



Pilot study on perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation in the North East

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i Executive summary

This report presents the results of pilot research with perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which took place in 2017, funded by the National Lottery and Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. This explorative study aimed: to investigate the backgrounds, motivations and approaches of offenders; and to seek to identify points of intervention to disrupt, 'treat' or manage perpetrators to prevent future victimisation. The research developed out of a realisation that no attempt had been made to consult with those who perpetrate exploitation, other than during police interviews, which may be a significant omission in efforts to address the crime and its effects.

Together with a Research Steering Group, the research team managed to identify a total 25 offenders in custody and on probation with CSE-related crimes. Of these, 11 agreed to participate in the research. A total of nine in-depth interviews were carried out; one dropped out because of illness and the other started employment. Most of these were interviewed in prison (seven); either HMP Northumberland or HMP Holme House, and two were interviewed at their probation appointments. All of those interviewed were White British males between the ages of 22 and 68 years old. There were a number of themes which became apparent from the narratives during the research which included:

- **Adult trauma:** most interviewees recounted narratives about experiencing emotional stress and poor mental health related to a specific event such as a relationship breakup, problematic pregnancy or a bereavement. There were subsequent explanations of how these experiences led them to engage in sexual behaviour with children as a way to escape these situations. Some of these included drugs and alcohol but equally others did not.
- **Ease of access:** interviewees who engaged in online CSE reported how easy it was to gain access to large numbers of young females very quickly. A number of these in turn could be coerced into sexual behaviour also

very quickly. This was all facilitated and made highly accessible through online social media and dating platforms.

- **Offending without punishment:** all online perpetrators described being surprised when they were arrested and said they had no idea they would be caught. They described offending in a defacto private space where they felt they could act in isolation.
- **Victim blaming:** this was apparent in the narratives of both those who admitted and denied their guilt, which is a common theme in abuse and exploitation behaviour (Russell & Chohhan, 2017). Victims were reported to have been manipulative and having created false testimonies. There was also no consideration given to the victims or the harm they had suffered; only one of those interviewed who had a guilty plea mentioned or talked about their victims with any contrition or attempted understanding.
- **Contradictions:** there were a number of contradictions inherent in the narratives which require further investigation in order to understand their underlying thinking and seek explanation. For example, in targeting children over adults, interviewees with online offences said they did not know the individuals were under the age of consent, yet targeted females that looked very young both as a sexual preference and knowing that they could be coerced into sexual behaviour.
- **Disassociation with sex offenders:** all interviewees distanced themselves from other sex offenders held in the Vulnerable Prisoner (VP) population in prison. Interviewees felt that their offending was different to other VPs, they did not belong there and were very distressed that they would be placed on the Sex Offender Register.
- **Hidden themes:** as a result of the small sample size we have been unable to explore any themes relating to potentially valuable thematic subjects such as links between ethnicity and exploitation, and age of perpetrator and type of CSE, e.g. grooming, parties, online. If the research is expanded we will explore these in detail.

Conclusion

The learning from the research process includes:

- The research permissions process is long and care must be taken when applying to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service National Research Committee as there are only two chances; we were successful on our second application. However, now we have permission, we can continue with the research.
- It is vital to have a Research Steering Group made up of agencies that can problem solve and help overcome barriers. It has also been raised of the need to include an agency to represent victims/survivors to provide a balance to the narrative of the perpetrator. If the research is continued/extended, we can look to extend the membership to include a relevant agency.
- It is also vital to have the participation of all police force areas as it is only with the help of those forces that can sufficient numbers of perpetrators of the identified. Unsuccessful attempts were made to engage all of the PCCs. If we can use this research to engage those other PCCs, then we are confident that increased numbers could be accessed.
- Identifying perpetrators of CSE relies upon local intelligence from probation and police. As offenders' primary sentences may not be related to CSE, or at least on the face of it, it is difficult to conduct searches on criminal justice databases, such as PNC and C-NOMIS. If these are conducted, then child abuse and CSE may become mixed, which is not helpful for the research.

An intention of this research was to explore preventative or enforcement CSE interventions with offenders. The research has identified two levels of remedial measures which include:

- 1 The provision of therapeutic counselling to address adult trauma in males who are at-risk/perpetrators of CSE; and
- 2 Additional warnings on online portals which are accessed by young people in adult contexts, i.e. dating sites. These warnings/preventative measures could capitalise on the experiences of offenders in prison as a Vulnerable Prisoner.

In further research, interventions will be explored further.

Recommendations

We make the following recommendations based on the research experience:

- To expand the research in Durham and Northumbria Force Areas with the cooperation of the respective PCCs. This would enable us to increase the sample size and the depth and detail of the findings across different types of CSE, e.g. focus on widening the ethnic background of offenders and the types of CSE.
- The research continues to engage with prison staff as, given time, they may be able to provide access to a wider cohort of offenders. Staff at HMP Durham, Holme House and Northumberland have been very helpful and offered further support identifying research participants. Additional time is required for this opportunity as a result of the current changes and pressures experienced by the prison estate.
- To continue the Research Steering Group, with the current members, meeting quarterly, as it provides an excellent response to problems and barriers encountered. We also recommend increasing membership to include victim representation.
- To explore the support available to alleged perpetrators following their arrest and release on bail.

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Finally, thanks to those offenders who agreed to be interviewed as without their agreement and participation, the study would not have been possible.

THANKS 

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1.0 Introduction

This report presents the results of research with perpetrators of CSE which took place in 2017. This explorative study aimed: to investigate the backgrounds, motivations and approaches of offenders; and to seek to identify points of intervention to disrupt, 'treat' or manage perpetrators on micro and macro levels to prevent future victimisation. The research developed from a substantial programme of research conducted by Barefoot Research and Evaluation (BRE) into extent and characteristics of CSE in the North East. This research programme was funded by Northern Rock Foundation¹ between 2006 and 2015. Together with ARCH, a regional charity providing specialist sexual violence services to adults and young people affected by sexual violence, we developed a proposal to conduct experimental research with perpetrators of CSE. There was a realisation that no attempt had been made to consult with those who perpetrate exploitation, other than during the police interviews, which may be a significant omission in efforts to address the crime and its effects. This is the first research of this nature that has been carried out in the North East region and one of the few national studies; we know of only one other having been carried out in the West Midlands earlier this year (Russell & Chohan. 2017).

As well as local drivers, there has been national interest from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and their Public Protection Division and those responsible for community sex offending programmes. This interest was related to the development of improved Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP) aimed at the rehabilitation of offenders. Currently, perpetrators of CSE are offered places on standard SOTPs which have been recognised by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service as unsuitable for CSE crimes². Interest was also generated when a major study into the impact of SOTP's was released this year which concluded that Core SOTP did not reduce

¹ Now closed.

² Farmer, M. 2016, Head of Community Sex Offending Programmes, pers communication.

sexual reoffending and may even increase offending rates (Mews et al, 2017). It is hoped that this research can contribute to the evidence base behind attempt to improve rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

1.1 Methodology

This section presents the process of the research, from inception to completion, draws out learning points and allows for replication.

1.1.1 Consensus and permissions

The first stage of the research was for BRE and Arch to develop consensus and support from local agencies, including Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police. These recognised that conducting research with perpetrators of CSE could contribute to their enforcement and preventative efforts. The research was particularly timely for Cleveland Police as they were just setting up their new CSE team. With their support, a research proposal was developed and agreed. After this, a series of different organisations and trusts were approached for funding, including the region's three Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC). The research was finally funded by the Cleveland PCC (one third) and the Big Lottery Fund's Awards For All fund (two thirds) to a cumulative value of approximately £15,000.

The research proposal went through two levels of permissions: NHS Research Ethics Committee; and National Offender Management Service (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) National Research Committee. Applications to both of these were made through the Integrated Research Application System or IRAS. This presented the proposal including the methodology to the two authorities where it was scrutinised by committee. Permission from the latter was necessary to conduct research in both the prison and probation estate. This was a lengthy process which took approximately four months to complete. As well as requiring NRC

authorisation to conduct research in the region's prisons, permission was also needed from the individual prison governors. These were then individually approached and included HMP Durham, HMP Frankland, HMP Holme House and HMP Northumberland (HMP Kirklevington Grange was excluded as it was a resettlement prison and unlikely to hold relevant prisoners; HMP YOI Deerbolt what excluded as we were concentrating in the adult male estate). All prison governors agreed to participate in the research with the exception of HMP Frankland who refused without reason. The majority of the CSE offenders were found to be located either within HMP Holme House and HMP Northumberland (the latter holds a significant Vulnerable Prisoner (VP³) population) or on community license⁴.

1.1.2 Creating a Research Steering Group

After permissions were granted, the next stage was to constitute a Research Steering Group (RSG) to assist, problem solve and contribute to the research. The members consisted of: National Probation Service; Cleveland Police; Police and Crime Commissioner representative; Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Psychology Department; Arch; Middlesbrough Council; prison service (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service); and BRE. The Community Rehabilitation Company was initially invited and attended one meeting but it was felt unnecessary as a result of the NPS having all of those offenders with CSE-related crimes. The RSG, as a task and finish group, was instrumental to the success of the research and together we went through a staged process consisting of the following:

1. Developing a Terms of Reference
2. Identifying perpetrators
3. Agreeing questionnaires and questioning approaches
4. Reviewing findings

³ These include sex offenders who are required to be housed apart from the standard prisoner population for their own safety.

⁴ In other words, they had received a custodial sentence, had been released and where required to report regularly (weekly or fortnightly) to a probation officer.

5. Agreeing final report.

Box 1.0 Defining Child Sexual Exploitation

This definition of CSE was created by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People and is used in statutory guidance for England:

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Source: www.nwgnetwork.org, 2017

1.1.3 Identifying offenders with CSE-related crimes

Stage two was key to the progress of the research and was assisted through the input of Cleveland Police and NPS. Here, the first task of identifying offenders with CSE-related crimes (see appendix one for a list of those crimes) was done through NPS and the police scrutinising their records and questioning other relevant officers for likely candidates. These were cross referenced to remove duplicates and a list was created. In the first instance, this list counted 20 individuals in custody or recently released on license with crimes which included: 'Rape female < 13; Sexual Activity with Child; Meeting child following sexual grooming; Incite female < 16 to engage in sexual activity; Possession of Extreme Pornography; Buggery; Sexual Activity with female < 16⁵.

⁵ The titles are taken directly from police records.

There was a proposal from the prison officers attending the RSG that they could potentially identify other possible research participants, i.e. prisoners, by looking through their C-NOMIS database and talking to other prison officers on the residential wings who may be aware of those with relevant offences. As this was a divergence from the original methodology which was granted permission by the authorities, an re-application was made and permission was once again authorised. Unfortunately however, despite having potential, this approach did not yield any participants.

After identification, potential candidates were approached by prison or probation officer and provided with a participant information sheet, which was either presented or explained (appendix two). From the 20 approached, a total of 11 agreed to be interviewed, of these nine were interviewed and two became unavailable (one due to mental health problems and the other finished his license). All interviewees were from Teesside as a result of the local knowledge of Cleveland Police and the NPS Cleveland Cluster. The original research proposal had a target of 20 offenders to be interviewed. In explorative social research of this nature, the number of research participants varies between 10 and 20. Therefore despite not reaching our target, the findings remain scientifically valid, i.e. the research is looking to explore themes, identify emerging findings and to make a judgement on whether further research in this area is worthwhile.

The RSG recognised that identifying participants was key to the research and that numbers it would be limited to the Cleveland Area. It was for this reason that Durham and Northumbria Police Force Areas were also approached with a request to participate in the research, join the RSG and assist identify potential research participants. Despite multiple approaches by email and telephone neither force area were forthcoming.

1.1.4 Interviewing offenders

After agreement, a convenient time and location was arranged through the prison or probation officers; this was either through legal visits in prison or at their regular appointment to see their probation officer in their local police station or probation office. After introductions, a consent and confidentiality was completed and signed. The discussion was directed by an interview guide and the emphasis was less about getting through a list of questions and more about understanding the background and motivations of the perpetrator. The interview started with the background and history of the individual which then lead onto their offending behaviour. The researcher chose not to know any background about the offender or their offences as it may have created prejudice or prejudgement which would have clouded the conversation. It was only afterwards that background information was referred to in order to provide a context for the narrative information given. It was initially planned to digitally record the interviews and permission was requested and granted by prisons. However, on the day of interview the gate staff did not have the necessary paperwork and would not let the recording equipment inside. For this reason, notes were taken during interview instead and transcribed directly afterwards.

1.1.5 Research framework, analysis and sampling

This study was a qualitative research exercise which used Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 19676) as an analytical framework and thematic analysis as a means of examining the data produced. Grounded Theory was chosen and used because it is an explorative study, there is a little in the way of existing research and we are relying upon the findings to lead us to conclusions, i.e. the 'grounded' nature of grounded theory means that concepts are generated from empirical data rather than the literature (Visram, 2011; McGee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007; Walls, Parahoo & Fleming, 2010).

We did conduct a literature review for research proposal, in line with contemporary Grounded Theory (Visram, 2011) and which is presented again in appendix two. However, we are presenting the findings using a more classical Grounded Theory approach in order: to avoid generating a focus from the literature rather than from the emerging data; and to promote 'telling it as it is' rather than 'telling it as they see it' (Visram, 2011:14). Indeed, Grounded theory has been described as 'particularly useful in new, applied areas where there is a lack of existing theory and concepts to describe and explain what is going on' (Robson, 2002: 90, quoted in Visram, 2011).

We chose thematic analysis to process and examine the data once they were⁷ produced, and we did this because it is a flexible, adaptive method with a preference for small sample sizes. Our analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model: familiarisation with data; generation of initial codes; search for themes; review of themes; definition and naming of themes; and production of the final report. The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used within the thematic analysis to clarify meaning and examine, compare and contrast associations. Common themes became apparent and the research report will be structured in agreement with these themes. In terms of sampling we used a non-probability purposive approach (Wilmot, 2005) in recognition of the difficulty in finding relevant and appropriate participants. Narrative data was collected using in-depth semi structured interviews.

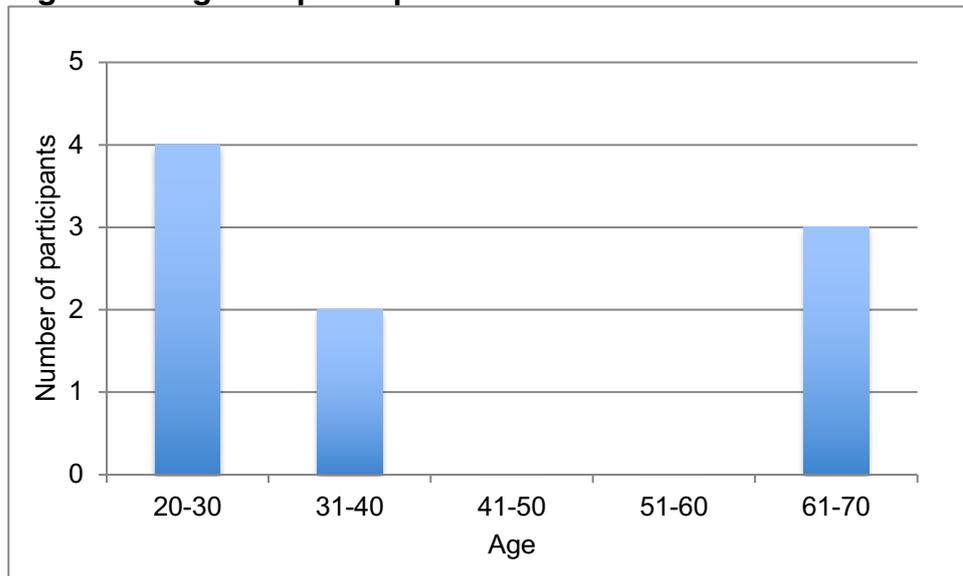
The sample

Out of a total 25 offenders in custody and on probation, 11 agreed to participate in the research. A total of nine were interviewed; one dropped out because of illness and the other started employment. Most of these were interviewed in prison (seven); either HMP Northumberland or a HMP Holme House, and two were interviewed at their probation appointments. The

⁷ Data is a collective noun.

interviews in prison were conducted during Legal Visits. Research participants were of varying age, some younger and some older (see figure).

Figure 1.0 Ages of participants



The sentences of participants are presented in the table below.

Table 1.0 The nature of the offence⁸:

Buggery
Causing female to engage in sexual activity without consent
Incite female <16 to engage in sexual activity (x 2)
Inciting male <16 to engage in sexual activity
Meeting female child following sexual grooming
Possession of extreme pornography
Sexual activity with child
Sexual assault female child <13

⁸ Nomenclature of Cleveland Police.

2.0 Findings and themes

2.1 Findings

We make the following findings from the research:

Identifying perpetrators: the crimes for which perpetrators of CSE receive custodial sentences, may not necessarily be related to CSE. It is often the case that other crimes are more easily prosecuted and so are used to bring a successful court outcome. This makes finding CSE perpetrators difficult by simply scanning databases. When attempting to identify CSE perpetrators, we found that it is best to rely on local knowledge of police, probation or prison staff who have an good knowledge of (local) offenders.

Interviewing offenders: there was an almost 50% refusal rate from offenders who were approached to be interviewed (it was a voluntary arrangement). As a result of this, it is necessary to maximise the names of potential candidates. The RSG, through the Cleveland representatives, identified the maximum number of local potential candidates, which were all approached. If the other two force areas in the region had participated, it is reasonable to assume that the target number of interviewees would have been reached. Therefore, it is necessary to have the participation of all force areas in the region to ensure that sufficient numbers of participants are identified and can be interviewed. It would have been advantageous to the research had the other PCCs been supportive, even if funding had not been made available. The minimum requirement was a list of names of people who could be approached with information about the study and asked if they would participate.

Range of childhood experiences and backgrounds: there was no common identity to the offenders and nor any denominator to provide a link in relation to their early life experiences and current offending. Instead, there was a diversity of childhood experiences which included: stable and happy

upbringings with both sets of parents; similarly with only one parent; both middle and working class families; those with dysfunctional family backgrounds, including victims of domestic violence and parental substance misuse. There were those in the cohort who came from stable families who then started an offending career from a young age. This provides no typology of early life for a typical CSE offender. However, there was a majority (80%) of interviewees whose parents had separated and/or divorced.

When questioned about their early school life, again there was a variety of experiences, with some having successfully completed school and others having dropped out early. There was no participation in higher academic education, although two interviewees had completed vocational courses at college. There was a similar variation in professional backgrounds, with some having long-term employment, e.g. business owner and military, others occasional work, labourers, and those with offending careers. Some of these required close contact with the public and young people, e.g. bus driver, window cleaner and school worker, but others did not.

Adult emotional trauma: for most interviewees (n=8), there had been a significant event in their lives prior to the offence, such as a relationship breakup, a death or family crisis. These events which were often experienced as a relationship problems, were referred to during the course of the interview as creating the 'push' factor for the first involvement in their offending. For example:

"My father had died, I was working all hours, I had problems at home, everything was getting on top of me, it was all too much."

"I had just split up with my girlfriend because she slept with somebody else, I was devastated."

"My wife was pregnant and she lost the baby, then we split up."

"I just retreated into myself, I couldn't handle it."

For most, this emotional trauma led to a route into exclusion and CSE, seeking out an online space. Pursuing children appeared to be therapeutic/a distraction/a way to gain attention. One offender said:

"My girlfriend had just had a miscarriage and we had split up. I started going on dating sites, I never went out to find young girls, the first girl said she was 18, then they [females under 16 years old] would be the ones who would come back to me, then it was them I went after. They were easy and didn't want anything, I didn't want a relationship."

Another offender said:

"My girlfriend had left me and I wanted to get back at her. I met a girl on Facebook, I went to see her, she said she was 19. I took her to a hotel room. I found out she was 15 afterwards. We kept seeing each other, we were having a laugh. Then her mam told the Police."

Another described:

"I hadn't been out of jail long [for an unrelated offence] and my girlfriend and kid was staying with her mam, who wouldn't let me see them. I was staying in the flat on my own and I was drinking a lot, staying up late, on the dating sites. I never meant to find underage girls, it was so easy, there was loads of them and they'd do anything, I'd have five girls online at the same time, flicking between the webcams. It was a way out, a fantasy world. It never struck me I'd get caught."

Admission or denial of guilt: approximately half of those interviewed denied their crimes. Those that did, demonstrated widespread victim blaming and said that they were the victims of manipulation and lies both from the children and their families. Interviewees talked about how the young person's version of events was untruthful or inflated, and they were the victims of a general environment which encouraged persecution. For example, one offender said:

“A lot of it [child's testimony] was made up, my brief was shit, it was obvious they [police and the CPS] had decided that I was guilty. Jimmy Saville was all over the news and all the others.”

The researcher felt the interviewees used the interviews to tell their side of the story; most of these cried during the interview.

All interviewees, both those guilty and not guilty, distanced themselves from the other prisoners who were housed in the Vulnerable Prisoner cohort; they thought they were different. For example, one offender said:

“Some of the people in here are animals, I'm not like them.”

There was an incredulity possessed by many of the offenders both guilty and not guilty that they were included in with the sex offender group. One offender said:

“I can't believe it, I'm classed as a paedophile, I wonder if I'll be able to get a job, will I ever have a girlfriend, have a normal life.”

Offenders said they avoided knowing about the crimes of others in the VP block, preferring not to know the offences of fellow prisoners. However, for certain prisoners this was unavoidable as others would tell them and this caused prisoners to be uncomfortable in their company/association.

In other prison-based research conducted by BRE, we consulted standard prisoners (non-VP) about the status/reputation of offenders convicted of CSE-related offences. The common response was that they were in the same regard as other sex offenders including paedophiles. As one offender said:

“You’re a VP, you’re a nonce, simple as, doesn’t matter to people in here how old they [victims] were, if they were a kid, it’s a kid isn’t it?”

Approaches of engaging young people: all those who accepted their guilt had first engaged with their victims online; one remained online only, exchanging photographs, videos and texts and said they would have never converted the online to physical contact; another started online engaging in Skype and then met one female face to face after a short time; one made contact on Facebook and met almost immediately face-to-face; and another knew some of the victims before and then started engaging online as he had been prohibited by the police from having physical contact. Offenders used a variety of platforms including Facebook and dating sites (including Tagged and Plenty Of Fish). Interviewees described how easy it was to engage numbers of young people (one targeted males, the others, females). There were offenders who targeted the general cohort of children who were using the online platforms and there were others who engaged with children they already knew and their acquaintances.

Those that used online portals to gain access to females used a structured approach: first, browsing photographs and profiles, choosing those that best fitted their preference, e.g. young, with sexualised poses and clothes with ‘flirty’ profiles, those with higher levels of both characteristics were judged to be more likely to reply and engage in sexual exchanges; copying and pasting a ‘patter’, i.e. an engaging paragraph of text; sending it out and waiting for replies. At the start of a session they would send out the text to a number of females, e.g. 30 and would receive four or five replies. They would engage in ‘flirty’ exchanges with those which would become increasingly sexualised.

They would be engaging in 'sex talk' within an hour with at least one of these which would increase in detail and lead to exchanges of photographs, text, telephone or video calls. Two offenders used Skype to engage in sexualised behaviour⁹. Interviewees talked about creating fantasies with which to engage the young people, for example, one offender talked about pretending they were a businessman, a photographer and a model at different times. They said that they would ask the young people to wear certain clothes and act in specific ways and the young people would be compliant.

Children were said to be 'easy' to engage and were often available throughout the day, which was a key reason given why children were preferred over adults. The latter were reported, although sometimes willing participants, to be more complicated and were not always available. For example, one offender said:

"They'd [adults] say I'll be online after the kids've gone to bed or after school, they want to talk about things, have a conversation ... but they're [children] always up for it, always available and they'd do what you ask them to do ... it's really easy [with them]."

All offenders who accepted their guilt viewed pornography. When asked why their behaviour did not limit itself to masturbating in front of pornographic images, they said that engaging children directly gave them a bigger 'buzz'. One offender said:

"It was not the same thing, looking at porn and getting people to do things in front of you ... it was so much better."

Getting caught: all of the online offenders said they had no idea that they would be caught and when the arrests were made it took them entirely by

⁹ Technology moves very quickly and it is recognised that there will be more current forms of video exchange; the crimes of interviewees were over 12 months ago and Skype may no longer be widespread.

surprise. They said that they made no connection between their offending behaviour and that they would be arrested. Most of them said that if they had have known, they would not have continued with the offending. For example, one said:

“After that first time when she said she was 18 and she was 14, if I’d have known that there was any risk of me being caught, I would never have carried on trying to find other girls that young. But it was just a game, I never once thought I would be arrested.”

Two interviewees said that they continued the offending after they had been arrested and released on bail, and even whilst doing this, they did not think that they would be detected or caught again.

Support/interventions: offenders had several suggestions for support and intervention to prevent the offending in the future. All of the offenders waited a considerable time between arrest and trial, some up to 12 months and they all said that this was a very difficult time for themselves and their families. Several talked about deteriorating mental health, prolonged anxiety and even thoughts of suicide. One offender said, after first arrest, access to counselling would have been helpful to him; another said they had counselling which was beneficial. Other offenders said that the dating sites need to do more to stop under 18 year olds using the sites. One said:

“It is obvious which ones are [under 18], after a while you can see easily, it’s them that the sites need to stop using.”

A suggestion made by almost all online offenders was that if they knew that they were being watched/monitored, they would not have engaged in the offending behaviour. These said that if they had known the extent to which their lives would have been affected, this would have acted as a major deterrent.

“My life has been ruined, I’ll never get back to normal ... have a family. If I’d have known all of this, there is no way I would have done it, you need to make that clear to people, warn them, put signs on[line] saying you are being watched. Honestly I had no idea.”

Another said:

“It is like you’re your own world, just you and them, nobody watching, in a fantasy, no rules ... you need to let people know [that they are being monitored].”

As stated an undercurrent theme to the offending behaviour was the experience of adult trauma and unresolved issues, which caused some to seek and engage the company of children in sexualised behaviour, using it to distance themselves from their experiences in the adult world. As one offender said:

“I was definitely trying to run away from things.”

In a small number of interviewees, there was a recognition that a level of therapeutic intervention may have been beneficial. One offender said:

“I think counselling would have done me good, maybe even stopped what I was doing.”

2.2 Thematic analysis

There were a number of themes which became apparent from the narratives during the research which included:

- **Adult trauma:** most interviewees recounted narratives about experiencing emotional stress and poor mental health, such as a relationship breakup, problematic pregnancy or a bereavement. There were subsequent explanations of how these experiences led them to engage in sexual behaviour with children as a way to escape these situations. Some of these included drugs and alcohol but equally others did not.
- **Ease of access:** interviewees who engaged in online CSE reported how easy it was to gain access to large numbers of young females very quickly. A number of these in turn could be coerced into sexual behaviour very quickly. This was all facilitated and made highly accessible through online social media and dating platforms.
- **Offending without punishment:** all online perpetrators described being surprised when they were arrested and said they had no idea they would be caught. They described offending in a defacto private space where they felt they could act in isolation.
- **Victim blaming:** this was apparent in the narratives of both those who admitted and denied their guilt, which is a common theme in abuse and exploitation behaviour (Russell & Chohhan, 2017). Victims were reported to have been manipulative and having created false testimonies. There was also no consideration given to the victims or the harm they had suffered; only one of those interviewed who had a guilty plea mentioned or talked about their victims with any contrition or attempted understanding.
- **Contradictions:** there were a number of contradictions inherent in the narratives which require further investigation in order to understand their underlying thinking and seek explanation. For example, in targeting children over adults, interviewees said they did not know the individuals were under the age of consent, yet targeted females that looked young

both as a sexual preference and knowing that they could be coerced into sexual behaviour.

- Disassociation with sex offenders: all interviewees distanced themselves from other sex offenders held in the Vulnerable Prisoner population in prison. Interviewees felt that their offending was different to other VPs, they did not belong there and were very distressed that they would be placed on the Sex Offender Register.
- Hidden themes: as a result of the small sample size we have been unable to explore any themes relating to potentially valuable thematic subjects such as links between ethnicity and exploitation, and age of perpetrator and type of CSE, e.g. grooming, parties, online. If the research is expanded we will explore these in detail.

3.0 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

This has been a successful pilot as we have learnt much from its application. The research approach of interviewing prisoners during legal visits and those on licence at their probation meetings has been positive and has yielded sufficient levels of narrative data to process.

The learning from the research process includes:

- The permissions process is long and care must be taken when applying to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service National Research Committee as there are only two chances; we passed on our second application. However, now we have permission, we can continue with the research.
- It is vital to have a research steering group made up of agencies that can problem solve and help overcome barriers. It has also been raised of the need to include an agency to represent victims/survivors to provide a balance to the narrative of the perpetrator. If the research is continued/extended, we can look to extend the membership to include a relevant agency.
- It is also vital to have the participation of all police force areas as it is only with the help of those forces that can sufficient numbers of perpetrators of the identified. The researcher unsuccessfully attempted to engage all of the PCCs; perhaps more senior strategic efforts should have been employed. If we can use this research to engage those other PCCs, then we are confident that increased numbers could be accessed.
- Identifying perpetrators of CSE relies upon local intelligence from probation and police. As offenders' primary sentences may not be related to CSE, or at least on the face of it, it is difficult to conduct searches on criminal justice databases, such as PNC and C-NOMIS. If these are

conducted, then child abuse and CSE may become mixed, which is not helpful for the research.

An important intention of this research was to explore preventative or enforcement CSE interventions with offenders. The research has identified two levels of remedial measures which include:

- 1 The provision of therapeutic counselling to address adult trauma in males who are at-risk/perpetrators of CSE; and
- 2 Additional warnings on online portals which are accessed by young people in adult contexts, i.e. dating sites. These warnings/preventative measures could capitalise on the experiences of offenders in prison as a Vulnerable Prisoner.

In further research, interventions will be explored further.

3.2 Recommendations

We have started a research process which has been slow and laborious to get going, and now it is moving, it would seem a waste of time and resources to let it stop. On the basis of the pilot research, we make several recommendations:

- To expand the research in Durham and Northumbria Force Areas with the cooperation of the respective PCCs. This would enable us to increase the sample size and the depth and detail of the findings across different types of CSE, e.g. focus on widening the ethnic background of offenders and the types of CSE.
- The research continues to engage with prison staff as, given time, they may be able to provide access to a wider cohort of offenders. Staff at HMP Durham, Holme House and Northumberland have been very helpful and offered further support identifying research participants. Additional time is

required for this opportunity as a result of the current changes and pressures experienced by the prison estate.

- To continue the Research Steering Group, with the current members, meeting quarterly, as it provides an excellent response to problems and barriers encountered. We also recommend increasing membership to include victim representation.
- To explore the support available to alleged perpetrators following their arrest and release on bail.

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Appendix one: List of CSE related crimes used in the study

In line with government child protection guidance, 'child' refers to a person under 18 (NSPCC, 2008), rather than below 16, which is the age of sexual consent in the UK (Brayley et al, 2011). The offences covered by the research include a selection from the 2003 Sexual Offences Act which is likely to capture CSE behaviour outlined. Offences that were covered by the research include:

- Abuse of children via prostitution/pornography:
- Internal sex trafficking of children
- Paying for sexual services with someone under 18
- Causing or inciting prostitution/pornography with anyone under 18
- Controlling a prostitute under 18 or a prostitute under duress/subject to threats
- Arranging or facilitating any of the above.

Other offences that may be covered by the research include Child Sex Offences, such as:

- Rape of a child under 13
- Sexual Assault of a child under 13
- Causing or inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity
- Sexual activity with a child
- Causing or inciting sexual activity with a child
- Engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child
- Arranging or facilitating commission of a child sex offence
- Meeting a child following sexual grooming
- Contacting a child for the purposes of sexual grooming by any means (text/social media/written/oral)
- Indecent photographs, taking/possessing/distributing indecent images of child under 18

Appendix two: Participant information sheet

Vers 2, 22/06/16

Introduction

I am writing to you to ask if you would participate in some research I am doing on child sexual exploitation (CSE). My name is Christopher Hartworth and I am an independent researcher, not part to the prison, the police or local authority. The research has been funded by a charitable trust and we are working with Arch, a local charity.

Purpose of study

I would like to find out from people who have been convicted of a CSE-related offence things like:

- How they became involved
- The reasons behind their actions
- Their thinking and rationale; and
- Their personal contexts/backgrounds.

By doing this we are hoping to understand more about the crime and those involved, because currently very little is known. If we know more we will be in a better position to help both victims and offenders and prevent crime from happening in the future.

Why have I been invited?

You have been selected because your offence relates to CSE. So we think you will be a good source of information.

What will the research involve?

If you choose to take part in the study, I will arrange to come and interview you for approximately 60 minutes in the prison. I will record our interview on a digital voice recorder. After the interviews, I will write a report and I may use direct quotes, but this information will be presented anonymously and nobody will be able to know that you were part of this study. The report will be used by organisations to help victims and stop crimes from happening in the first place.

Confidentiality and data security

Our conversation will be kept confidential but if you say anything about any of these things: children who are being or who are at-risk of harm; about named individuals who are at risk of serious harm; harm to yourself; misuse of drugs; or about threats to prison security, I will use standard procedure and will tell the Police, Social Services and/or the prison.

Interview notes will be stored safely i.e. in a locked filing cabinet, in a locked office, in a locked building. Computers are all password secured, with password for each file. No personal identifiable data is recorded and notes from interviews will be coded with a date and number, e.g. 15/05/15 001. All notes will remain anonymous.

Risks and benefits

Being involved in this study will not affect your life in prison or parole in any way. There is a possibility that talking about past issues may cause you to become distressed. If this happens, and if you wish it, we can let an appropriate person know about it so they can provide you with some support. You may feel better after talking about your activities and background and knowing that it is helping people.

Do I have to take part?

No, being involved in the research is totally voluntary. Even if you decide later to withdraw, that is fine, even during interview you can stop at any point. If you do agree to be involved could you indicate this to the staff member that gave you this sheet.

What if there is a problem?

If you do have anything you need to raise about the study, you can contact an independent referee: Dr Ian Convery, University of Cumbria, Rydal Road, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9BB.

Can I see a copy of the finished research?

Yes, I will send a copy of the report to you, if you let me know.

Additional Information

The research has been reviewed by an NHS Research Ethics Committee.

If you want to find out anything more about the study you can contact: Gaynor Truman, Arch, 22 Hoylake Rd, Middlesbrough, TS4 3JL. You can contact the researcher himself at the address below.

Many thanks for your help in advance.

Appendix three: Literature review

Although there is a significant body of literature focusing on the victim/survivors of CSE, which is where our proposal originated, there is a limited body of knowledge that exists into perpetrators of CSE in the United Kingdom.

The UK Human Trafficking Centre referred to this as a ‘knowledge black hole’ (Brayley et al, 2011: 134). There is a small amount of work which has been done by the specialist Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) group along with a recognition that ‘further debriefing of offenders is needed to gain a better understanding’ of CSE (CEOP, 2011: 87). In their thematic assessment (2011) they identify the nature of networks among offenders, the role of grooming, power and control in the offence and draw similarities with perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Very recently (2017) a collaborative project between the Regional Organised Crime Unit for the West Midlands Region and Coventry University conducted a very similar study to ours, interviewing perpetrators of both CSE and Child Sexual Abuse (Russell & Chohhan, 2017). They interviewed a total of 27 perpetrators with the objective of developing a greater understanding of the tactics and motives used by offenders when targeting and grooming victims. They identified a number of themes, some of which were identified in our research. These included:

- Denial and victim blaming
- Poor mental health
- Difficulty forming relationships
- Lack of understanding about the law and consent
- And issues of power.

There were some key differences between Russell and Chohhan’s research

and ours, for example, the interviews were conducted by police officers and in twos; and they had access to a larger geographical area and more offenders with more diverse backgrounds. There were some similarities about how they identify those offenders, such as using police intelligence and liaising with the prison officers.

A more profound level of understanding was carried out by Cockbain and her recent research, including analysis of national CSE operations, e.g. in Oxford and Rotherham. She has been the first researcher to examine the offence of CSE in detail and has provided a criminological analysis based on Situational Crime Prevention (SCP - Cohen and Felson, 1979) and Crime Scripting (Cornish, 1994). However, again similar to CEOP at the beginning of her research she states that there are major gaps in the research in this area (Cockbain and Wortley, 2015). Her research however provides an important framework and reference point for our proposed research.

Cockbain finds perpetrators of CSE who are criminal generalists, with a range of other offences, and opportunists whose networks, both close and peripheral, are important facilitators of offending (better-connected offenders tend to commit more offences). Importantly, she found pre-existing social networks underpin offender networks (Cockbain et al, 2011). She postulates that CSE offending might involve more opportunism and less specialism than other forms of child sexual abuse, involving both White British and ethnic minority children (Cockbain and Wortley, 2015). Cockbain (2013) finds contrary to popular opinion, CSE is not a uniquely Asian threat: in her studies the single largest ethnic group among suspects was white (page 28).

In their 2015 study, Cockbain and Wortley found that offenders tended to consist of the younger age groups, most lived with their families, unemployment was high or low skilled and half were in an adult relationship. In relation to the situational nature of crimes, there was evidence to suggest that many offenders happened across targets in the course of their everyday

activities, such as driving taxis or simply moving around town in familiar environments, suggesting an opportunistic approach to victim selection (Cockbain and Wortley, 2015: 8). In place of calculating individuals, they found offenders who took few if any steps to conceal their crimes, e.g. not masking faces, limited or erratic condom use, using their normal telephones and using their own names, indicating that CSE was not perceived as particularly risky (Cockbain and Wortley, 2015: 10). They concluded that much could be learned from conducting research with CSE offenders about preventative and protective interventions, which had the potential to reduce incidence and extent.

Brayley with Cockbain and Laycock (2011) take a detailed look at Crime Scripting which they say allows specific crimes to be logically deconstructed into their component parts, even using a relatively small data set. We may be able to learn from this in the analysis of our dataset. Their crime scripting and analysis offers five different stages for CSE based on an offender's intentions and behaviour, including:

- Cruise: the offender looks for a completely new girl to abuse.
- Convert: the offender targets a girl who he has not previously abused but who he, or a co-offender, already knows.
- Recruiting other victims via girl: going through a 'girlfriend' figure.
- Re-abuse: any girls were re-abused on at least one further occasion.
- Pimp: although the majority of the abuse appeared to be motivated by non-commercial reasons, some girls were pimped out to clients (Brayley et al, 2011: 137).

They grouped these activities into three broad stages of find, groom and abuse (see following table).

Table A1. Stages of abuse in CSE

Stage	Description
Find	Although some offenders were skilled in psychological manipulation, even for them it appears to have been a numbers game: approach enough girls and some will capitulate/cooperate. Once identified, offenders relied on unsophisticated but effective tricks to get a girl's attention, such as whistling or shouting. They then bantered, flirted, or pestered their way to extracting name, age, and telephone number.
Groom	Offenders tended to use a range of tactics, often switching abruptly between them, for example, being nice one moment and nasty the next. There was no fixed grooming period: offenders abused some girls within minutes and groomed others for weeks
Abuse	They invited targets to socialise, often offering to pick them up by car. They took girls to abuse locations, which were usually co-offenders' properties, cheap hotels, playing fields, or even parked cars in isolated areas. Offenders used various physical and non-physical isolation tactics. They locked doors or took away mobile telephones. Even if girls were not physically restrained, they may have been too afraid of repercussions, or disorientated due to drink, drugs, or an unfamiliar location to risk an escape attempt.

Source: (Brayley et al, 2011: 138).

We see that their research, similar to the objectives of our research, led to the development of crime prevention approaches which centred around the five key pillars of SCP (Clark, 1997): increase effort; increase risk; reduce benefit; reduce provocation; and remove excuses. Each step offers a potential intervention point in the efforts to stop CSE.

When looking through the child sex abuse literature (e.g. Cale et al , 2014, Benoit et al, 2015) we felt it was qualitatively different from the CSE field and one with limited crossover, particularly for crime prevention issues,

This was for a number of reasons including differences in motivations, psychology, patterns of offending and roles of offender networks. Although there may be areas within this significant body of knowledge which have relative value, it is clear that CSE and child sex abuse are different practises and require different policing and SOTP approaches.

We may also be able to learn something about CSE from research on men who buy sex. Predation, contradiction, dubious rationalisation, violence, male attitudes and misogyny are all found in research carried out with men who purchase sex (Farley et al, 2015) and similar patterns may be found in men who perpetrate CSE. For example, research has taken place looking at the rationalisations surrounding purchases of sex. Knowing and understanding the psychological justifications of men give us insight into public misconceptions about the objectification, degradation, and violence perpetrated against women in prostitution (Macleod et al, 2008) and possibly about exploited children. Research on adults has found that men rationalise buying sex through:

- Asserting a need for constant access to sex
- Stating the inevitability of prostitution
- Using opportunities to dominate women
- Explaining that those involved do so out of choice not coercion
- Declaring that those involved are qualitatively different from and have less value than others (women)
- Asserting it is a form of rape prevention (Macleod et al, 2008: 21).

There are other research areas which relate to our subject matter, although perhaps to a less direct degree. Many of these relate to male attitudes and cultural practices, aggression and violence, and pornography. For example, research that has been undertaken on 'ordinary' men, from the more psychological 'rape proclivity' studies to more sociological exploration of youthful attitudes and behaviours (Burman, 2001, Burton et al, 1998, Kelly

and Regan, 2000, Sanday, 2007, Katz, 2006)¹⁰. These are relevant as they study sex crimes committed by groups of males, which is one model of CSE perpetration, and explore the values and behaviours in the social groups/communities from where the perpetrators emerge¹¹.

¹⁰ Cowburn, M. 2016, pers communication.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 2016.