted on their experience of arrest. They felt that the police were 'doing their job', but that they were doing this well and that they were treated 'better than expected'. Participants described being treated with a sense of fairness, empathy and respect, despite the sensitive nature of the offence. Some of the participants described the police 'getting it right' in terms of the balance between being respectful and polite, while also being assertive and taking control of the situation. Jason, who was self-harming at the time of arrest, spoke about his appreciation of this: "It's the whole process of 'oh my god', but they were really good, CID, the two officers were really, really good, they were very assertive, they got me dressed." This balanced approach by officers at the time of arrest was spoken about by the participants as being a positive approach and helpful factor during the immediate arrest procedure.

Another factor that the participants described as being beneficial to their immediate experience of the arrest, was the police' communication, about what was happening next.

> 'Um, what made it good? Um. There was, um, continuous talk about you know, um, obviously the reasons why they had arrived at the home, um, and they made me aware of what was likely to happen next' - Denzel

This communication was related to the fact that the police attempted to conserve discretion for the participant during arrest, as well as the support of officers to reassure and help others in the house at the time of arrest:

‘Fine. Really fine yeah. Um, they didn’t put handcuffs on or anything. They were quite respectful, you know like, we’ve got to take you past, down the X, to the car…No, it was quiet, nothing to draw attention to anything…They were quite respectful’ – Seamus

‘I was accompanied to the bathroom by one of the officers. Um. And whilst there he, suggested to me, that, I explained to my wife why I was there. He also explained to me that in his experience, it’s, better on a relationship basis, that I was, that it came from me rather than from anyone official… So, that’s what I did. And X sat down and explained why I’d been arrested and uh, so yeah. I think, that initial approach, especially that, that sort of stands out, that um, it’s not just me…That was very positive’ – Jorge

The discretion was further maintained in the custody area, while also attending to the participants’ psychological and physical wellbeing while being in custody. Police offered helpful signposting to support services upon release and the police officers undertook follow up calls, which were appreciated.

‘Then they gave me all the information, you know, straight, straight away, well the officer gave me some sort of pack that they gave me on that day… So, I had some, something to go on, you know. Something to, to know what to do next, you know’ – Patrick

Another helpful factor identified in the aftermath of arrest the support of family and friends, services such as GPs and, when accessed, specialist support i.e. Lucy Faithful Foundation. Speaking about this, Jorge said, “And I was fortunate enough to have my wife

around to discuss this cus if you haven't got that support, it's easy to lose yourself…It's so easy to lose yourself, you know."

There were also factors identified by the participants which were detrimental to their immediate experience of arrest. A few of the participants highlighted unfair treatment and unnecessary force used by the police, which they felt was unnecessary and may have been interpreted by the participants as purposefully shaming:

> 'They didn't really need to send two police cars and four officers. I'm only 5ft 5. And it was the same people that nicked me last time…They knew they weren't going to get beaten up I suppose, so it was a little OTT I thought.' – Euan

Other participants found that there was a lack of discretion in parts of their arrest and described the impact of the public seeing them being arrested. Jason stated, "Um and that was the thing when they escorted me outside 'oh my god, the neighbours can see me now, I'm handcuffed' and this and that sort of thing. Oh. (sighed). It was horrendous". Other participants described how their mental health risk at the time was not acknowledged by the police officers present and they had considered suicide.

> 'I would say, from the, from the policing perspective, yeah very little information right at the start…I think that um, there was a risk, that I might have self-harmed, um, and it was fortunate that I did have a support network, it was just pure luck…Um, because the thoughts were there.' – Jorge

Difficulties accessing support shortly after arrest was also highlighted by the participants as having a negative impact on their experience. This included not actually

knowing who they could talk to, inconsistencies in what support services offered and negative experiences of support when they did reach out.

> 'I did get in touch with X…And, had no help whatsoever from them…Um, I rang them up, I explained what…What was happening. And they said 'oh well we can't help you until you've been convicted…I've gotta be honest, after probably contacting X, I thought 'there's nothing out there, there's no help out there'' - Denzel

Participants described a range of experiences during the arrest, but they were able to clearly identify factors that they experienced as helpful and unhelpful. Most of these factors were related to the behaviour and attitudes of the arresting police staff. The helpful behaviour, i.e. maintaining discretion and a humane approach can be considered examples of good practice. The unhelpful experiences were related to police's attitude towards them and the lack of support and information of the process ahead.

### *c. Emotional responses*

As described in the 'Initial reactions' sub-theme, the participants spoke about experiencing intense feelings of shame and guilt at the time of the arrest. These emotions were reflected in how they expected they would be treated by the police. For example, Denzel said, "I was treated like a human being, which at the time, I thought I didn't deserve to be."

The other period where the participants described increased emotional distress was the time between arrest and going to court. They described this period as having a very negative impact on their mental health, as they felt stuck in an uncertain 'limbo,' as discussed by Seamus: "So, for two-and-a-half-years I was literally just in limbo. That could have been a lot quicker. I think I tried to kill myself twice. Um. Yeah. It was two-and-a-half-years".

Participants described this period as feeling 'lost' and in 'limbo', and that particularly the uncertainty of this period placed great strain on their mental health, as Patrick described:

> 'I didn't know, what, at that point, what was going to happen to me or anything…Or what I was, um, going to be charged with or anything. Um. Yeah. So that, that, that was, that uncertainty was the hardest bit' - Patrick

There seemed to be an increased and ongoing risk of suicidality and poor mental health, from the initial contact with the police, and upon release after arrest, while awaiting the court case. The management of the initial emotional responses at the time of arrest appeared to be relevant in understanding the longer term impact on their mental health outcome. Being treated with respect and fairness by the police could be a relevant starting point to begin to manage the strong emotions experienced, in a distressing situation.

### 2. 'Life Sentence' – long term experience of arrest

This superordinate theme pertained to the longer-term impact, consequences and overall experience of being arrested for an IIOC offence. Three subthemes were identified: psychological impact on their sense of self, the impact of the arrest on others and how the arrest for this crime impacted their everyday living.

#### *a. "I'll always be the sex offender" – psychological impact*

All the participants talked about the negative psychological impact of their offence. This aspect was not part of the interview schedule, but all participants discussed their experiences. They spoke about the shame, disgust, guilt, and regret they continued to experience following their arrest for IIOC offences. Andy said, "The thought of what I was doing now disgusts me. Um. I just wish I could go back and speak to me, you know. Years

back in fact." Piers shared that "you realise the full extent of what damage this does, you can't forgive yourself."

There was a sense that the arrest was just the beginning of the journey and the psychological impact was a continuation of the punishment that did not go away. There was a sense of a distorted/disconcordant identity, where they described the struggle in their identity between 'me' and 'offender me', as exemplified by Patrick:

> 'But there were these comments on the torrents…Um, comments with, with names and, and I never stopped, never stopped to identify myself with that…I always saw myself as being a normal person, which I still think I am, you know?' – Patrick

Participants were trying to position themselves on a 'spectrum' of offenders/offences and distancing themselves from the 'bad' end of the spectrum, as Claude described: "Cus the thing is I never ended up stalking school yards and things like that, I never thought about actually, acting all this out."

The participants spoke of struggling with carrying this 'sex offender' label and how people judged them. They always felt under suspicion and seen by others at risk of offending again. The idea that this label 'sticks' in a way perhaps other labels for other offences did not, was prominent for Andy: "No one knows what it's like to be me. Doesn't matter what I say to people, I'm always going to be the sex offender." This sense of conflicting identities - working with/caring for children, family man, hard-working - and this new sex offender identity was evident in Jason's quote:

> 'I love kids, I adore kids and I was working with kids and, I just, my ex's, they were horrified when they found out. I mean because there was nothing there, there was never

anything there. People you hear always say, 'oh there must have been something,' no there wasn't. There wasn't anything there.' – Jason

Other long-term psychological experiences of the arrest included feeling powerless, denied control and a continued assumption of guilt. Some of this was in the very literal sense by not having the opportunity to defend oneself at court as explained by Claude; "And it was sheer terror that if I say anything, I'll end up in prison… What's the point? I was trapped, um. But as I said, they just didn't seem to listen".

Loss of control was also experienced through the physical restrictions, the loss of liberties from being under arrest, removing electronic equipment and being controlled/watched by those around them. Patrick said: "But now, having facing the consequences, and having controls that my wife has put in place…It's hard. I understand that it needed to happen."

Other participants spoke about the anxiety and fear that feeling out of control evokes, especially when control was in the hands of people who could inform others about their identity as a sex offender. Jorge spoke about this anxiety.

'I'm like 'bloody hell' because then that now means that her partner has got to be made aware. And there's limits. What does he say to other people? Because then that's a sphere that I have no control over whatsoever' - Jorge

This lack of control was also described by Andy:

> ‘And when I spoke to police about that, yeah, they said that it was in public domain, that the picture was, and the article was in the paper and it was all online so we can’t do anything about it.’ - Andy

> ‘So that’s when I went back to work and, um, I didn’t know what my future was, that was the hardest part, not knowing what the future was going to be…Uncertainty, and thinking ‘is my life down the drain?’ What am I going to do if somebody comes and says, that? Well, you’re finished…So, all those worst scenarios going through your head, so that was the hardest bit’ – Patrick

The stress and strain of living with the uncertainty of how others would respond, as well as shame and disgust with oneself, was acknowledged by the participants. Several identified having thoughts of suicide and wondered whether they needed an inpatient mental health admission. Claude spoke about how, “On a couple of occasions, I did actually think seriously about committing suicide. Without a shadow of a doubt. Um, I just found the whole thing, the shame side of it, overwhelming”.

This sub-theme captured the complex and far-reaching psychological impact of being arrested for an IIOC offence. The negative psychological impact included the continuing sense of shame, disgust, guilt, and regret regarding the offence committed and the internal punishment this leads to for a long time after the arrest. The evocative label of ‘sex offender’ had a great impact on how they viewed themselves and their perception and experiences of how they were viewed by others. They struggled with making sense of being a ‘sex offender’ as well as holding other identities, e.g. being a family man. This conflict was distressing and several of the participants tried to manage this distress and discrepancy in their self-identity by seeing their offending behaviour at the ‘lower end’ of a spectrum of potential sexual

offending behaviours. Another psychological impact was the feeling not having control: practically by being managed by the probation service or having certain restrictions put in place, and the anxiety about who might find out about the offence, their responses and how the offence could impact their future. While poor mental health and suicidality can be present from the moment of arrest, there seem to be longer-term consequences that accumulate into significant detriment on participants' mental wellbeing.

***b. 'Alternative life'- everyday impact***

This subtheme explored how 'every-day' changes led to the participants leading a different life than before arrest. Apart from the long-term psychological impact, participants described how day-to-day life was impacted, including financial stability and housing.

> 'I tried to get rehoused last year…Back down in X where I'm from…But the minute they found out about the offence, that was it, didn't want nothing to do with me. So um, you do find all doors are shut.' – Seamus

They spoke of everyday activities that people without this arrest would take for granted, such as going for a jog and feeling safe in their neighbourhood, whereas they would have to think about before doing these things. The participants spoke of an 'alternative life' following the arrest, as they felt they were 'living in fear' and 'living a lie', by always having to be guarding against the possibility of recognition. This was exemplified by Jason "I still look out for myself and I still make sure if they have a group photo which they have for work I'm not included, that sort of thing, don't put myself out there." Andy spoke about his living arrangements: "I'm very happy where I'm living, so I have to keep that very hush hush. Things like that, because I don't want to be targeted".

These examples highlight some of the changes that have impacted the participants everyday living, such as needing to be more vigilant, avoiding certain activities or being more cautious about sharing information about themselves. These changes mostly pertained to the participants themselves, but these everyday changes (such as needing to keep your address a secret, spoken about by Andy) could also impact on others around the individual.

### *c. Ripples of the offence – secondary victims*

This sub-theme concerns the participants' experiences of the impact of their arrest and offence on relationships with others and the wider society. The participants talked about the 'ripple effect' of their offence and how their offending and arrest negatively impacted those close to them.

When talking about the psychological impact of the arrest, many of the participants mentioned not only their own inherent shame, but the impact on their families. Some participants were not able to stay in the family home, and therefore not able to offer support or protection to their family. Others found they had to distance themselves physically or emotionally, in order to protect family members from recognition, or vigilante groups.

> 'Friends…One or two in particular because of the nature of their job role…I cut off contact with. Completely… But to protect him, through no fault of his own, and his profession, then I had to pull myself away because it would be unfair for him.' – Jorge

> 'So, yeah, the ripple effect is there, of course it is. Uh. I can't do, my life has changed, I can't do the gardening for my wife, I can't do the housework for my wife…I can't do it for her.' – Claude

Listening to the participants, it was apparent that there were real fears of their loved ones becoming victimised. Indeed, participants gave examples where family members became 'secondary victims' to the offender's actions. Some described how their family suffered and how the family felt a sense of 'guilt by association,' which caused the participants enormous shame, e.g. when social services became involved with because of the grandchildren, as discussed by Claude:

> 'One of my daughters who lives in X, she has certainly seen my social worker…Because of her, two of my grandkids, you know, used to go and pick 'em up and take them to school, pick them up from school.' - Claude

Others described how their families were affected because of vigilante attacks.

> 'Because they were getting grief. And they get victimised…The house got egged, and those other bits and pieces, it was like she was getting abuse on the way to school and everything else…People were threatening to hurt her and all sorts.' – Andy

For others, relationships broke down due to the other person knowing about the offence. These experiences seemed linked to the earlier observation around identity and the sense that other people were seeing the participants in the new light based solely on the crime they committed.

> 'Very good friends have said we want no more to do with you…You know. Which I can understand, but then, when I think more deeply about it I find it uh, I find it hurtful that

> you know, they've known me a long long time…These other people have known me for a lot of years, and they know who I am.' – Wilson

It was not just in personal interactions and relationships where participants experienced this labelling, but also within the wider society. They talked about how they felt society labelled them after their arrest. The participants felt that their 'true' identity was not acknowledged and that they were painted as 'unforgiveable' and 'the worst of the worst.' Seamus said, "Other people that have broken the law, that have killed people and stuff, and they're fine, their live just go on fine…for some reason this, you, that's it, you're finished." There was a sense that society was continuing the punishment.

> 'I was scared in regards to the media, because really, when you read a story, you don't know the person in that story is about…And then, then you hear people comment 'oh he, he was a really nice person', well he was a really nice person and he still is a nice person, it's just that he did something that was wrong.' – Patrick

### 3. Barriers to seeking support on the pathway to offending

This superordinate theme explored possible reasons why the participants had not sought out or accessed support prior to being arrested.

#### *a. Too risky*

This subtheme described the idea that participants felt that seeking support was too risky, as the benefits of seeking support did not appear to outweigh the negative consequences of being arrested and charged. Robin described this: "You feel like whoever you're going to tell, is going to immediately have to tell the police,". Although the majority

stated they wished they could have stopped in the early stages of offending and had wanted help and support, they felt that seeking out this support would have led to them being arrested. Particular concerns were raised about the impact on their career if they were arrested, especially for those working with children or vulnerable people.

> 'If you're in a job role where there's maybe a sniff of you doing something wrong ends up with you being on the DBS register, then, if you get arrested today and you don't go to court for 18 months, you can't work. Your professional life has disappeared.' – Jorge

Participants wondered whether some leniency in criminal charges, a 'sliding scale' for the offence, whereby there was a clear distinction between looking at a small number of IIOC versus sharing, or producing and distributing them, might help people in overcoming the risks associated with seeking support.

> 'So if somebody has been looking at images and they're getting counselling, then there is an opportunity for them to then stop the offending…If someone is looking at images and then sharing them…then you've gone past that stage.' - Jorge

However, as viewing of any IIOC was classed as illegal, participants felt this prevented them from accessing support in the early stages. When discussing this, Patrick said, "I said well 'I've looked at it once, might as well look twice, three or four times.'"

This subtheme of 'too risky' highlighted that the perceived risk of negative consequences of arrest outweighed any perceived positive impact of seeking support. The participants wondered whether by introducing early intervention that recognised where the

individual was in their offending journey, without the risk of arrest, might help in people seeking support.

### b. *Not acknowledging it was a problem and not knowing who to ask for help*

This subtheme highlighted another barrier for not asking for help, related to participants not acknowledging or appreciating the significance of their offending behaviour.

Patrick spoke about his difficulty acknowledging his behaviour, "I mean, I, I didn't reach for help because I didn't think I needed it…I never confessed to myself it was a problem". Other men also spoke about difficulties knowing when this behaviour had become a 'problem.' Some used the idea of a 'sliding scale' (as discussed in the 'Too risky' subtheme) to reassure themselves that what they were doing was not *that* bad.

Those who had reached a point of wanting to stop, found it difficult to know who to turn to for support. The majority of the participants had not heard of specialist services, such as the Lucy Faithful Foundation or 'Stop It Now', until after they were arrested. Denzel said: "I didn't even know of them…I didn't know where I could go." They were not clear whether approaching such services would have helped them to stop their offending behaviour or would have resulted in arrest.

This subtheme highlighted a challenge around awareness. Some participants struggled to acknowledge the offending nature of their behaviour and did not see it as a problem. In this state of mind, seeking support would not be a logical step for them. Those that did consider asking for support, were not aware of any services available to them.

### c. *Support available does not match the needs of offenders*

As seen in the subthemes above, accessing support before the arrest had been difficult for the participants. This subtheme highlighted that those who accessed the support services after the arrest, did not find the service offer met their needs.

Two participants tried to seek support from 'Sex Addicts Anonymous,' which may reflect the way they understood the nature of their offending behaviour. Both participants reported having an addiction to pornography. Patrick described that when he considered accessing the 'Sex Addicts Anonymous' group for support, it did not feel the right place to explore his experiences.

> 'I mean I briefly phoned this place called Sex Addicts…But that wasn't, I couldn't have gone there, it was in X, but it wasn't the same thing. So, me suddenly going there and saying 'well, I've done this' would have been bad'. - Patrick

Andy spoke about joining 'Sex Addicts Anonymous' too, because he felt that accessing a mentor and other people to discuss his difficulties with might have been helpful.

> 'I joined sex addicts anonymous… I think cus you have that, oh what's the correct terminology, um, alcoholic anonymous have got them as well, you know when you have someone you can talk to'. - Andy

Those who wished to seek support, did not have the information about support services available to them. They conceptualised the nature of their problem differently from offending behaviour.

### 4. 'Reasons why' - framing the context of support and prevention

This superordinate theme was not part of the interview schedule, but was introduced by participants as a way of understanding and making sense of their journey to their arrest. The proposed reasons behind their offending behaviour added context and indicated the type of

support, intervention and possible prevention approaches that might have been useful to them.

### *a. Pornography as the gatekeeper*

This subtheme pertained to the suggestion raised by the participants that pornography was a key element in the beginning of their offending journey and part of the reason why they started to look at IIOC.

Nearly all of the participants identified mainstream pornography as the 'starting point' to looking at IIOC, the beginning of a very slippery slope into more risky and illegal sexual images. Several of the participants spoke about how IIOC was never that far away from mainstream pornography. Patrick said: "It's not that many clicks away from pornography…At all. It's a few more clicks away from finding that, but, not that many". Participants talked about how easy it was to come across IIOC. Seamus spoke to this, "I came across the stuff by accident. Yeah, I didn't go looking. It came up as pop-ups". Similarly, Percy reported feeling that there was little control on accessing these images and suggested greater restrictions:

> 'because of the rise of this sort of thing. It's got to a point, it really has, where it all really needs tighter controls on it…Otherwise it's gonna go up and gonna get out of control and they'll never stop it.' - Percy

Pornography was spoken about as a 'siren'; something that seemed harmless and attractive, but actually had darker intentions. Participants described how some borderline/risky pornography was 'okay', because it was available on legal sites and easy to access and seemed to give them a kind of permission when viewing child pornography.

‘Yeah. And stop this ‘twink’ and this ‘father and son’ porn…Yeah, yeah, you’re saying to people, ‘oh this is alright’…Yeah, yeah, where does it stop?...Yeah and then you think, ‘oh well, yeah you know, okay he looks younger than 18’ you know (sighed). It’s wrong, it’s wrong.’ – Denzel

‘Because often you find that these sites will have, something like ‘barely legal’ or something like that, and you’re just tempting fate there….Because you put something so close to the line, you shouldn’t be surprised when people eventually find themselves a foot over.’ – Robin

The idea of a darker side of pornography was further developed when participants described how pornography seemed to address people’s natural sexual desires, attracted curiosity and morbid fascinations.

‘Then, the right thing to do is ‘I don’t want to look at this’ and go back to the legal stuff. But for whatever reason, there’s an element in people, me included, who went ‘oh that’s interesting’… I just, cus it’s so wrong, I found it fascinating…Um, because it fascinated me it was interesting and because it was interesting, I went looking. And really, once I’d got to that stage, it’s almost like there’s no going back’ – Jorge

The participants felt protected by a sense of anonymity amongst other people who were also looking at these images, with this ‘invisibility’ maintaining the offending behaviour. Patrick spoke about it being a “Drop in the ocean, that’s how I felt, that’s how I felt so I didn’t feel scared.”

> ‘So that gave me, acceptance…To do what I was doing, because I wasn’t doing it on my own, I was doing it with other people, so if they’re doing it then it’s alright for me to do it…And then it gives you that justification then to yeah’ – Jason

The role of mainstream pornography was presented by participants as a significant factor in starting the offending behaviour. They felt that how pornography acted as a ‘gateway’, as mainstream pornography websites provided links to IIOC, thus luring viewers into materials (e.g. ‘young 18’ pornography) that were presented as being acceptable. In their view, mainstream pornography elicited curiosity, unusual desires and morbid fascinations common to all humans. Pornography offered a place where these interests could be played out anonymously and the easy links from mainstream sites to sites with IIOC provided a sense of acceptability, and acted as a ‘gateway’ for illegal activity.

***b. Seeing it as an addiction***

This subtheme presented as a recurring theme, where participants spoke about their offending behaviour as an addiction. They felt that the nature of their ‘addiction’ led them to and maintained their viewing of IIOC. Some of the participants spoke about how looking at IIOC was maintained by addictions, similar to being addicted to pornography, drugs or alcohol. They considered the IIOC like a ‘drug’, a ‘fix’, a next ‘high’, which offered escapism and a ‘buzz’, as described by Seamus: “I was getting that buzz again…Getting away with something that I know you shouldn’t be getting away with”. Andy spoke about how “We’re all addicts. Yeah? We didn’t go looking at it because, you know, it was good for our health, or our mental health or anything like that”. Patrick alluded to slipping into a maintenance cycle of addiction when he said, “I just had periods where I didn’t do it. But then just at that weak point I did again.”

Participants who struggled with substance misuse spoke about how IIOC became part of their addiction cycle, as substances lowered their inhibitions and, in some cases, increased arousal. Jason explained, "Because that's the connection. It was the drug. Boundaries just drop, your inhibitions just drop and then you start doing things that you would never think about doing."

This subtheme sets out how participants conceptualised viewing IIOC as a form of addiction. For some participants, viewing of IIOC formed part of other addictions, such as drug and alcohol addition, which made them more susceptible to accessing IIOC. For others viewing IIOC led to a thrill or 'buzz', that became addictive in its nature and led them to repeating the offending behaviour. The idea that viewing IIOC was an addiction, might also explain why some sought support from Sex Addiction Anonymous.

### *c. Coping mechanism*

This subtheme described another set of reasons given by the participants as to why they initially started and continued to seek out IIOC. Accessing IIOC was seen as a way to avoid experiencing painful thoughts or emotions which were happening in their lives at the time.

Participants spoke about how their offending behaviour did not happen in isolation, but was part of many difficult aspects of their life at that time. These factors built up to create an environment where either inhibitions of viewing IIOC were lowered or viewing IIOC became a coping mechanism.

> 'Started drinking, um my wife had walked out um, so everything was going downhill. I had to speak to my mum, or my step-mum and she abused me as a child. Um and it was just like triggers just went all off within this time.' – Seamus

Some participants spoke about how they struggled to talk about their difficulties with mental health and their past abuse history, as this would not be in line with society's expectations of being a male ('toxic masculinity'). For some participants viewing IIOC appeared to have served as a form of escapism from intolerable emotions and thoughts:

> 'But the problem was, I felt like I had to be strong for my wife and my family, so I couldn't get help. So, I did what all men do, 'I'm a man!' (gruff voice) and put it all in a box and put it in the cupboard...Um, the problem was it didn't work…talk to people about your issues, don't bottle them up. Don't go down this rabbit hole.' – Andy

**5. Preventing the first offence**

While participants spoke about the barriers in accessing support and help before the arrest, this superordinate theme looked at the participants' ideas and suggestions regarding how to prevent IIOC offences. Their suggestions included external control from societal bodies and internal control to not initially perpetrate. The role of increased public awareness about this type of offending was also identified.

***a. External control – taking the choice away***

This subtheme addressed options using external mechanisms which could deter people from accessing IIOC. The participants expressed a wish for external bodies, such as the police and government, to take greater control over websites in order to make it harder for people to access IIOC and commit related offences. They felt that website providers were not taking responsibility for the materials and search references on their websites. Jorge shared this view:

> ‘You know, um a lot of legitimate sites where illegitimate things happen and are being presented, and because they’re a hosting site, you know ‘oh but we didn’t post the content’…You know and they, they’re not held to account enough’ - Jorge

There was a shared agreement among the participants that those at the top of the chain in creating and distributing IIOC should be identified and penalised, and that the websites hosting these images should be shut down, thereby controlling access to IIOC.

> ‘And I just think they need to be a bit more, sort of like clamp down and find these people…Yeah just sort of like, kind of like a drug dealer, find the source and then stop them. It was just too easy.’ – Seamus

Several of the participants spoke about the idea of fining websites when these images were found, and placing the responsibility on the hosts, to act as a deterrent in allowing IIOC material on their websites.

> ‘If for example a site was making however many tens of thousands pounds a day, an hour, was automatically closed down, the moment anything was found, and for every minute lost, I’m sure they’d find a way to stop it.’ – Jorge

Another suggested way to deter people accessing pornographic websites was charging customers for access and for payment details to be clearly identifiable on bank statements. They felt that this additional hurdle could protect those who may be accessing pornography frequently as well as underage users. The pornographic websites could then, as an act of social responsibility, donate the raised funds to support services for people viewing IIOC.

> ‘If you can get people like Pornhub or whoever, whoever they are, to charge, to legitimately charge and then say give themselves some brownie points by saying that this is going to, you know, make themselves look like the good guy.’ – Denzel

The suggestions made here which formed this subtheme were related to other people and organisations taking control and responsibility in order to deter and add hurdles people to access regular pornographic websites, as these were often seen (as discussed earlier) as ‘gate ways into IIOC.

***b. Internal control - knowledge to make the right choices***

In this subtheme, participants identified internal control mechanisms, where people needed to have a better understanding of, and the factors that can lead to, IIOC offences, in order to help them make choices about possible offending acts. They suggested that understanding and awareness of the consequences to oneself, the victim and those they cared about could be a significant internal deterrent not to offend, and offer an increased sense of internal control over choosing whether to engage in viewing IIOC.

> ‘In terms of when they’re caught and penalised; how it can destroy their social lives…Perhaps their careers and everything else, and their own mental health perhaps, because you need to be very strong to, uh, deal with this stuff.’ – Piers

The participants spoke about a possible lack of understanding of the impact on the children in the images and how they were victimised. By regarding the image as “only a picture” could remove responsibility and increase the risk of offending. For several

participants, finding out the impact on the victim of looking at these images, cemented their decision not to engage in this behaviour again.

> 'To hear from an abuse victim much further down the line talking about how it's impacted…the damage that this has done to abuse victims. I think if people, appreciated that…And saw the other side of it, then it might make them think twice.' – Piers

> 'To understand the consequences and the ripple effects of one photograph. For me, (pause), it was, it was end of. You don't think about the consequences of that one child, what that situation that was kept in the internet, the ripple effect that has when they grow older…(crying) I didn't think about that.' – Jason

When asked about what they felt could deter people from offending initially, the participants spoke predominantly about education of the consequences and the factors that may lead to accessing IIOC. This included information around forming healthy sexual relationships; the connection between substance use and sexual offending; and the legal consequences of viewing indecent images. They felt that the use of pornography and the risks of the internet - both significant factors in their own reasons for offending - needed most attention. Jason and Jorge both discussed this need for education:

> 'It's to make them understand, just don't press that button…No matter how tempting it is, no, cus once you press that it's like opening pandoras box. You know it's wrong. It's the danger. You're not supposed to be doing it.' - Jason

> ‘For somebody who is trying to get their fix by looking at images for example, but trying to avoid seeing anything illegal, there is the risk then that they will find themselves on a legitimate site, like Pornhub, which everybody knows…And then finding themselves having illegal images’ – Jorge

### *c. Raising the profile of IIOC offences*

This subtheme pertained to a common point raised by the participants regarding prevention of the initial offence was to increase the profile of IIOC offences in the public domain. As a taboo subject, they felt IIOC was often not publicly discussed and that this silence and secrecy perpetuated offending behaviour.

> ‘But it does need talking about. Because it hasn’t just been going on for the last 10 years…This has been going on for decades. It’s not just the last 5 or 10 years. People just see it, sweeping it under, don’t like to talk about it.’ – Seamus

> ‘Cus we turn a blind eye to lots of things don’t we, and, um, if they don’t affect us. But yeah, I can only think that having this subject more in the open, in a sense, in younger people, it can only be a good thing.’ - Patrick

Some of the participants made the comparison with how other emotive and difficult topics, such as rape or cancer, had successfully been addressed in the public sphere. They felt that this approach could be used for IIOC and when handled sensitively, the public would be able to hear a message of prevention. Claude said:

‘I think it would make a big difference. Yeah, um, more awareness in the public, you know. You see it, don’t you, you see posters up about rape victims and so on, what’s so wrong with doing it about this situation?’ - Claude

‘It’s you know, a very difficult subject, to, to um, put on the agenda. But then again so was cancer…and you know, they are taboo subjects that have come into the public light now…So why, there’s no reason that this can’t.’ - Denzel

The participants spoke passionately about raising the public profile of IIOC offences and suggested advertising through posters and TV adverts to show the consequences of viewing IIOC, as well as to highlight access to support.

‘You could show them maybe a 5-minute video. I don’t think it needs to be any longer than that…Um, whereas somebody, an offender who’s been put through the whole system…And the effect it had on their life and the press and everything else. And I think that would be a very good deterrent.’ – Piers

They suggested that messages in these advertising campaigns would need to communicate a message that would activate the person’s internal control, such as guilt and conscience, while at the same time strongly stressing the legal consequences.

‘If people think they can get away with it, that’s not enough…But if people think, there’s a consequence to their own conscience, I mean, if you can’t give yourself a narrative that you can justify it, then you’re less likely to do it.’ – Piers

Societal views about IIOC offenders as being "different" to everyone else were deemed to perpetuate the risk of offending. Media headlines referring to child sex offenders as "monsters" and "evil", reinforced these stereotypes about individuals who committed IIOC offences. Challenging these stereotypes and beliefs was thought to help those who were at risk of, or were in the early stages of offending, seeking support. By removing these 'degrees of separation', the us and them, they felt would help bring into focus that potentially *everyone* could be at risk of committing these crimes, as Euan explained: "'How the hell have you ended up here? Studious little pale faced lads, 'what have you done?' and you know, it can happen to anybody I suppose". Other participants also spoke about this:

> 'There's a couple of blokes similar to my age on that community service, I tell you what, they, they are nice people…To talk to, you would stop them in the street, you wouldn't know, you wouldn't treat them any different to another person.' – Patrick

> 'Because it wasn't, the sexual gratification, it was more for escaping me because, I was struggling with, my partner wasn't well, my daughter was getting tested for X, I wasn't overly happy with my job…You know, I was tired all the time, tired of being skint, I hated my life.' – Andy

### 6. Making sure it does not happen again

While the previous superordinate theme focussed on what the participants felt was needed to prevent IIOC offences, this superordinate theme focussed on what the participants found beneficial after offending in order to reduced recidivism. The subthemes highlighted the need

for timely support to address the needs of the offenders, as well as the role that society played in the individual's rehabilitation and recidivism.

### *a. 'Ideal support' - access to the right support at the right time*

This subtheme pertained to the support participants had found beneficial, support that they would like to see more of or improved, and suggestions when this support was likely to be most effective.

Several of the participants had been able to access support after their arrest and they spoke about their own positive experience and benefits of psychological therapy. There was a need identified for this type of support post-offending.

> 'Yeah because counselling is about getting you, you do the speaking… and a gentle guide, to you know 'what brought you here'. Um, cus then, because if you voice it, it's almost like you hear yourself outside of you… but, to speak it is in a way admitting it. Full stop. But then it's admitting it to yourself. And, yeah, I found that very useful.' – Jorge

The role of psychological support appeared to be particularly important (as shown in Jorge's quote above) to help the participants answer some 'reasons why' questions. Identifying and understanding the triggers that led and maintained the offending behaviour was seen as particularly beneficia. Andy spoke about this being a positive feature of his therapy:

> 'He, explained to me that I'm not completely broken, I've, uh, just got a couple of little bits that aren't working quite right… And he was one of the first ones that stopped me from putting things into a box.' - Andy

However, they identified that this support required a specialist psychological approach, with a variety of treatment modes, such as one-to-one and group work. Percy spoke about how those who were not specialists in the area, did not really understand how to help: "I haven't spoken yet, how do you know what's up with me? They've already diagnosed what the problems is, and they say oh right this will help. No, it won't".

A support group with other IICO offenders, similar to Alcoholics Anonymous, was suggested as a potential beneficial forum of peer support, as this could offer access to a 'sponsor' or mentor for support, as well as general access to people with similar lived experiences. The association between accessing IICO and addictions to alcohol and drugs re-emerged here again.

> 'If you, you know, say you were my sponsor, yeah, and I was like 'I've got a craving to watch porn' 'I've got this, I've got that' yeah. I could just send you a message going 'I'm having a bit of a wobble mate' you know, do the chat, help…That to me, would be a godsend.' – Andy

Participants felt that receiving support from people with the same lived experience – people who truly "get it" - would be very valuable as they could not only offer support for the offending behaviour and related issues, but also hope for the future. Denzel spoke to this: "You need someone, yeah again, who, who has had that experience, who has had maybe a positive outcome, but has gone through the ringer before that positive outcome has come along".

The participants acknowledged the role of specialist support services, such as the Lucy Faithfull foundation in the UK, in reducing reoffending. Support services needed to be

clear about what they could offer and that they needed to be safe and discreet. The latter caused concern as participants queried whether support services could guarantee anonymity in case a person had a relapse, or if there were concerns about (re)offending. Participants wondered whether this type of support would be helpful for those who were engaging in risky behaviours that could lead to offending, or those people who were at risk of re-offending. Participants seemed to propose this 'sliding scale' of offending, as discussed before, where there was the option of anonymous support and greater leniency during the early stages of IIOC offending. However, the risk involved with contacting support services was considered worth taking, if that meant that they did not continue offending or re-offend.

> 'I can't go back to the start, this middle ground is where I'm at, and whatever the consequences is going to be, I need to do something about it…And then that gives people the opportunity to step off…You want to try and get the early stage but allow the next stage to know that…There is a way forward, you know…There is hope.' – Jorge

In summary, this subtheme discussed how participants clearly identified the need for specialist psychological support for those who committed IIOC offences, and where approaches from services who work with people with addictions could be useful. Seeking support involved taking risks of being arrested, but this was considered worth taking.

***b. 'A life worth living' - rehabilitation and societal understanding***

While previous subthemes looked at specific support to reduce recidivism, this subtheme highlighted how participants identified practical support they needed in order to rebuild their lives that would help them rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. Access to a coordinator or social worker who could offer support and guidance after the sentencing (and

prison if applicable), with the practicalities of finding work, housing, etc was identified as being needed.

> 'that's what you say there about the support package, that would be good. If somebody was like, right let's get you a job, lets, right you're not going to stay here, let's move you back with your friends and like that, that would have just eased everything' – Seamus

The benefits of having a job was considered a significant contribution for the participants in moving forwards in their rehabilitation and appeared to play a protective role against re-offending.

> 'But now, I've got responsibility, I've got a team, I've got other people around me. Um, not that I'd ever ever do anything wrong again, but that family, that kind of extra, feeling wanted and a team that I'm feeling part of, this cog of, of a working company sort of thing. Oh my god! I cannot express that enough sort of thing, that's so important for me now' – Jason

Being part of and playing a role in society was allowing participants to progress in their rehabilitation. However, the participants felt that if the media and society continued to punish and express strong negative emotions towards IIOC offenders, this could limit their rehabilitation opportunities and could paradoxically lead to reoffending.

> 'So, there wouldn't be this, never-ending condemnation because otherwise you're going to create the very monster you fear. I mean, what was the old story of Frankenstein's

monster – he wasn't a monster…The creator was the monster, but the monster was the one condemned, and he was the one hunted and therefore became the very monster they feared'- Robin

This was where participants reiterated that the responses from the public could be altered by raising the profile of IIOC offences and helping the public understand some of the reasons why people might offend. By allowing and encouraging people who committed IIOC offences to rehabilitate, they felt this would likely contribute to reducing the risk of re-offending.

This subtheme addressed the need to include practicalities as part of the rehabilitation process, such as having a job, a house and a role in society. These could become protective factors against recidivism. The barriers identified in engaging in rehabilitation were societal views and reaction, which would need addressing by the community being educated and thus offering support

***c. 'Moving forwards' - learning from mistakes***

This final subtheme pertains to the idea that arrest and being charged for their offences offered the participants an opportunity to take responsibility for the difficulties they were experiencing and to start making reparations for the damage caused. This included facing up to some of the problems that led them to offend e.g. addiction, and to learn more positive ways to manage their difficulties.

'And it's taken, as much as I'm cursed by what I've done, um I will be for the rest of my life, it's good because I'm starting to talk…Because I think, if I had carried on, I don't think the child abuse images would have gotten any worse, but I think I would have ended up killing myself or something' – Andy

This moving forward also included having the opportunity to offer help to others so that they would not re-offend, and to make some reparation with those around them and wider society for the damage caused.

> 'I just want to try and move on, do something productive with my life and try and show, make some, you know, what's the word I'm looking for, not penance…Well, just trying to help something that I've fucked up' - Andy

One of the participants spoke about how this experience had changed the way he thought about people and that it has changed his outlook on life:

> 'Uh, definitely with me. I, I, I end up with, with a more reasonable opinion on people, on what they do and why they do it…Even going to the, on the paper at work and seeing other people that I would have called a name before maybe, kids you know, actually stepping back and thinking well, it doesn't, it's not an excuse, it's just you can get to a point' – Patrick

Although participants spoke of many negative experiences related to their offending, they also expressed a sense of hope that rehabilitation is possible, and how people around them had been willing to acknowledge the offence, while also recognise the positive attributes of them as a person.

> 'I said 'I think she knows me'…10 minutes later he comes back and says 'yeah she knows you'…she came up to me at the end of her interview with the boss, and, oh my

> god, she said 'don't worry it's absolutely fine'…I work with her now and she's amazing, there's no elephant in the room, we've chatted, she has family, mother of two sort of thing. Um. And that just makes me know that I can have a normal life now, and that's all I need' – Jason

This subtheme illustrated the sense of hope that some participants experienced of being able to learn and move forward with their lives after being arrested and charged for an IIOC offence. It had offered an opportunity for positive growth through exploration of personal factors that led to their offending behaviour and to learn new ways to overcome difficulties. Several participants found that having gone through these experiences, they were able to accept the consequences of their offence, were committed to not re-offend, and were keen to assist and support others to not offend either.

## Discussion

To our knowledge this is the first study exploring arrest experiences of IIOC offenders. The superordinate themes that emerged from this research captured the short and long-term experiences of arrest, the reasons why individuals commit IIOC offences, their experience of barriers in seeking support, and their suggestions for reducing initial offending and recidivism of IIOC offences. These overarching themes, as well as the subthemes contained within them will be discussed in relation to relevant clinical and empirical literature, alongside the implications from this research and limitations of the study.

### *Mental health impact*

The first superordinate theme finding from this study pertained to the immediate experience of arrest for IIOC offences. Two of the subthemes within this superordinate theme ('Initial reactions' and 'Emotional response') reported on the finding of the negative impact

on mental health as a response to arrest, where participants reported overwhelming shame, anxiety, fear and possibly suicidality. Regarding suicidality, our findings echo Farnham and colleagues' (2018). They found the highest risk for suicide in the 48 hours post discovery/arrest. They identified risk factors for suicidality, including toxic levels of shame, loss of social status, irreparable reputational damage and the burden of the acknowledgement of their actions through the arrest. The participants also described how overwhelming shame and the realisation of the consequences of their offending were triggers to suicidal ideation. Initial stress and anticipatory stressors such as tolerating uncertainty were also discussed. The findings support those of Sugie and Turney (2017) in their view of arrest being the catalyst for mental health difficulties. This may be even more evident for those arrested for child sex offences as the stigmatisation of this offence is much greater than other crimes (Jahnke et al., 2015).

*Police behaviour*

Another finding was the subtheme exploring what had been supportive or exacerbating factors for participants during the initial arrest. The majority of the participants felt that the police had supported them during the arrest by balancing authority with empathy and respect. The limited research base shows that sex offenders report humanity, fairness and understanding as important factors in cooperation with police (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Kebbell et al., 2010). The factors that the participants felt were helpful in communicating this element of humanity were directly related to the SOPs that this police team used to protect the welfare of these individuals. For example, using unmarked police vehicles, non-uniformed officers and not using handcuffs during the arrest. These welfare SOPs for IIOC offenders are specific to local police teams and it is therefore difficult to compare our outcomes with other police forces or offender experiences; but there does appear to be benefit for offenders, and police officers, in carrying out these during arrest.

*Reasons for offending*

Although exploring motivations for offending was not an explicit aim for this research, the participants in this study presented this information and it was considered relevant in helping to frame the context of support and prevention, which were aims. Motivations were explored within the superordinate theme 'Reasons Why' where the participants spoke about pornography ('Pornography as a gatekeeper' subtheme), unhelpful coping mechanisms ('Coping mechanism' subtheme) and addiction ('Seeing it as an addiction' subtheme) as initiating and maintaining factors in their viewing of IIOC. The motivations and reasoning given by the participants map on to the Implicit Theories (IT) model described by Bartels and Merdian (2016). Bartels and Merdian found that users of online child sexual exploitation material, held sets of beliefs (called 'Implicit Theories') about themselves, others and the world. This model will be used to frame the discussion around our related findings. The first idea in Implicit Theory is described as 'unhappy world', where those accessing IIOC were doing so to avoid stressors, attempting to regulate emotions and cope with difficulties. This idea of 'escaping' was also reported by the participants in this study and was captured in the 'Coping mechanism' and 'Seeing it as an addiction' subthemes. This idea that IIOC is used as an escape mechanism is supported by further literature (Middleton et al., 2006; Rimer, 2017; Seto, 2013; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Winder & Gough, 2010). Similar to our 'Seeing it as an addiction' subtheme (where the participants in this study spoke about their offending behaviour as an addiction), Bartels and Merdian (2016) also noted how IIOC offenders spoke about an 'addiction' and a sense of an internal lack of control. This finding is similar to findings from other studies (Rimer, 2017; Merdian et al., 2013; Middleton et al., 2006; Quayle &Taylor, 2002) and is in line with Bartels and Merdian's second IT 'self as uncontrollable'.

Another pertinent subtheme found within the 'Reasons why' superordinate theme was the role of pornography ('Pornography as the gatekeeper'). The participants spoke about pornography being the 'gateway' to offending and the use of legal pornography set them on a 'slippery slope' to looking at IIOC. This was corroborated in other studies regarding use of legal pornography leading to the viewing of IIOC (Rimer, 2017), and reflects what the participants explained regarding the role of curiosity (Winder & Gough, 2010), sexual thrill (Rimer, 2017) and distraction (Bartels & Merdian, 2016; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Seto, 2013) within this subtheme. Continuing with this subtheme, several of the participants spoke about grey areas and almost 'trickster' nature of legal pornography in allowing content such as 'young 18's' and 'school uniform fantasy'. Viewing this portrayal of adults as children in pornographic content may be a contributing factor to distorted cognitions normalising or legitimising viewing of child pornography (Bartels & Merdian, 2016; Machia & Lamb, 2009; Quayle & Taylor, 2002) and feeds into the third IT of 'children as sexual objects' (Bartels & Merdian, 2016).

The role of the internet itself was discussed by the participants relating to reasons why they offended (particularly relating to pornography access) and can also be seen in the subtheme 'Pornography as the gatekeeper'. Participants spoke about the anonymity of the internet that maintained offending, the ease of accessing IIOC and how the internet was lacking external and internal control mechanisms. Merdian et al (2006) made reference to the "Triple A Engine" (originally described by Cooper, 1998) which referred to the perceived Affordability, Accessibility and Anonymity of the internet. The internet allows for anonymous, affordable (often free) access to IIOC with greater ease (compared to pre-internet) (Bartels & Merdian, 2016; Merdian et al., 2006; Quayle & Taylor, 2002). This triad covered many of the participants reasons captured in the 'Reasons why' superordinate theme, where they talk about how their offending behaviour was maintained, despite knowing it was

inappropriate and illegal. For example, those who viewed their offending behaviour as an addition (a subtheme in the results), struggled to remove themselves from the temptation of getting their 'fix' or 'high' when the material was affordable and accessible. This was similar to those participants who spoke to the 'Coping mechanism' subtheme, whereby it was easy and affordable to access material that provided the escape and relief from other stressors.

Returning to the Implicit Theories (IT) model described by Bartels and Merdian (2016), the fourth IT 'nature of harm' reflects what the participants in our study discussed around difficulty linking the images they viewed to actual harming of a child. Although the participants acknowledged that they no longer believed this and could understand the consequences of their actions, they still found it difficult to identify with the label of being a 'sex offender'.

The first three ITs reflected the participants understanding regarding their reasons for offending and mapped onto the subthemes within the overarching theme of 'Reasons why'. This fourth IT 'nature of harm' appeared in our findings within a different superordinate theme ('Life sentence'), which captured the long-term experiences of arrest. More specifically, the 'nature of harm' IT could be seen in the related subtheme 'I'll always be the sex offender', which considered within the overarching theme of long term experiences of arrest, the psychological impact of this type of offending. This subtheme pertains to how the participants felt discordance with the 'sex offender' and 'real me' identities. Rimer (2017) noted that IIOC offenders tended to have dichotomous 'offline' (i.e. real world) and 'online' (internet) identities, which may assist in maintaining their offending behaviour (through attributing offending behaviour to 'online' identity) and protect one's self-identity ('not a bad person'). This identity protection was seen in several participants who appeared to hold a 'spectrum of sex offenders' concept (seen within the 'I'll always be the sex offender'

subtheme). For example, one participant spoke about how he had never "stalked school-yards" and had never considered "acting this all out". This finding was concurrent with other studies (Kettleborough, & Merdian, 2014; Merdian et al., 2014; Quayle & Taylor, 2002; Winder & Gough, 2010), with the notion of a 'spectrum' of sex offender also being reported in Winder and Gough's (2010) study.

As mentioned above, the fourth IT 'nature of harm' was conceptualised in this study as related to the experiences of the participants following arrest for IIOC offences rather than their reasoning behind the offence. However, there was perhaps a vicious cycle in the development of conflicting identities and the subsequent use of 'splitting' these to protect ones self-identity; thus providing distance from the offending behaviour, increasing the potential to (re)offend and likely maintenance of the offending behaviour. Subsequently, leading to another 'reason why'.

*Support seeking*

Another superordinate theme found in the study was the barriers experienced by IIOC offenders in seeking support on the pathway to offending. Interestingly, none of the participants reported seeking support prior to their arrest. This chimes with previous research where Piché and colleagues (2016) found only 18% (N=100) of sex offenders in their study ever sought support and the majority reported support-seeking barriers related to shame and not knowing who to talk to. Not knowing who to ask for help was part of a subtheme found in our research. The other subthemes regarding barriers in support seeking prior to offending included the subtheme of 'Too risky' (where the participants reported the benefits of seeking support did not appear to outweigh the negative consequences of being arrested and charged), the subtheme of 'Not acknowledging it was a problem' and 'Support available does not match the offenders needs'. The findings of these subthemes were concordant with other research literature, where reported barriers included concerns about confidentiality, difficulty

in accessibility of support and challenges in finding professionals who have the knowledge and willingness to help them (Houtepen et al., 2016; Levenson et al., 2017; Levenson & Grady, 2018).

The participants reported wanting to stop and access support early into their offending pathway, but saw risks as outweighing the benefits (as seen in the 'Too risky' subtheme) and spoke about wanting a confidential support system. Such schemes have proved successful in early intervention programmes such as the Dunkelfeld project in Germany and Stop it Now in the Netherlands. Studies from the USA, Canada and the UK, where disclosure laws are stricter, show that fewer people contact support services prior to offending (Grady et al., 2018; Piché et al., 2016; Van Horn, 2015). The participants in our study had not heard of schemes as the Dunkelfeld project, but felt that this type of scheme would have been beneficial for them in the early stages of offending. Interestingly, support services such as Stop it Now (UK) could have offered a similar type intervention (although without as much protection), but none of the 12 participants had heard of this service, or other specific support services prior to their arrest. There appeared to be a gap in the knowledge of the existence of such services for individuals at risk of offending, as has been found elsewhere (Levenson et al., 2017; Piché et al., 2016; Van Horn, 2015).

*Prevention and recidivism*

Along with the aim of this study to explore the experiences of arrest and access to support (as discussed above), the question was also to explore what the felt would be 'ideal support' for them as well as a wider views on prevention strategies for IIOC offences. With regards to initial offending prevention (superordinate theme of 'Preventing the first offence'), the findings from this study were that there was a need identified by the participants for approaches which increased external and internal control. The subtheme 'External control' reflected the participants views that greater control needed to be taken by external bodies

such as the government or the police in order to make it more difficult to access IIOC e.g. gated access to pornography sites, increased policing of IP addresses for websites uploading/sharing IIOC and fining websites who host child pornography. This subtheme related to the previously discussed "Triple A Engine" and the perceived lack of control the participants identified due to the Affordability, Accessibility and Anonymity of the internet. Their suggestion for prevention, by increasing external governing controls of the internet, was to tackle the 'A's of the internet in order to stop the engine from working (in a similar vein to the fire triangle – removing one element stops the fire).

The other approaches regarding initial offending prevention highlighted by the participants in this study focused on education and information. In the subtheme 'Raising the profile of IIOC offences', the participants spoke about the need to increase public awareness of these offences, giving information that can help prevent offences and help to highlight available support. Advertising in mainstream media may appear to be risky or too emotive, but as several of the participants pointed out that this approach had been successful with respect to other sensitive topics such as rape and FGM. A good example where mainstream media had a positive impact in engaging those at risk of child sexual offending came from the Dunkelfeld project. This project was launched in 2004 with an extensive public media campaign. The message to the public focussed on how preventative therapeutic intervention with potential abusers was a way of protecting children from sexual abuse, rather than assisting perpetrators (Beier et al., 2009). Within the first 18 months of the media campaign, 476 individuals contacted the Dunkelfeld Project enquiring about participation (Beier et al., 2009). This example showed the positive impact of public media advertising in engaging those at risk of offending, as well as the motivation and willingness of these individuals to seek help (particularly in a country where their confidentiality can be legally maintained). It

was interesting that despite none of the participants in study knowing what the Dunkelfeld Project was, there was a desire expressed by the participants for the same type of campaign.

The participants in this study felt that increased public information regarding IIOC offending could prevent initial offending through educating the public, particularly young people, about risk factors (such as pornography use) on the offending pathway as well as the potential consequences of committing this offence. This was reflected in the subtheme 'Internal control' where the participants referred to the importance of education and information in order to help people make choices about their behaviour, with an aim to reduce likelihood of initial IIOC offending. Support for public education, particularly young people within school, had come from other researchers and professionals working in this field (Harper et al., 2016; Houtepan et al., 2016; McAlinden, 2016; Parr & Pearson, 2019).

The final superordinate theme from the results of this research was called 'Making sure it does not happen again' and reflects the themes raised by the participants around reducing recidivism and rehabilitation. One of the subthemes was 'Ideal support'. When considering 'ideal support' the participants spoke about wanting support from professionals who had and understanding of their difficulties, and empathy and willingness to help *them* understand their own behaviours and desires. Houtepan and colleagues (2016) found similar responses in their study where several participants had benefitted from general counselling approaches, but others felt more specialist knowledge was required. Other studies have also identified the need for more specialist professionals to provide support for individuals who have or are at risk of committing CSA offences (Levenson & Grady, 2018; Levenson et al., 2017; Piché et al., 2016). Houtepan et al (2016) reported that their participants found online support groups for individuals with paedophilic interests beneficial in helping them not to offend. They spoke of recognition, empathy and moral support being particularly helpful and the focus on living as a non-offending paedophile. The participants in the current study spoke

of wanting such support and some had tried to access groups such as Sex Addicts Anonymous (which may also link to their conceptualisation of offending as an addiction), but this had not been appropriate. Limited support groups currently exist for this cohort of individuals, one example is Virtuous Paedophiles (VirPed.org); however, there again appeared to be a gap in the knowledge of such sources of support for the participants. Equally, only one of the participants in this study had been involved with Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA); the majority had never heard of the organisation. This international organisation provides social, practical and emotional support to help sex offenders reintegrate back into society (McCartan et al., 2014). Again, many of the participants wanted such support, particularly around practicalities (as seen in the subtheme 'A life worth living'), but sadly did not have the knowledge of this organisation.

There was a crossover in themes around prevention and reducing recidivism which primarily focussed on the role of society, the media and public understanding. As discussed above, with regards to prevention, the 'Raising the profile of IIOC offences' subtheme pertained to the participants' desire for greater public information and education about IIOC offending, in order for the public to understand the offence pathway and commonality of offence risk factors. The participants in this study and researchers in this field felt that through this approach the public may be able to move away from the "monster", "evil" and "predator" narrative and recognise the potential risk factors many people do hold in relation to potential sexual offending (Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2018; McCartan, 2004). In the 'Life worth living' subtheme, the participants in this study reflected on how this stigmatising narrative prevented offenders (and potential offenders) from reaching out for support initially (Buckman et al., 2016; Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2018; Piché et al., 2016) and made it difficult for offenders to integrate fully in society. Ultimately, they felt this stigmatisation may lead to re-offending due the barrier it placed on those wishing to seek

support for urges, and how this prevented positive societal integration creating additional stressors (and therefore risk factors) for recidivism (Craissati, 2004; Houtepan et al., 2016; Jahnke, 2018). The participants spoke of how when they were given the opportunity to make reparations and to contribute back into society (e.g. working), it could be very protective against reoffending and supported them to overcome some of the difficulties that led to their offending pathway initially (as seen in the subtheme 'Moving forwards').

**Implications**

*Police Approach/ SOP*

Within the 'What helped and what exacerbated the situation' subtheme regarding immediate arrest experiences, there was considerable positive feedback from the participants regarding their treatment by the police during their arrest procedure. The welfare SOPs employed regarding this cohort of offenders by the police in this study are not a generic in all police service nor are there a national set of procedures. To our knowledge this is the first study to explore the impact these welfare procedures have had on offenders. The findings within this subtheme highlighted specific examples given by the participants around how these SOPs were beneficial and supportive for them during what can be a highly emotive and distressing experience (arrest). Interestingly, not all the participants who reported these supportive factors would have been under the welfare SOP for IIOC offenders, as their offences may have pre-dated this. This indicated good practice by the police in supporting the welfare of IIOC offenders pre-SOP and perhaps reflected individual police officer training or approach. However, within the same subtheme regarding what exacerbated the (arrest) situation, a number of the participants reported what they felt to be unfair and discriminatory treatment (e.g. excessive force), and several of these participants would have been arrested under a welfare SOP. What these findings highlighted was that when the welfare SOPs (such

as upholding discretion, supporting family and signposting) were carried out, this was recognised, appreciated and helpful for individuals during the arrest procedure. However, as evidenced in this subtheme, there were inconsistencies in these being carried out during all IIOC offender arrests. This may have been due to factors surrounding the arrest but also possible individual differences in police officers attending the arrest.

*Mental health risk management*

One area of need highlighted in this research was around identifying possible suicidality in IIOC offenders at arrest. Under the superordinate theme of 'Here and now', relating to the participants immediate experience of arrest, two subthemes emerged which identified suicidality among the participants. This was during arrest, shortly after, whilst being held in custody ('Initial reactions' subtheme), and upon release, particularly whilst awaiting the court date ('Emotional response' subtheme). The participants reported feeling that this risk was not always recognised or attended to by police, particularly in the immediate arrest and custody context. Further training for police may be required, with a possible amendment to the welfare SOP to ensure mental health risk assessments are carried out consistently, emphasising this increased risk of self-harm and suicide, particularly during the initial arrest and in whilst custody.

This research identified that there were significant gaps in the knowledge IIOC offenders have of support services, particularly pre-arrest. This could be seen in the overarching theme of 'Barriers to seeking support on the pathway to offending' and more specifically from the subtheme within this – 'Not knowing it was a problem and not knowing who to ask for help'. This finding is important, as available services such as Stop it Now might have been beneficial prior to offending and potentially intervened early enough to prevent the offence happening. The internal and external barriers to accessing support prior to offending (or arrest) discussed within the subthemes ('Too risky', 'Not knowing it was a

problem and not knowing who to ask for help' and 'Support does not match the needs of offenders') of this overarching theme, were identified previously by other researchers and it is unfortunate that these barriers still remain present. Barriers such as mandatory reporting, discussed in the 'Too risky' subtheme, may be harder to overcome, but successful services such as the Dunkelfeld Project, should be exemplified as good practice in order to support changing reporting regulations.

*Awareness raising*

'Raising the profile of IIOC offences' was an important subtheme within the context of preventing initial offending (the superordinate theme of 'Preventing the first offence'). The findings showed participants beliefs in how increasing the profile of these offences would not only publicly advertise support services for individuals at risk of offending, but also educate the public and reduce stigmatisation. The participants shared that this reduction in stigmatisation and increase in public understanding regarding the pathway into offending (and the associated risk factors) could help support a reduction in recidivism (see subtheme 'A life worth living' and 'Moving forwards'). Therefore, the roll out of an approach in the UK similar to other successful instances of raising the public profile of IIOC offences, e.g. the Dunkelfeld Project, is a primary recommendation from this research. As one participant said "I always wanted to stop…I did. And I always was in fear of this happening". By bringing this offence and the available support services to the public's attention, barriers can be broken, and it may be possible to reduce the prevalence of IIOC offences.

**Limitations**

*Reliable data*

IIOC offending was a sensitive topic, which may have impacted on the participants willingness to discuss their experiences openly. This cohort of offenders were likely to have

felt stigmatised and shamed, which may have led to giving responses that were affected by desirability. Although great efforts were taken to reassure the participants that their responses were anonymised and would not impact upon their existing relationship with the police or legal system, there was always the risk that the participants were withholding because of the fear of identification and/or repercussions.

It is important to acknowledge that this research included the views and narratives of participants after they have been arrested and charged with IIOC offences. This research was not focussed on the 'truthfulness' of what the participants were reporting, but primarily about capturing the experiences of the participants as *they made sense of it*. However, the retrospective nature of the study meant there was a risk of the participants attempting to portray themselves in a more pleasing light; their narratives may have suffered from biased recall or impression management. An example of this may be the lack of discussion from the majority of the participants around the use of IIOC for sexual gratification, or a primary sexual interest in children. The shame and disgust the participants reported feeling about their offending behaviour may have inhibited their willingness to discuss these topics openly. They may also have chosen to highlight a need for greater support services, control by governing bodies and responsibility of website hosting sites (as a number of examples) to externalise and distance themselves from the shame of their sexualised behaviours. It would be particularly interesting if in the future researchers could discuss motivations, support needs and barriers to accessing support with this cohort of individuals prior to arrest (and possibly with the caveat of complete confidentiality) to try and garner what may be a 'truer' picture of these individuals; without the potential bias of retrospect or impression management. This may give further insight into the type of support and intervention which could be most effective in preventing initial and continued offending (prior to arrest).

*Sample*

The restraints regarding access to this cohort of participants (participants available and willing to discuss this sensitive topic, participants deemed suitable by the police for interview, time and venue constraints of the researcher) meant that 12 was the total number of participants recruited to this specific research study. Although 12 participants would be considered a large enough sample for a thematic analysis approach, particularly from this hard to reach cohort, a more varied group representing a wider cross section from this cohort could gain further detailed insights. Whether more participants would have provided further insight that were missing from the findings is difficult to ascertain. From a practical research perspective, data saturation can be reached through operationalising it in concordance with the research questions, theoretical position and analysis adopted (Saunders et al., 2018). The authors of this research believe that in the context of the restraints in the sample number as described above, they were still able to reach a point of data saturation where the new data being collected from the participants over time was redundant of the data already collected (as in same views, comments, ideas are being presented repeatedly and are captured within the coding). However, there is always the acknowledgement that a different research methodology and thus different approach to data saturation could have presented further findings not identified in this research study.

*Sensitivity of the research*

Anonymity and confidentiality, as well as controlling for interviewer bias was prioritised in this study, therefore no crime specific details about the participants were known to the researchers. Within the sample, there could have been a significant participant variation that may have impacted on the results. These factors meant that generalisability of results was problematic, however, the focus of this research was the personal experience. Future research may wish to focus on employing control or comparison groups to increase reliability and generalisability of results.

**Acknowledgement**: I would like to thank the North Wales Police for all their support with this research, with particular mention to Jonathon Salisbury-Jones, Andrew Pendleton and Elizabeth Kingston. I would also like to thank the men who took part in this research. You were willing to speak so openly to me about your experiences and I know this wasn't easy. Thank you for your help.

**Disclosure of interests**: The authors report no conflict of interest.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1:** Study approval by School of Psychology Sensitive Ethics Committee

**Re: Sensitive ethics committee**

SB **Steven Barnard <s.barnard@bangor.ac.uk>**
24/06/2020 16:04

**To:** Sophie Augarde **Cc:** Christopher Saville

Hi Sophie,

I can confirm that no objections were raised with myself in relation to your project and that members of the Committee had opportunity to do so, therefore the project was not stopped from proceeding.

Best wishes for your submission.

Steve


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**Appendix 2:** Sample extract from coded transcript as part of the thematic analysis



| | |
|---|---|
| | The thought of what I was doing now disgusts me. Um. I just wish I could go back and speak to me, you know. Years back in fact – Pete, didn't happen overnight. |
| | Yeah. What would you say? |
| | 'give your fucking head a wobble' (laughed). Yeah. Or 'talk to people about your issues, don't bottle them up. Don't go down this rabbit hole' |
| | What do you think would have, cus I'm quite interested in, in people who, kind of like you were saying, who just starting to go down that rabbit hole, for whatever reason, um and are kind of starting to maybe get a bit more risky; what do you think would be helpful for those people to sort of step away from the edge? |
| | The problem you've got is, if, say, hypothetically you were going through internet stuff yeah |
| | Yeah |
| | If you found say a child abuse video online, if you contact the police about that, they would then seize your hardrive |
| | Yeah |
| | Search all your internet history and everything else. Um. Then it's 'are you looking?' |
| | So actually, you can't contact about this necessarily. So, would you want someone to contact who you could talk to about, 'I found this, I'm interested in it, I don't want to' but would keep that confidential |
| | Yeah. Yeah. Like I would never, believe it or not, I wouldn't ring Stop it Now again |
| | No, no, and that's a shame, cus that's kind of what they're there for |

| | | |
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| Could be you – fear/threat of internet (control) | Through google chrome, through Firefox, through all that, you can get it through that. | all legal browsers. everyone use them<br>Again, feeling of threat/fear - out to get you. |
| | What do you think would have deterred you, if you saw, I dunno, if you saw an advert or saw something, what would have kind made you look at think 'ooo' I'm not, yeah, really make you question even in that really dark place, would have caught your eye? | |
| Deterrent – tapping into individual differences → linking/engaging | Um. Probably 'it could be your kids' | tapping into his individual difference + identity as a father. |
| | Yeah? Personalise it to you? | |
| | Yeah. Cus, the thought of someone doing that to my kids | linking |
| | Yeah | |
| | Is the only thing that would send me back to prison. If someone did that to my kids, I would go back to prison for it. I'd kill them. (laughed) | interesting. linking harm sexually from a screen to your children – shoe on other foot/ insight and empathy development<br>– human element to the offence |
| | So actually, having that sort of thing where you're saying, yeah, having make you think 'who's kid is that?' | |
| | Yeah | |
| | Actually, making it more personable | |
| Individual differences in SO, Still not okay (justifications/ reasons why) | Yeah. Because, as I said, even though you get people going 'I didn't touch them, I didn't do that', you're watching child abuse images, child rape videos, you're watching that sort of thing, and it disgust me yeah? | Not contact but still 'digging' |
| | Yeah | wants to make sure I know this |

**Appendix 3:** Supplementary table of additional participant quotations to evidence and support the subthemes.

| Superordinate theme | Subtheme | Supporting quote |
|---|---|---|
| **'Here and now' – immediate experience of arrest** | ***Initial reactions*** | 'Yeah just like your world turned upside down<br>Yeah, yeah, um what was going on for you at that moment?...one minute I'm washing up and the next minute there's four people, coming through your flat…Yeah, it's quite, yeah. Sends your world upside down. There's nothing emotionally. No. nothing emotionally just sort of like everything's like pheww…'<br>- Seamus<br><br>'And immediately, I knew. Immediately. Um. And it wasn't the case of going to panic mode or anything like that, it was a case of 'oh right, they're here'. Cus effectively been expecting it'<br>- Jorge |
| | ***What helped and what exacerbated the situation*** | 'No, they tried to not make it obvious to other people at work as to why I was being arrested and things like that…Um, so they were quite subtle about things. Um. Yeah so, it wasn't a terrible experience'<br>- Andy<br><br>'And uh (Police officer's name) and uh she was very good with my wife. And she came back the next day with her sergeant and uh had a word with me and my wife'<br>- Wilson<br><br>'There was nothing mentioned about support…she dug out and handed pamphlets, leaflets, fliers…And that was the first time, so that was 18 months after my arrest'<br>- Jorge |

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| | ***Emotional response*** | 'Um, so to be put into a cell, hearing other people shouting, I was there for 24 hours….It brings it home to you….Um, what, how bad the thing is that you've done. And, then you start playing, your mind starts playing…but it wasn't overthinking, it's like consequences. Look at where I am, what's going to happen next? The shame starts coming in then cus you've got that time in the cell to be, you know, to get your, not your act together because I remember just again banging my head against the wall, I was trying to knock myself out so that I just didn't want to be there at all'<br>- Jason<br><br>'Overall it was, scary I suppose in a sense, but it was, okay, it was all happening so quick, without warning, um. I didn't even sort of; it just happened, taking it in you know. And then uh, after, after everything finished and dropped me back home, that was when um, you know I had to tell my dad and my wife, and you know, that was the hard bit'<br>- Patrick<br><br>'Uh in all honesty a lot of it I probably tried to block it out of my mind anyway…For being such a fool and all the shame as well, um. But yeah. That was my initial reaction'<br>- Claude |
| **'Life Sentence' – long term experience of arrest** | ***I'll always be the sex offender*** | 'I'm the same person you knew before, I haven't suddenly changed into a different person after what I tell you' you know, because I was frightened of some people suddenly seeing me as; because you read things in the paper don't you'<br>- Patrick<br><br>'I mean just made, it was terrible, I thought 'that's not me!'. Um. But I suppose it was'<br>- Claude |

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| | | 'It's like, I still don't know when my risk is going to be lowered. I'm still classed as high risk. Uh I don't know what courses I can do, I don't know how to lower my risk…They're just like 'it takes time' and I'm like 'well how long!', 'is it going to take me 20 years?'<br>- Andy |
| | ***Alternative life*** | 'You know, you're gonna tell them the truth, you know, that's the only way of doing it, and obviously you know as soon as you do that, chances are that you're not going to get employment'<br>- Denzel<br><br>'I don't like the situation but then I have to accept it, um, the flat I mean, it's a nice flat…um but it will never be home, I will never refer to it as home, because it's not. Um. I've tried to make it liveable for myself, but, uh. But as I say, I've just accepted the situation, I'll never like it but then it's my fault'<br>- Claude<br><br>'Most of the time it's by not telling anybody. My landlord never asked so I never said. And the, the small amount of work I've managed to find in the time I've been out, they never asked either'<br>- Robin |
| | ***Ripples of the offence*** | 'How much it affects other people…Obviously not just the victims but I also consider my wife affected, family victims as well cus they've suffered…Without a doubt, uh, they've suffered as a result. Of that, I feel guilty for of course'<br>- Claude<br><br>'And, how can I put it, if I got, if someone gave me a hiding, I deserve it. Yeah? But my family doesn't…I get more worried; half my worries for them was since I wasn't there to protect |

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| | | them…I couldn't be at home to protect my family'<br>- Andy<br><br>'yeah, they'd come and they'd make visits, and then obviously that would mess with the boss's head a little bit because, it's there, straight away, and she's got to go through it…she struggles with certain things at times… And she's fine for a while and then something will come up and will bring it back and you know then she'll be upset and whathaveyou'<br>- Jorge |
| **Barriers to seeking support on the pathway to offending** | ***Too risky*** | 'Would they go on to confess to anyone, I don't know. I certainly wouldn't…surely would be asking for trouble?'<br>- Euan<br><br>'Well up to that point I hadn't been convicted of it so probably not because I would have been admitting to something I hadn't been charged with'<br>- Patrick |
| | ***Not acknowledging it was a problem and not knowing who to ask for help*** | 'I've gone through phases in the past where, I think 'I need to stop doing this' and, how do I go about getting help?'<br>- Jorge<br><br>'There's a lot of people in this situation who would register that what they are doing is illegal or at least immoral, certainly what I did. But you don't know what to do with that…you don't feel like you can trust anyone with it'<br>- Robin<br><br>'It's like the, you know, saying 'I'm an addict' you know? You need to admit there's a problem before you can do it. So, it's getting people to be aware that they've got a problem'<br>- Andy |

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| | ***Support available does not match the needs of offenders*** | 'I just thought well, you're meant to be a helpline number and all you've done is phone the police when I've already told you that they've told me to ring you. so, I just threw them in the bin'<br>- Seamus<br><br>'Um, I rang them up, I explained what…What was happening. And they said 'oh well we can't help you until you've been convicted''<br>- Denzel |
| **'Reasons why' - framing the context of support and prevention** | ***Pornography as the gatekeeper*** | 'in the days before the internet, you really had to go and look for these things…But now it's potentially in everybody's home…and I said to this probation officer 'the porn comes looking for you now''<br>- Percy<br><br>'You know, the essence of it is, that adult porn leads to children's porn, you know, it does it's a natural progression, that's the mechanics of how you arrive at the bottom of the internet…You start at the top and you work your way down, and when you get to nearly the bottom you've got the decision to press the button to say yes, I want to go there or click. You make that decision. One way or the other'<br>- Wilson<br><br>'I remember first seeing an image of a child in, mixed in with normal images. And, just being revolted. And then reaching this point, reaching that point then (upset)… Why was I, several years ago thinking this, and now looking at those pictures, I wouldn't have even dreamt of looking at them'<br>- Patrick |
| | ***Seeing it as an addiction*** | 'But, then you're always searching, and it's never enough, always looking for something more…You're looking for something that you feel is more extreme…I've looked at things that are more extreme before and then I thought |

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| | | 'oh god no that's not for me' and I've gone back. But then I've gone off on another path and that was the path'<br>- Patrick<br><br>'Porn destroyed my life. Cus porn, I said, even though towards the end of my porn addiction it wasn't for sexual gratification. That was the onset of me looking at child abuse images'<br>- Andy<br><br>'because then you've got something that is likely to make them reoffend again, cus then there's some kind of addiction…On a different level, I think. Yeah, more than just an attraction to the pictures and so on…Something else pulling them in…Psychological'<br>- Piers |
| | ***Coping mechanism*** | 'I think when I was working, you see, I had a very um intensive job…And um, there was a lot of pressure, it was a high-pressure job…when I retired redundant at X, when the X with good pension you know…I needn't of worked, but I did have a couple of other jobs. Um. I think, and um when those jobs petered out, I think I did suffer a bit from depression…On reflection I didn't think so at the time, um but I think I probably did and that might have had a bit to do with it, but I would never turn to that to excuse my behaviour'<br>- Wilson<br><br>'I wasn't aware I had committed any sex offences…I was in such a mess…After this interlude, 5 years and then my mother dying and so on. I, um, ordered two guitars on the internet and didn't know I'd done it…I hadn't a bloody clue. No idea…I had everything to deal with. And this on top of it'<br>- Euan<br><br>'I was in such a bad way…Yeah especially with my mind. I've never |

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| | | had any issues before, I haven't now. Um, but, yeah. It's just taking that wrong path, choice in life. And you pay a price, a heavy price'<br>- Jason |
| **Preventing the first offence** | ***External control*** | 'Yeah, I mean the first thing, of course is for them to shut down these sites in the first place'<br>- Claude<br><br>'No, well, if you cut the head off the snake, you'll almost definitely kill it….You know, so, definitely need to crack down and try and find the people supplying it'<br>- Robin<br><br>'Yeah yeah. And if, if, I'm sorry but they also need to stop saying 'it won't appear on your bill as Pornhub', well, sorry, it goes on as Pornhub…You know, that's what it should do. So that if a 12, 13, 14, 15 year old is accessing…Even if it's their own card…It comes through on the statement'<br>- Denzel |
| | ***Internal control*** | 'The consequences…And, the fact that you're not just looking at a picture, there's consequences to why you looked at that picture. You're fuelling the fire kind of thing and then what that person is going through as well'<br>- Seamus<br><br>'This is, if you continue to do this, this is not what might happen, this is what's going to happen. And all you need is a list of general, um, things that will happen, you end up doing the register, you could end up with um a suspended sentence if you're lucky, um or you could end up being in jail, and that won't be fun'<br>- Percy |

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| | | 'How much it affects other people…Um. Obviously not just the victims but I also consider my wife affected, family victims as well cus they've suffered'<br>- Claude |
| | ***Raising the profile of IIOC offences*** | 'It's always, it's so easy to condemn or sperate yourself from it, and then you can just give your opinion whatever, cus it has no consequence. But as soon as it happens in a place so close to you that you can't ignore it, well, you have no choice but to acknowledge it then'<br>- Robin<br><br>'Yeah I don't think it's, what's the word, I don't think, it gets um, like the recognition…Seriousness of the recognition, does that make sense…Yeah, yeah, it's all quite swept under the carpet kind of thing'<br>- Seamus<br><br>'It I mean, that's the thing about being, I don't know, am I alone? I don't know how many people have got the same thing, I've no idea. And you feel alone, you know you're not, but is there another thousand people? Is it ten thousand people? I don't know. Is it an epidemic? Is it not? Is it still quite rare? I don't, no idea. So, if somebody came to me with those numbers, I'd think 'okay, something's wrong here''<br>- Patrick |
| **Making sure it does not happen again** | ***Ideal support*** | 'I don't want to be sharing a room or space with a circle of people who do the same thing. I don't like the fact I did it… I want to know how I can stop myself doing it, not what somebody else did, I just, so I can sort of'<br>- Jorge<br><br>'To have someone to talk to who's been through, um the whole thing, and uh, maybe could signpost you somewhere…Where did they get |

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| | | help?...What, what did they find useful?'<br>- Denzel<br><br>'I thought it would have been very good in this case, uh, to have an after group with some kind of supervision…Would have been extremely positive. Because we got, we got, some good friendships came out of it, you know, at first we didn't know anything about each other at all, and we were all dealing with our own issues, but, uh, as we engaged with the uh, facilitators and we opened up and opened up to each other, yeah we got pretty close, and that would have been…think it would have been positive to maintain good social relations because if people are otherwise trying to mend fences and are still feeling that isolation, it's more likely to, um, make them feel depressed again and maybe get back into the same mindset that caused them to offend in the first place…So, I think to keep the morale up, it would be very good for that if nothing else'<br>- Piers |
| | ***A life worth living*** | 'Cus I mean, most of the time, you end up accepting the guilt at the time of serving your sentence but then when you come out and find that the public still condemns you for it, even if you've paid the price…You end up starting to go into a form of denial, where you decide it's not your fault and that it is, it's just one of those things that seeps into your brain'<br>- Robin<br><br>'But that. The vilification, the hatred, and rightfully so, rightfully so. Um, the downside is, obviously, that stresses etc. something that could push somebody back to reoffending…And the general public don't understand that'<br>- Jorge |

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| | | ‘‘how would you feel about taking on people, ex-cons and working in the garage?’ cus he wants to make it a proper garage…I said ‘if you take on people who are ex-convicts, they’ve got a basic knowledge of engineering’ …On minimum wage so that it builds up. And he was like ‘yeah that’s not a bad idea’. But it would be good to be able to do something like that’<br>- Andy |
| | ***Moving forwards*** | ‘it was like ‘oh I’ve been caught, thank god for that’…And that takes so much pressure off. And I think that’s why I’m dealing with the crystal meth now, because of the fact that I’m in such a good place, why would you want to take a drug that just to get yourself high, sort of thing? You know, when you’re feeling good anyway’<br>- Jason<br><br>‘the Zippo it has the serenity prayer. Which is the alcoholics prayer…And I don’t want to go down that route again. So whenever, if you ever see me in public and I’m thumbing with my lighter, I’m having a read because I’m having a bit of a wobble. Um. And what I normally do then, I’ll either um go to X, my mate’s got a unit there and he buys cars now and again for me…So, I’ll go and have a tinker with them, when I start to get stressed’<br>- Andy<br><br>‘But I know that it’s up to me to make sure that I don’t go anywhere near, and it’s not the matter that, it’s a matter that you’ve got to have that mobile phone to prove that you can…Abstain from it’<br>- Denzel |

# Chapter three

# Contributions to theory and clinical practice

## Contributions to theory and clinical practice

This third chapter explores further ways in which both the literature review and empirical paper in this thesis can contribute to theory and clinical practice in the field of sex offending.

### Implications for future research and theory development

*Literature review*

An area of Female Child Sex Offending (FCSO) that has received increased attention since the original Grayston and DeLuca (1999) paper has been that of solo vs. co-offending FCSOs. Despite this, the majority of co-offending studies have predominantly explored male and female relationships with little discussion of same sex co-offending, particularly where the offenders are in an intimate relationship. Similarly, there have been few studies looking at multiple perpetrator or 'gang' offending in regards to FCSOs, particularly where there may be more than one female perpetrator. These may be areas of future research to develop co-offending theories. Another direction for future research related to co-offending, is regarding the true extent of coercion in co-offending relationships as this was a debated topic between researchers in the review (Gannon et al., 2008; Martellozzo et al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002).

There was some difficulty assessing from current literature the role of neurodevelopmental difficulties and disorders in FCSO. Whilst several studies indicated that their FCSO sample tended to have fewer qualifications or worked in low paid jobs (Wijkman et al., 2010, Lewis & Stanley, 2000) there was not clear evidence as to whether women with learning difficulties or disabilities are more likely to sexually abuse children. Similarly, there is a dearth of research around neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in relation to FCSO. The increasing interest in neurodevelopmental disorders and links with potential sexual offending (e.g.

Mogavero, 2016; Langevin & Curnoe, 2010; Schnitzer et al., 2020) may provide a platform for future research in regards to FCSO.

As Gannon and colleagues discussed in their 2008 paper, theory development needs to continue working towards a gender specific understanding of child sex offenders in order to contribute towards interventions for FCSOs. The work of researchers such as Gannon and colleagues has assisted clinicians in carrying out interventions with FCSOs (British Psychological Society, 2016), however unlike male child sex offenders (MCSOs), there appears to be less consensus or uniformed approach to intervening with FCSOs (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). Future research may look at developing and assessing FCSO theory driven interventions and treatment programmes. In relation to this, the role of gender in the evolving field of institutional and online perpetrated CSA needs further researching so as to get a clearer profile of the FCSOs abusing in these contexts.

*Empirical paper*

Although research into IIOC offences is gaining interest, the majority of research regarding MCSOs focuses primarily on contact (or 'offline' offences), or online offences where there is contact with the child (e.g. grooming) with possible intention for physical sexual abuse. There is less research on individuals who view IIOC without grooming or intentions to engage in contact abuse. Continued research into IIOC offenders as a distinct category of child sex offender can help further develop understanding of their motivations, offending pathways and whether there are patterns of progression in their offending behaviours. Of particular interest from our study was the role of specific 'risk factors' that our participants identified had initiated and maintained their offending behaviour, such as substance misuse, pornography and inadequate coping mechanisms. Further research regarding such factors could help identify early intervention support preventing initial offending and reduce

recidivism. The perception several of our participants held relating to the addictive quality of viewing IIOC may warrant further investigation alongside existing addiction literature, so as to contribute to offender pathway theory and possible focused interventions (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous peer support model).

More consensus is needed regarding intervention programmes for those who have committed IIOC offences (Perkins et al., 2018). Some of the participants in the study benefited from the iSOTP (Internet Sex Offender Treatment Programme) groups that took place within prison. However, some of the men were not offered this programme whilst in prison, and those serving a community order received no formal intervention without paying privately – this is a common outcome for those who have committed IIOC offences (Levenson & Grady, 2018). With the SOTP intervention withdrawn from prisons due to concerns about its efficacy (Mews et al., 2017) and limited community interventions, this group of offenders often have little access to evidence-based interventions (Perkins et al., 2018). Research needs to focus on developing a formalised evidence-based intervention specifically for IIOC offenders which is accessible to all those charged with this offence.

Another direction for future research should be on raising the profile of IIOC offences (e.g. using mainstream media advertising) and measuring impact. Such research could investigate whether public perceptions and their understanding of IIOC offenders change following interventions such as an informational advertising campaign or an educational intervention for young people. In particular it may be interesting to measure public opinion regarding advertising of support services specific to CSA perpetrators in the UK, especially if applying a previously successful advertising model such as that developed for the Dunkelfeld Project. As discussed in the empirical paper, further assessment of whether advertising increases uptake to support services in the UK would be beneficial and would also provide evidence that these individuals want help with their inappropriate sexual desires. Such evidence would

support lobbying for changes in laws regarding mandatory reporting, so that successful early intervention programmes similar to the Dunkelfeld Project could be set up in the UK.

To our knowledge, this is the first research paper looking at arrest procedures and their impact on IIOC offenders. The findings from this research indicate that arrest has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of IIOC offenders and there are risks of suicidality. This research has also shown that when the welfare of these offenders is considered during arrest procedures, this can have a positive impact in offender perceptions towards the police and reduce some of the more negative psychological impact. More formalised research into the impact of arrest and welfare operating procedures on this cohort of offenders could provide evidence of risk reduction (e.g. self-harm and suicidality) as well as more long-term outcomes such as cooperation with the police and subsequent support seeking behaviours. Such evidence would be beneficial for informing 'gold standard' police procedure and ultimately reducing potential life-threatening risks for IIOC offenders.

## Implications for clinical practice

*Literature review*

Although the prevalence of FCSOs is small, there is growing research and evidence to indicate that a) this cohort of offenders exist; b) the impact of their offending is significant; and C) they require specialised assessment and treatment interventions (Gannon et al., 2008). It is hoped that this literature review can support professionals potentially working with FCSOs or their victims, by providing an up-to-date summary profile, and highlighting research in an accessible way which may further develop their understanding regarding female-perpetrated CSA. It is also hoped that this literature review may be able to signpost clinicians towards approaches for working therapeutically with this client group.

Although FCSOs are a heterogenous group of offenders, certain characteristics were common. These characteristics may indicate to clinicians and professionals those potentially at risk of offending, in order to intervene. For example, there was a strong link between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) i.e. sexual abuse, and future sexual offending in these females (Bickart et al., 2019; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Wijkman et al., 2010; Levenson et al., 2015). That is not to say every girl who experiences childhood sexual abuse will become an FCSO, but it is an important risk factor for clinicians to acknowledge, especially those working with young people who are exposed to such ACEs (Harrati et al., 2018). Early intervention providing therapy for experiences, as well as psychoeducation regarding healthy relationships and sexuality for these girls, may help prevent later sexual offending. In a similar vein, FCSO risk factors such as intimate partner violence or having a partner who is a known sex offender (particularly in co-offending CSA) (Wijkman et al., 2010; Burkey & Ten Bensel, 2015), may mean that clinicians are working with adult women who are also at risk of committing CSA (e.g. in a domestic abuse service). In both of these examples, there is a need for multi-disciplinary, joined up working among services. FCSOs may be able to offend undetected due to lack of communication in services (Tozdan et al., 2019). For example, suspicions of female-perpetrated CSA held by social care services may never be communicated with other agencies, who may also have their own concerns. This combined with a lack of knowledge about FCSOs, or a belief that they do not exist, increases the risk of FCSOs continuing to abuse children without intervention. A primary clinical implication, therefore, is for the education of clinicians and other professionals around FCSOs – their prevalence, characteristics, offence operandi; and how professionals could intervene through spotting risk factors. The information in this review can help to update the knowledge of specialist support services such as the Lucy Faithful Foundation, who provide sexual abuse education to professionals, supporting dissemination of information regarding

FCSOs to the wider professional sphere. Safeguarding is 'everybody's business' and therefore knowing about FCSOs and their pathway to offending (including risk factors) is necessary for all clinicians and professionals, not just those in specialist settings.

*Empirical review*

There is a responsibility for psychologists and other mental health clinicians to try to work with individuals who are at risk of sexually abusing children. Frequently clinicians are working with victims of CSA and rarely work with the perpetrators of this abuse, unless based in specialist settings. The firefighting approach to CSA needs to be addressed and prevention work includes working therapeutically with individuals who find themselves drawn to viewing children in a sexual way. It is estimated up to 4% to 5% of adult men acknowledge some level of paedophilic interests or tendencies (Levenson & Grady, 2018). It is therefore likely that clinicians working with the general public, including young people, may encounter individuals at risk of committing CSA. Clinicians need to be prepared and open to working with these individuals, to prevent them travelling further down the path towards offending.

It is hoped that this empirical paper can provide clinicians with some understanding around this cohort of offenders and help identify some of the risk factors potentially leading to viewing IIOC. This may be particularly important for clinicians working with young people who are discovering sex and relationships, and may be using pornography. Education around healthy relationships and about the risks of the internet, particularly in using pornography, were suggested as preventative interventions by the participants in this study. They also spoke about the need for clinicians to invite discussion around the viewing of child pornography in order to 'bring it out of the dark'. The men in this study who received support from professionals felt that talking therapy could be beneficial, particularly in managing

some of the underlying difficulties that led them down their offending pathway. However, several felt that clinicians needed more specialist knowledge to understand their difficulties, and that there needs to be greater access to trained professionals for support, particularly pre-offending/early intervention.

It is clear that better commissioning of specific services that support individuals who are at risk of perpetrating CSA is needed, and for these services to more accessible. Mainstream public advertising is one way of doing this and this needs to be explored further by specialist services such as the Lucy Faithful Foundation. However, clinicians can also highlight these services by having posters and leaflets etc., available for clients to see (e.g. in waiting rooms). Clinicians and their teams are also responsible for highlighting their training and education needs around understanding and intervening with individuals who may be at risk of perpetrating CSA. Those who do work with CSA offenders or 'at risk' individuals also have a responsibility to lobby for better commissioning of therapeutic services for this cohort and for innovative prevention programmes like the Dunkelfeld Project.

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**Word count**

| | Excluding references, tables, appendices etc | Inclusive |
|---|---|---|
| Thesis summary | 298 | 298 |
| Literature review | 8,881 | 16,471 |
| Empirical study | 12,812 | 20,565 |
| Reflective commentary | 2,004 | 2,565 |
| Title pages, acknowledgements, abbreviations, contents, word count | - | 1,029 |
| *Total* | *23,995* | *40,928* |