

Child Pornography Offenders: Final Findings from the Police Case File Study

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In this symposium, we report on the final results of a police case file study of child pornography offenders that has been previously reported at the ATSA conference (e.g., Seto, 2009; Eke & Seto, 2011). We have extended the follow-up results for a sample of 301 men (286 of whom had time at risk in the community) convicted of child pornography offenses that were obtained from 10 collaborating Ontario police services, covering rural areas, towns and large cities. We have a rich data set from investigation files that include police reports, recorded and/or transcribed police interviews with suspects, records of previous criminal justice involvement, and the offender's child pornography collection.

In the first presentation, we describe the sample and data set and report comparisons of different subgroups distinguished according to their child pornography related behavior (e.g., collections emphasizing boys versus those emphasizing girls). In the second presentation, we compare offenders based on how they came to the attention of police, distinguishing between those who were discovered downloading/purchasing child pornography, those who were reported by others such as family members or IT professionals, those who were discovered in the course of other investigations (e.g., online fraud, contact sexual offense) and those who were discovered in the course of undercover operations by law enforcement. In the final presentation, we report recidivism results and the results of our attempt to identify factors that help predict future offending.

References

- Eke, A. W., & Seto, M. C. (2011, November). *Recidivism risk factors for child pornography offenders*. Paper presented in M. C. Seto (Chair), Child pornography offenders: Characteristics and risk for recidivism. 30th annual conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Toronto, ON.
- Seto, M. C. (2009, October). *"A picture is better than a thousand words": What do we know about child pornography offenders?* Plenary address presented at the 28th annual conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Dallas, TX.

The Heterogeneity of Child Pornography Offenders

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Except for gender (most are male), child pornography offenders are heterogeneous (Seto, in press). The current work provides an indepth examination of the 286 convicted adult male child pornography offenders followed as part of our study. Similar to other adult male sex offenders (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005) and other child pornography offender samples (Babchishin, Hanson & Hermann, 2011) the average age of offenders at the time of the investigation was 38 years ($SD = 12.5$) and the average age at conviction was 39 years ($SD = 12.5$). Single offenders (54%) were younger than other offenders ($p < .001$). Almost half (42%) had committed a prior offense with a fifth (19%) having a prior contact sexual offense and/or a noncontact sex offense history. We had psychiatric history for just over half the sample; based on that, 25% of the full sample had a formal psychiatric diagnosis. Substance abuse was evident for almost a fifth of offenders (18%).

With regards to sexual interests, 14% were formally diagnosed with a paraphilia, with most diagnosed as pedophilic or hebephilic. More offenders (38%) admitted sexual interest in the child pornography material during their interview with police; 31% specifically admitting to sexual interest in prepubescent children and 12% specifically admitting to sexual interest in pubescent children. We discuss how the sexual interests of the offenders are evident in their collections (including non-pornographic child material) and their other offending.

There are also some significant subgroup differences. For example, offenders who had male oriented child pornography were more likely to be single, less likely to live with children, more likely to volunteer or work with children, were more likely to incur a new child pornography charge in the future and were more likely to admit to police that they were sexually interested in child pornography/children. A better understanding of the similarities as well as the differences among offenders may have criminal justice (e.g., sentencing, supervision) and clinical relevance (e.g., programming) and may assist us in formulating theories around this type of (often online) offending (e.g., role of fantasy).

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Differences in Offender and Offense Characteristics Based On Detection Method

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Distinguishing the characteristics of offenders by how they are detected may have investigative and clinical relevance. To date, there has been limited comparative research examining differences among offenders based on how they became known to police. In our police case file follow-up study of convicted adult male child pornography offenders, we had information on how they were identified in 250 of the 286 cases (87%). The most common methods of identification were online downloads and purchases (78, 31% of known cases) and reports to police by someone who witnessed the offender's child pornography activities (78, 31%). In this second group, the person reporting was often someone who lived with the offender such as their wife/girlfriend, their child or roommate who found the images on the home computer, a disc or tape or saw the offender viewing the images. Other common reporters were computer or photo lab technicians, work colleagues, and company IT staff. In 49 cases (20%) offenders were identified during other police investigations (e.g., fraud, dangerous driving, luring a child, contact sexual offence) and in the remaining 45 cases (18%) the offender was identified by undercover work, either by an officer chatting with an offender (as an adult) and/or being sent child pornography material online (30 cases), or chatting with an offender in the guise of a child (15 cases). In some cases, offenders could have been identified in other ways, for example, some offenders reported to police or caught via other investigations had also made online purchases or attempted to lure a child.

In our presentation, we will report findings based on offender demographics, mental health history, criminal history, child pornography collection details, and recidivism. Across the four main detection groups -- reported by others, online downloading, other investigation, and undercover work -- offenders were of similar ages at the time of the investigation and index conviction and did not differ in marital status. However, those reported by others were significantly more likely to have a criminal history, be younger at age of first criminal conviction, have a history of substance use problems and have a formal mental health diagnosis. Those who were caught by purchasing or downloading child pornography online were significantly less likely to have any other criminal history, more likely to have post-secondary education, and

more likely to have highly organized child pornography collections. Those found via undercover operations were more likely to have violent sexual material as part of their collection. The purchasers/downloaders and those caught by undercover operations were significantly less likely than the other offenders to recidivate in any way and were especially less likely to be caught for a failure on conditional release. Interestingly, there were no significant differences across the four groups in any sexual recidivism (contact or noncontact offenses). The detection method does appear to provide information that may be helpful in initial investigations and prioritization of cases. There is also the question of whether the characteristics of offenders and their material will change as police detection methods change. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the findings in the context of sexual offending theories.

Predicting Recidivism among Adult Male Child Pornography Offenders

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We have previously presented follow-up results for a sample of 301 convicted adult male child pornography offenders (Seto, 2009; Eke & Seto, 2011). We have extended the follow-up time to an average of 8.3 years ($SD = 2.5$ years), making our study possibly the longest follow-up of adult male child pornography offenders reported so far. We obtained recidivism data for 286 offenders in this sample: Of these men, 39% committed any kind of new offense (as indicated by a new criminal charge/conviction) during the follow-up period, and 16% committed a new sexual offense of some kind (13% had a new child pornography offense and 4% had a new contact sexual offense).

Police case files were reviewed to code information in the following domains: demographic characteristics; criminal history; substance use; child pornography offense details; and sexual interests (from self-reports, diagnosis when mental health evaluations were available, and from a review of all pornography content). We also had information that was of particular interest to police investigators and thus was systematically recorded, including access to potential child victims (children in same residence, working or volunteering in a position highly involved with young children, having contact information for specific children).

We are still analyzing the data, but the following variables were significant predictors of any sexual recidivism (contact or noncontact): highest grade achieved (inversely related; having any prior criminal history, consistent with our previous findings using an overlapping sample (Eke et al., 2011); total number of prior offenses; ratio of boy to girl content in child pornography; ratio of boy to girl content in all depictions of children; and admission or diagnosis with pedophilia or hebephilia (see Seto, in press). For the presentation, we will report whether empirically significant and theoretically important variables can be combined to create a risk scale for adult

male child pornography offenders. Preliminary exploration using a combination of demographic, criminal history, and sexual interest variables suggest we can predict any sexual recidivism with moderate accuracy ($AUC = .66$, $r = .30$, $p < .001$).

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