

The logo for the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse. It features a square background with a geometric, low-poly pattern in shades of blue, purple, and green. The text "Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse" is written in white, sans-serif font, stacked in four lines.

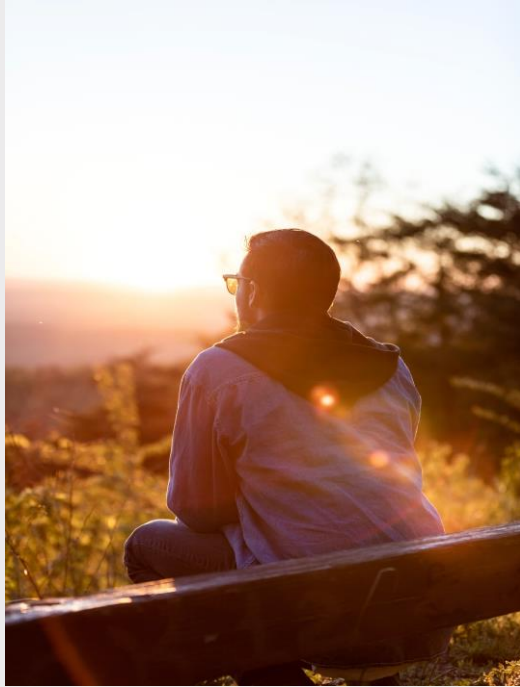
Centre of  
expertise  
on child  
sexual abuse

# Workshop: **Harmful Sexual Behaviour in online contexts**

Emma Hodgson

19 June 2024

# Grounding exercise



5 things you can **see**  
4 things you can **feel**  
3 things you can **hear**  
2 things you can **smell**  
1 thing you can **taste**

# What we'll cover in this session



# Digital revolution

**“Today’s children are growing up online and make little distinction between life online and off. Their use of online games, apps and services plays a crucial role in the development of their identities, friendships, relationships, passions and aspirations. It is essential that we respond by offering them high-quality education based on the best available evidence.”**

Head of Education, CEOP

Centre of expertise  
on child sexual abuse

**“Children are exposed to various forms of harmful content online, which simply wouldn’t be allowed to cross their paths in the ‘real’ world. This includes sexualised and pornographic imagery, violent or gory content, material depicting self-harm, and anonymous trolling”**

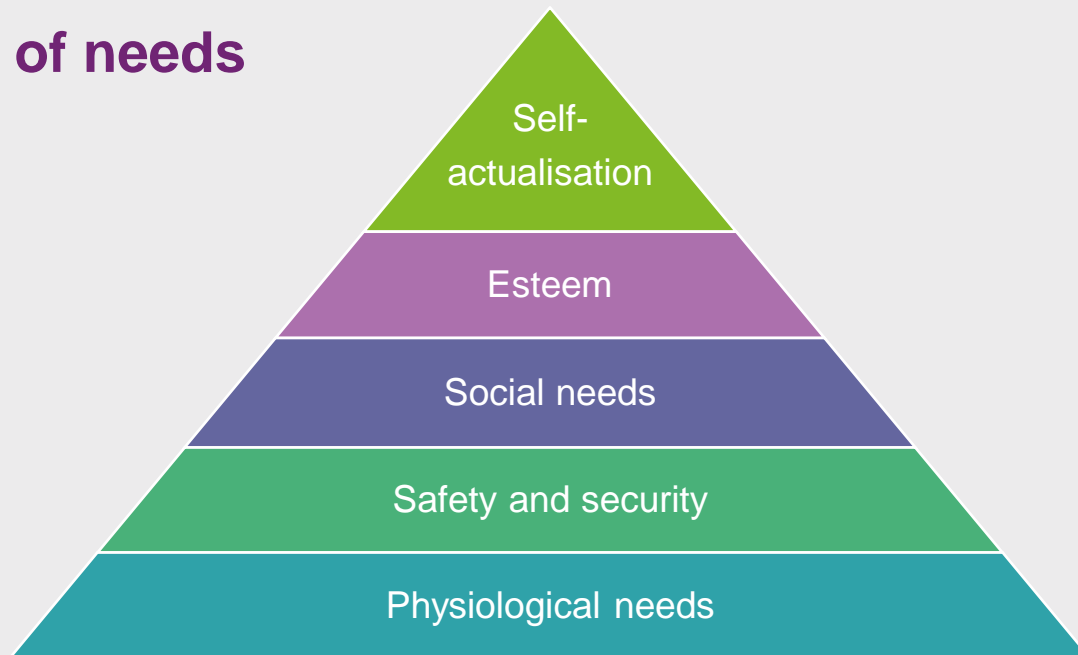
Rachel de Souza, Children’s Commissioner  
(2022)

**“The serious threat of child sexual abuse facilitated by the internet is an urgent problem which cannot be overstated”**

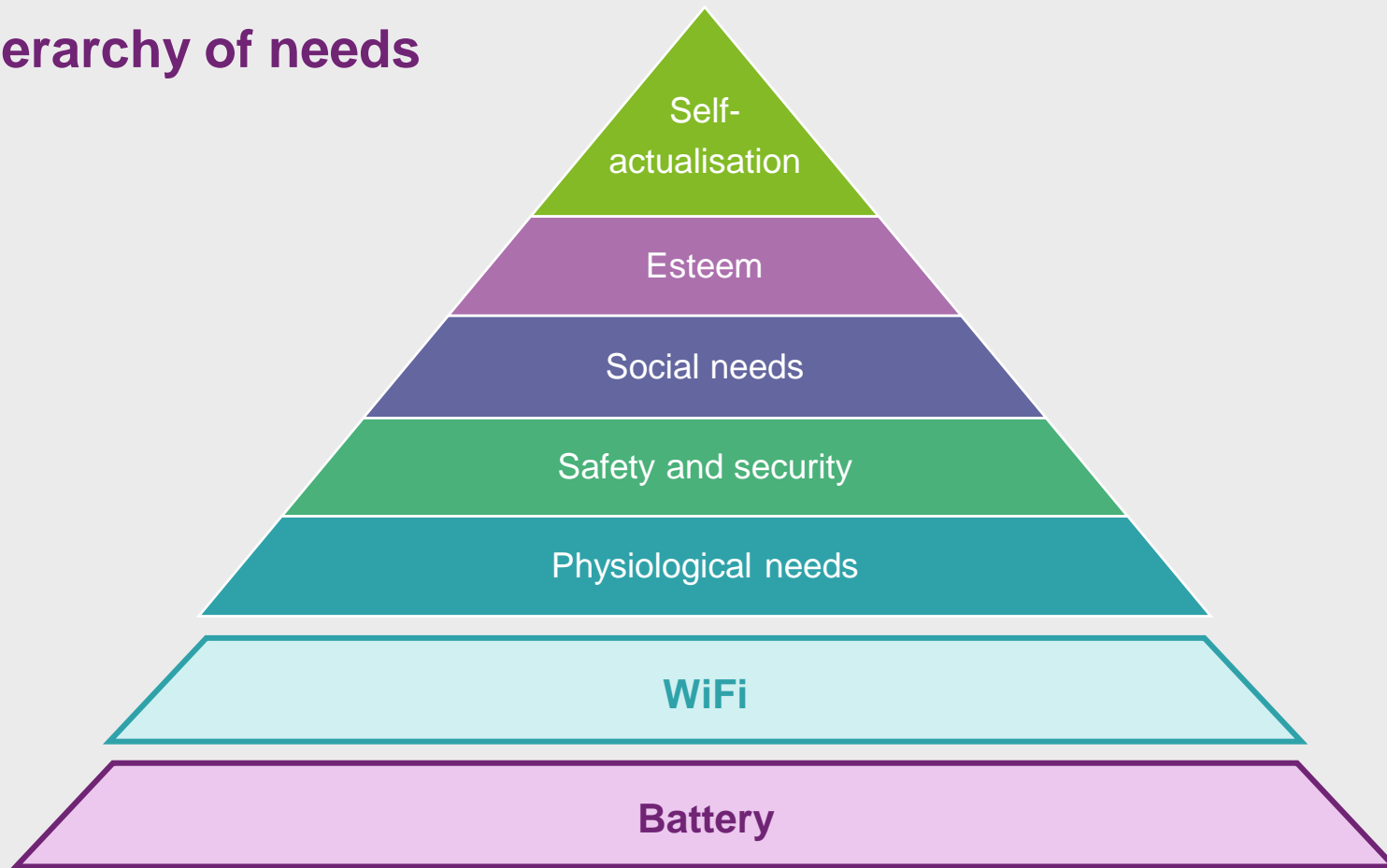
Professor Alexis Jay (2020)

# Hierarchy of needs

5



# Hierarchy of needs



# Impact of COVID-19

More time at home  
(school / work / social  
time)



Less opportunity for  
face-to-face  
socialisation



More time  
on  
technology

Increased stressors  
within families



# Digital factors

Different ways young people are at risk

## **‘Audience’**

The internet widens the audience of bystanders

## **‘Viral’**

The internet can facilitate the rapid spread of harassment

## **‘Instant’**

Easier to share something quickly, with devices to hand and without time to reflect

## **‘Evidence’**

Digital content has a footprint and anything you do, say or share can endure online

## **‘Disinhibition’**

The internet can enable people to act in ways they wouldn’t in person

## **‘Fans and followers’**

Popularity matters on the internet

## **‘Digital empathy gap’**

Digital communication can make it harder to understand other’s emotions

## **‘Anonymity’**

Opportunities for people to hide their identity or use an alternative identity

## **‘Constant communication’**

24/7 communication is difficult to escape

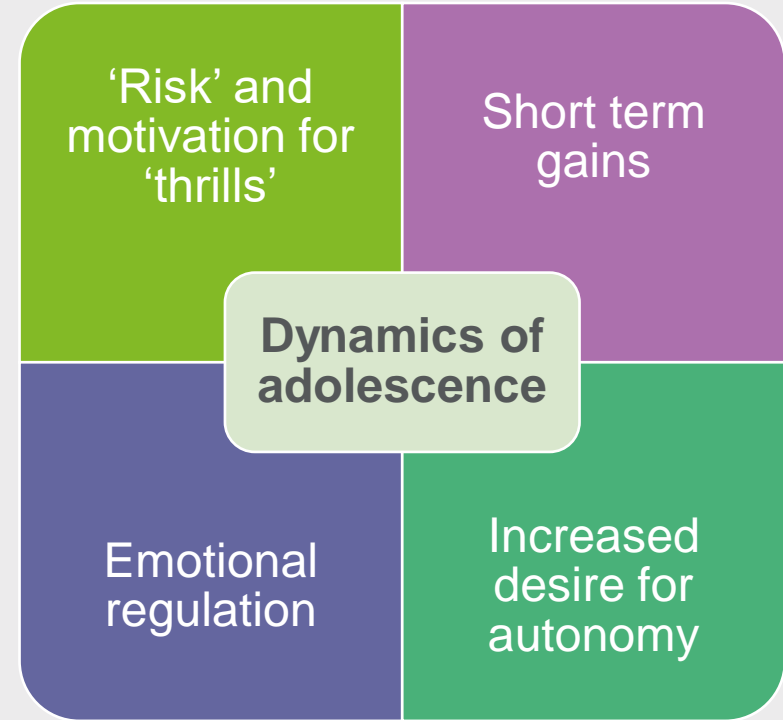


# Sexual development in the digital world



# Links to age and stages of development:

- Greater usage of technology and the internet
- Increased risk taking in adolescence
- Impulsivity
- Sensation-seeking
- Sexual interest
- Secrecy



# Digital romance

## Research project (2017)

“They encourage students to not partake in online relationships, Also it’s a different time so they don’t really know about technology these days/ online relationships”

I was only ever told about heterosexuals and relationships.....be aware of LGBT community”

“Be non-judgemental and have an understanding of ‘digital romance’ “

“We call it three R’s, which was Rules, Rights and Responsibilities’ and they would teach us stuff like online safety and genuine stuff like that... I always remember three R’s being painted in a negative light... I was like okay so you’re not gonna give us any light on the subject”

“Listen and don’t judge. Online is a valid way of sustaining relationships and older people sometimes don’t get it/ think its all dodgy old blokes”

# Harmful sexual behaviour

In online contexts

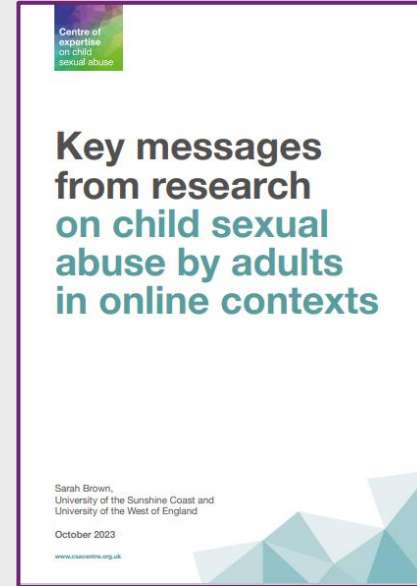
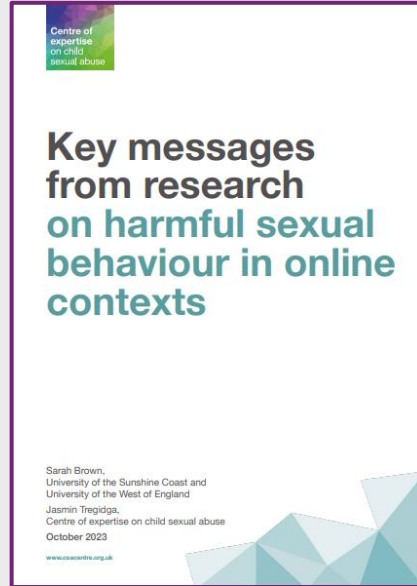
# Activity

## In the chat, tell us:

- What do you understand by the term harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts?
- Why is harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts a relevant issue for you and your role?



# New research summaries



<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/key-messages/>

“[...] refers to one or more children engaging in sexual discussions or acts - using the internet, image-creating/sharing or communication device which is considered inappropriate and/or harmful given their age or stage of development.”

Hollis & Belton, 2017. Definition of technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour



# What we know from research

# What we know on prevalence

No official figures exist on harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts

Complexities make it difficult to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour online.

## One research project showed:

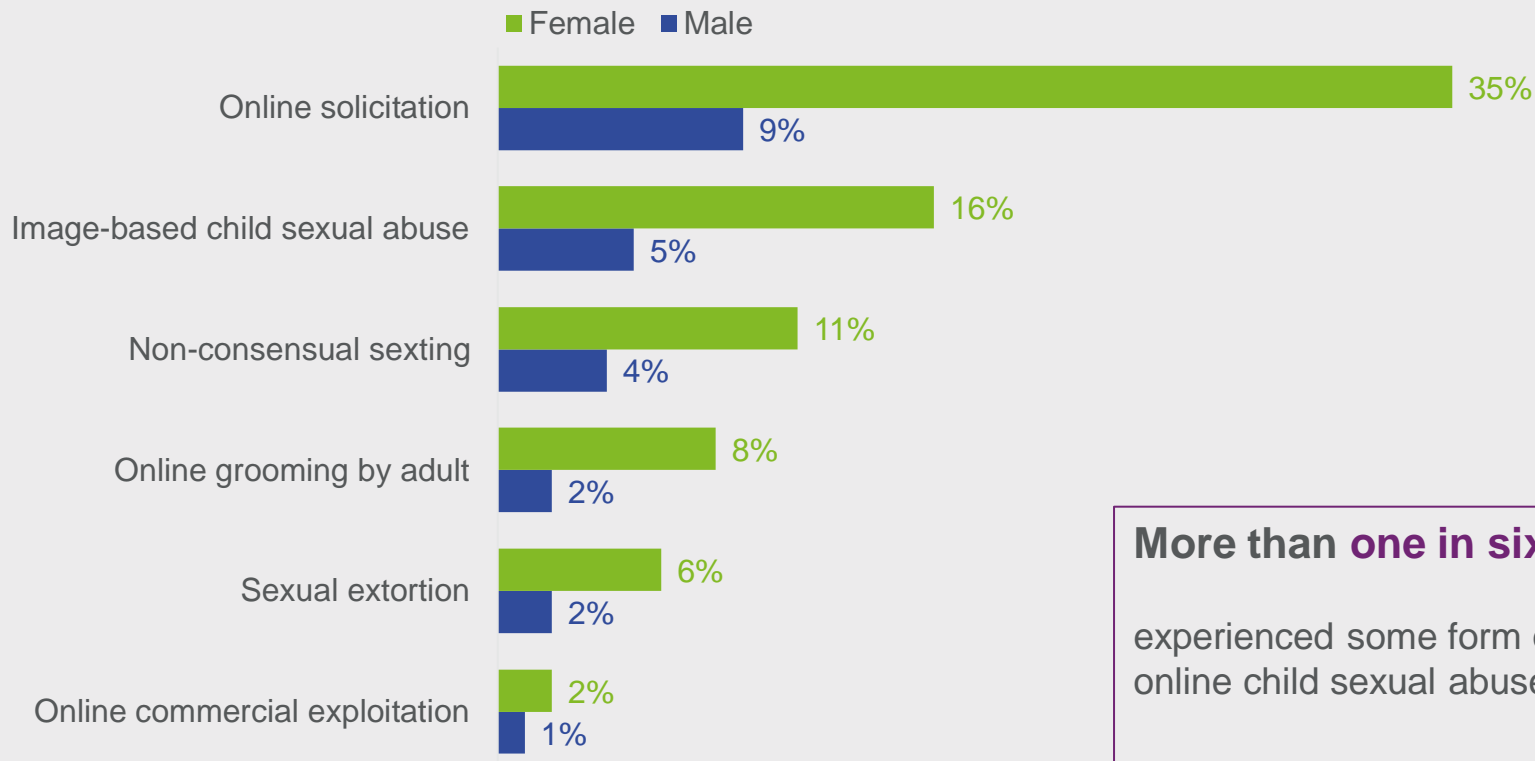
- 41% of 14–17-year-olds talked about sex online
- 10% to a stranger

Important to note that the study does not make it clear **what proportion of conversations could be classed as developmentally acceptable**, could be harmful to others and which represent young persons on online sexual victimisation.

**Research points towards need for a continuum approach.**



# Scale of online child sexual abuse



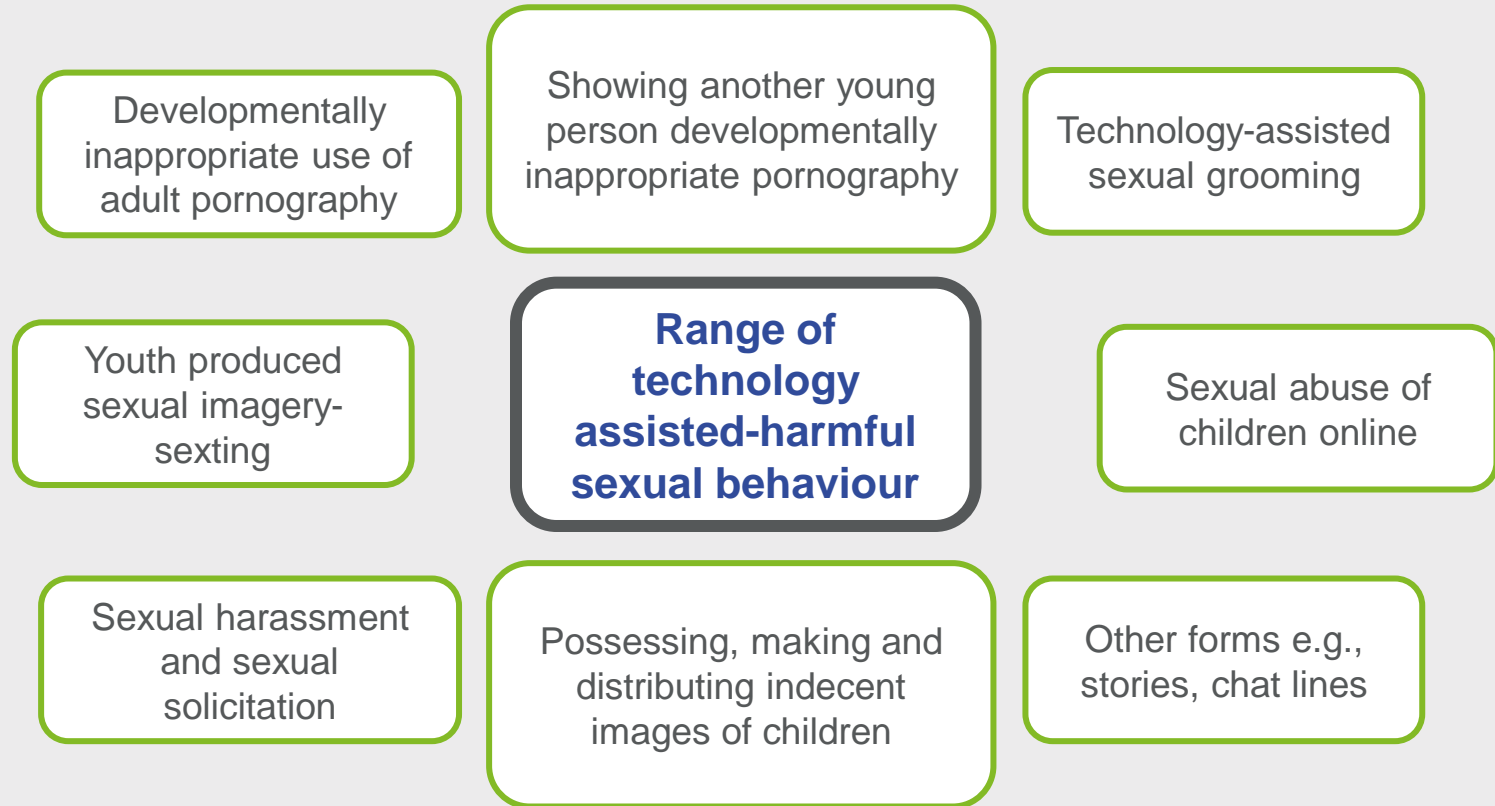
**More than one in six**

experienced some form of  
online child sexual abuse

## International Survivors' Survey for now-adult survivors whose child sexual abuse was recorded and/or distributed online

- 58% of respondents reported having had **more than one person** abusing them
- 82% of the primary offenders involved in multiple offender scenarios were **parents or extended family members** of the child
- 56% of the survivors indicated that the abuse began before the age of **four**, and 87% were **11 years of age or younger**. 42% were abused for **more than 10 years**
- 67% of the survivors were **threatened with physical harm** including being told they would die or be killed

# The range of harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts



## Background and characteristics

In NSPCC's research, children and young people with dual harmful sexual behaviour were similar to those with just offline harmful sexual behaviour.



- Those exhibiting both offline and technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour are **more likely to have less-stable backgrounds**, akin to those exhibiting only offline harmful sexual behaviour, characterised by **abuse and family dysfunction**.
- Children and young people who engage only in technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour may present with **different backgrounds and characteristics** to those who have also abused another person offline.

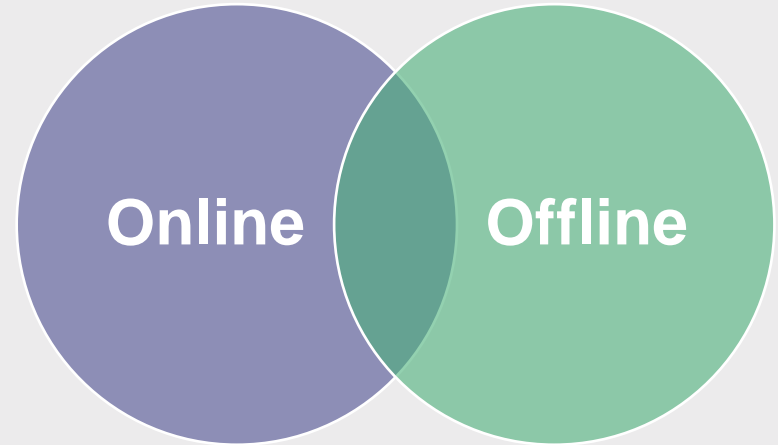
# Online & offline harmful sexual behaviour

## The crossover

A young person engaging in technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour is **more likely to have already engaged in offline harmful sexual behaviour**

There is a **relationship between** the frequent viewing of pornography and viewing illegal/extreme pornography and the young person's sexually coercive or offline harmful sexual behaviour.

Frequent viewing of pornography also relates to the young person's **increased desire** to try out what they have seen, yet not all frequent viewers will necessarily have viewed extreme/illegal images..



# Impact



# Additional risk factors

**Sharing personal  
information online**

**Chatting to strangers**

**Sexual content in  
discussions**

**Looking for  
pornography**

**Searching for  
sexual content**

**Substance misuse**

# What is the impact?

It is important to challenge the misconception that this is a 'harmless' or 'victimless' crime.

## Victims report:

- Creation of images, and their permanence and reach
- Who is viewing them
- Deception involved
- Powerlessness
- Image related-blackmail
- Reduced recognition of abuse
- Control of 'private' or 'safe' space



**“Everyone deserves to be happy and safe”**

A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it

Catherine Hamilton-Giachritsis  
Elly Hanson  
Helen Whittle  
Anthony Beech  
November 2017

NSPCC UNIVERSITY OF BATH UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



# Impacts of technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour

## From children and young people

### Control of image, lack of resolution and permanence

“I think it makes me anxious because I don’t know what was recorded, when it was recorded, do you know what I mean.”

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### Wider audience and revictimisation

“There’s evidence of it and I don’t know who else has seen that..”

### Impact on daily life

“What he used to control is me like not going to sleep. Sometimes he’d make me stay up all night ... ‘I didn’t do any schoolwork. I was falling asleep...a couple of teachers commented on how tired I looked.”

### Self-blame / shame re: images

“I feel quite stupid obviously, because I let it happen, looking back it was so obvious just the way they were talking like you could tell it wasn’t someone that was English, ... I think how did I not notice?”

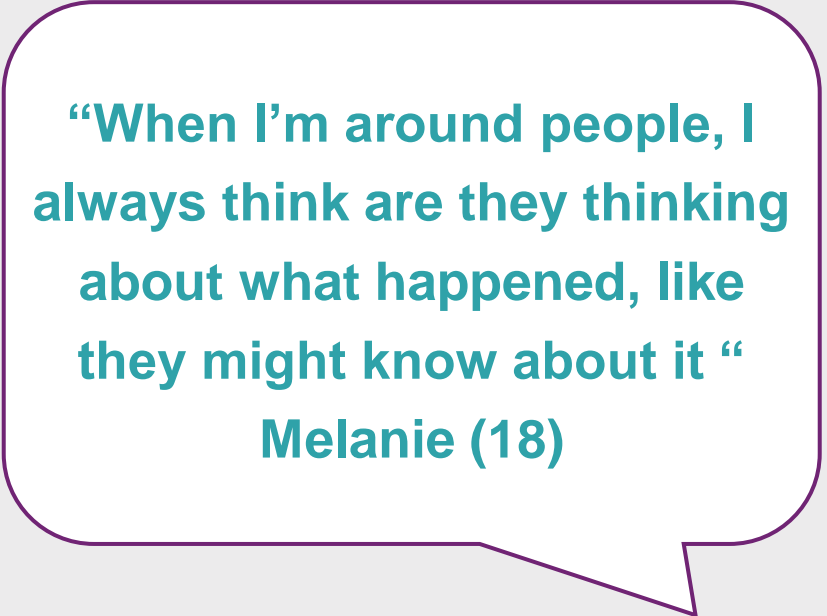
### Seen as less impactful

One young person noted that she felt she got less support than a relative who was raped offline, plus was made to feel it was a lesser ordeal.

## Worries about being recognised

Almost 70% of the survivors worried about being recognised by someone because of the recording of their child sexual abuse.

In fact, **30 respondents reported being identified by a person who had seen their child sexual abuse imagery**



**“When I’m around people, I always think are they thinking about what happened, like they might know about it “**  
**Melanie (18)**

**“It was all the shame. It has like kind-of stopped me. This, all this shame. I was so extremely ashamed. And that is kind of, shame is maybe the feeling that is most difficult to bear, because it really paralyzes you. It affected how I wanted to live”**

C3P (2017)

**“It felt as if they were saying, ‘oh you’re so, oh you’re stupid basically for doing what you did’. I don’t know if that’s what they were trying to say, but that’s what it felt like to me...It made me feel quite bad about myself”**  
**Mark (15)**

Joleby et al. (2020) Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2017)

# What is victim blaming?

**Victim blaming** is any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them.

It is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a victim, making them feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.



# Victim blaming language

## Direct

- Blaming the young person for sharing the image in the first place.
- Placing responsibility with the young person for accepting friend request from someone who becomes abusive.
- Not take action because the young person should have taken responsibility for not going on a game rated older than them.
- Telling a young person that they should have blocked or reported a person.

## Indirect

- Taking away the young persons' device or banning an app/platform as a consequence.
- Delivering online safety education to a young person after a disclosure.
- Saying that a 'young person should have kept themselves safe online' or 'not put themselves at risk'.
- Telling a young person what they should have done differently to keep safe.



# Key messages and top tips

# Key messages



1

Harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts covers a **wide range of behaviours** – the harm can be to young person themselves or involve direct harm of others.



2

Child sexual abuse online is **no less impact** full than offline.



3

Professionals can feel **under-skilled and lacking in confidence** when talking to and working with young people around online behaviours.



4


There is a **lack of research** looking at not only the prevalence of harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts but also possible pathways and in turn appropriate responses and interventions.

# Top tips


Talk to colleagues/ peers share knowledge and experience



It is OK to check things out and ask questions – remember, regardless of context - you have the skills to work with young people



Always explore both online and offline worlds - what meaning / needs are they meeting?



**Can you say one thing you've learnt today?**

# Wider resources

# Useful resources



**Shore**

<https://shorespace.org.uk/>



**Internet Watch Foundation**

[www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)



**Child Exploitation and Online Protection Unit (CEOP)**

[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)



**Childnet**

[www.childnet-int.org/](http://www.childnet-int.org/)



**Marie Collins Foundation**

<https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/>

If you are affected by anything that has been discussed today...



## The Survivors Trust

Find help, support and advice in your area: [Survivors Trust directory of services.](#)



## Rape Crisis helpline [0808 802 9999](tel:0808 802 9999)

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)



## National Association for People Abused in Childhood [0808 801 0331](tel:0808 801 0331)

<https://napac.org.uk/>



## SurvivorsUK

Online help for male survivors of sexual abuse and rape.

<https://www.survivorsuk.org/ways-we-can-help/online-helpline/>

# Tell us what you think

Remember to complete our post event survey to tell us what you thought about the CSA Centre Roadshow



# Thank you!

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