

Online and offline child sexual offenders: Who are they and what strategies do they use?

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The first objective is to investigate who the PMSA are, what strategies and motives they use to approach minors online, what sexual activities they do on the Internet and whether they are satisfied with their (sexual) wellbeing. The second objective...

Ethical review	Approved WMO
Status	Recruiting
Health condition type	Personality disorders and disturbances in behaviour
Study type	Observational non invasive

Summary

ID

NL-OMON54086

Source

ToetsingOnline

Brief title

Online and offline child sexual offenders

Condition

- Personality disorders and disturbances in behaviour

Synonym

Online behavior, sexual abuse

Research involving

Human

Sponsors and support

Primary sponsor: Universiteit van Tilburg

Source(s) of monetary or material Support: Fivoor Wetenschap en Behandelinnovatie

Intervention

Keyword: - Internet, - Offline child sexual offending, - Online child sexual offending, - Online grooming

Outcome measures

Primary outcome

Sociodemographic characteristics are asked, including age, gender, education, marital status, employment, judicial convictions, and psychological assistance.

Eleven self-report questionnaires are included:

1. The Personality Inventory for DSM-5-25 (PID-5-25; Van der Heijden et al., 2014);
2. The Self Concept and Identity Measure (SCIM; Kaufman et al., 2015);
3. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-16; Bjureberg et al., 2016);
4. The Utrechtse Coping Lijst; subscales Active tackling, Passive reacting, and Avoiding (UCL; Schreurs et al., 1988);
5. The Coping Using Sex Inventory (CUSI; Cortoni & Marshall, 2001);
6. The UCLA Loneliness scale version 3 (UCLA; Russell, 1996);
7. The Well-Being Questionnaire (W-BQ-12; Pouwer et al., 2000);
8. The Internet Sex Screening Test (ISST; Delmonico & Miller, 2003);
9. The Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS-18; B*the et al., 2018);
10. The Sexuality Scale (SS; Snell & Papini, 1989);
11. The International Index of Erectile Function (IIEF; Rosen et al., 1997).

Secondary outcome

The PMSA groups are asked to participate in a single interview to deepen the received information of the questionnaires to further investigate the strategies and motives to approach minors for sexual activities on the Internet. The interviews are semi-structured using a topic list of general topics based on the literature and the findings of the questionnaires. Follow-up questions depend on the input of the interviewees.

Study description

Background summary

Sexual activities on the Internet have increased over the past two decades (Barrada et al., 2019). These activities are very diverse and range from seeking information and using dating applications for engaging in intimate relationships (Doornwaard et al., 2017) to online child sexual abuse (DeHart et al., 2016). Online child sexual abuse includes the possession, production, and distribution of pornographic materials depicting minors and approaching and soliciting minors for sexual abuse and/or developing a sexual relationship (Kloess et al., 2014; Quayle, 2016). It is a phenomenon that has increased and facilitated in recent years due to the accessibility of the internet (Kloess et al., 2019). According to some researchers, there is even a transition from offline to online offenses (Tener et al., 2015). Therefore, research into both online and offline child sexual offenders is important.

Sexual offenders are a heterogeneous group and can be divided into various types. Relevant for this study are online and offline child sexual offenders. Several studies have shown differences and similarities between both groups in cognition, emotions, personality, behavior and motives of abuse (e.g., Babchishin et al., 2011, 2015; Elliott et al., 2013; Houtepen et al., 2014; Neutze et al., 2011; Seto et al., 2012; Webb et al., 2007). Furthermore, online sexual offenders can also be divided into various subgroups (e.g., Bergen et al., 2014; Briggs et al., 2011; DeHart et al., 2016; Kleijn & Bogaerts, 2020; Tener et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2012), which also applies to offline sexual offenders (e.g., Lanning, 2010; Ward & Hudson, 1998). However, the above studies do not provide in-depth comparative studies between online and offline child sexual offenders. To illustrate, for the PMSA group there is hardly any knowledge about their personality characteristics, (sexual) strategies, and motives. Therefore, this study aims to gain insight into this subgroup by focusing on crime-related factors, such as personality dysfunctions, emotional dysregulation and dysfunctions with (sexual) coping strategies. We distinguish

two groups of PMSA: convicted PMSA in treatment in an FPC or outpatient center (PMSA in treatment) and PMSA not convicted nor in treatment and recruited via Stop it Now! Vlaanderen (PMSA not in treatment). These two PMSA groups are compared with a group of downloaders of pornographic materials depicting minors, a group of offline sexual offenders and a community sample with no prior convictions.

With this study we aim to contribute to both research and clinical practice. First of all, we aim to provide more insight into personality characteristics and offense strategies and motives of online and offline child sexual offenders. Furthermore, we aim to receive more understanding of online sexual activities against minors of individuals from the general population. Therefore, this study is not only limited to individuals who are convicted and in treatment. In addition, despite the fact that online and offline sexual offenders make up about 15 to 20% of the total forensic population, psychologist and practitioners working in FPCs and outpatient centers often have to deal with patients who sexually exploit minors online and offline. Therefore, there is a need for more information on personality, cognitions, emotions, behavior and motives of these groups which can contribute to the treatment of these individuals to tackle child sexual abuse.

The following research questions are central in this study:

1. What are the personality and identity characteristics, the self-regulation and (sexual) coping strategies, and the motives of PMSA?
2. What sexual activities do PMSA do on the Internet and are they satisfied with their (sexual) wellbeing?
3. What are similarities and differences between PMSA, CP in treatment, CSO offline, and a community sample, based on their personality and identity characteristics, self-regulation and (sexual) coping strategies and motives, and (sexual) wellbeing?
4. Within the sex offender groups and the community sample, can homogeneous classes be distinguished on the basis of personality and identity characteristics, self-regulation and (sexual) coping strategies and motives, and (sexual) wellbeing?

Study objective

The first objective is to investigate who the PMSA are, what strategies and motives they use to approach minors online, what sexual activities they do on the Internet and whether they are satisfied with their (sexual) wellbeing. The second objective is to investigate whether the PMSA are a distinctive group of sexual offenders. They will be compared with online child pornography offenders, offline child sexual offenders and a community sample based on personality characteristics and dysfunctions, wellbeing, strategies, and motives.

Study design

The study has a cross-sectional design in which participants will answer nine questions about sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, education, relationship status, current employment, judicial convictions and psychological assistance) and complete eleven self-report questionnaires at one time point. In addition, two groups (PMSA in treatment and PMSA not in treatment) are asked to participate in a single interview to deepen the received information of the questionnaires.

Study burden and risks

Possible burden and risks of the study for the participants include the time to complete the questionnaires. In addition, some items from the self-report questionnaires and interview can be confrontational. To minimize these burden and risks as much as possible, the participants are informed that they can complete the questionnaires at their own tempo and with sufficient breaks. In addition, the self-report and interview questions are discussed in advance with the participants so that they are well informed. They are also informed that they do not have to answer questions they do not want to answer and they can withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason. If the participants feel confronted by some of the questions or if they have any questions about the study, they can always contact the principal investigator (Manon Kleijn), the heads of treatment from Fivoor and the independent expert Peter de Looff.

For the PMSA not in treatment, the questions will first be discussed with the researchers of Stop it Now! Vlaanderen. Stop it Now is an organization preventing child sexual abuse by offering help to people who have sexually abused minors or who are concerned to do so in the future. The researchers of Stop it Now! Vlaanderen will share our study via advertisements on their social media platforms. In their advertisements, the researchers will mention the questions of the questionnaires and interview, so that the participants are well informed. In addition, the participants are informed that any new fact of sexual abuse of a minor will be reported to Stop it Now! Vlaanderen. If they have any questions about this or if they have other questions about the study, they can always contact the principal investigator (Manon Kleijn) and/or Stop it Now! Vlaanderen.

Contacts

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Trial sites

Listed location countries

Netherlands

Eligibility criteria

Age

Adults (18-64 years)

Elderly (65 years and older)

Inclusion criteria

Sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Dutch language;

Age 18 - 70 years old;

Forensic patients who are convicted and/or in treatment for a sexual offence against minor victims, more specifically: online grooming offenses (i.e., approaching minors on the Internet for sexual activities), child pornography offenses (i.e., accessing, downloading, possessing, and/or distributing pornographic materials depicting minors), and offline child sexual offenses (i.e., sexually abusing minors in person);

General population with no prior offenses.

Exclusion criteria

IQ under 70;

Patients diagnosed with *schizophrenia and other psychopathic disorders* who are experiencing a psychotic episode and/or exhibiting severe symptoms due to their psychotic vulnerability and lack of resilience during the study;

Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the Dutch language.

Study design

Design

Study type:	Observational non invasive
Intervention model:	Other
Allocation:	Non-randomized controlled trial
Masking:	Open (masking not used)

Primary purpose: Prevention

Recruitment

NL	
Recruitment status:	Recruiting
Start date (anticipated):	18-02-2022
Enrollment:	620
Type:	Actual

Ethics review

Approved WMO	
Date:	06-12-2021
Application type:	First submission
Review commission:	METC Brabant (Tilburg)
Approved WMO	
Date:	01-11-2022
Application type:	Amendment
Review commission:	METC Brabant (Tilburg)
Approved WMO	
Date:	04-08-2023
Application type:	Amendment
Review commission:	METC Brabant (Tilburg)

Study registrations

Followed up by the following (possibly more current) registration

No registrations found.

Other (possibly less up-to-date) registrations in this register

No registrations found.

In other registers

Register	ID
CCMO	NL79265.028.21