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Internet-initiated incitement and conspiracy to commit CSA: the typology, extent and nature of known cases

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Biography

Bernard's special areas of interest are child protection and child care. His work includes studies into the attrition of child abuse cases in the criminal justice system, the physical and sexual abuse of children by strangers, and organised child sexual abuse. Before this he spent almost four years working in children's homes in London.

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Internet-initiated incitement and conspiracy to commit CSA: the typology, extent and nature of known cases

Abstract *This paper presents the first research on cases where offenders initiate contact with other individuals over the internet and incite, or conspire (IIC) with, them to commit child sexual abuse (CSA). Interviews and record searches were carried out among local police services in the UK. IIC cases were found to be diverse in terms of their typology but rare in regards to the extent of known cases. They were similar to other CSA in relation to victim and offender characteristics but were distinct in regards to offenders' modi operandi. IIC cases should be viewed as an additional and serious category of internet-related CSA, and one about which there needs to be much more awareness and research.*

Keywords *child sexual abuse and exploitation; internet; incitement; conspiracy*

While the internet, and its seemingly inexorable growth, is widely seen as a positive phenomenon, there has been a corresponding, and increasing, concern over its use in the facilitation and commission of criminal offences (Wall, 2001). These offences are wide ranging. Jewkes (2003), for example, has identified, among others, hate crimes, offences relating to intellectual property rights, and those pertaining to invasion of privacy, defamation and theft of identity. Within these, though, there is one offence that has generated by far the greatest organisational response, media interest and public anxiety - and that is child sexual abuse (CSA) (Akdeniz, 2001).

The majority of this attention has focused upon two particular categories of internet-related CSA: the grooming of children for sexual abuse and the use of child abuse images (CAIs). Both categories provide the focus for burgeoning research and publication. Grooming cases have been studied from a variety of perspectives, including incidence (Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak, 2000), the modus operandi of offenders (O'Connell, 2004) and victim behaviour (Berson and Berson, 2005). In respect of CAIs, there has been work on the extent and nature of reported cases (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2004), offender psychology (Middleton, Beech and Mandeville-Norden, 2005) and policing (MacVean and Spindler, 2003).

Researchers working in this area have highlighted a third category of internet CSA, where children receive unsolicited 'sexual material' via the internet (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2003). These cases have been subject to only a relatively modest - and now possibly declining - amount of official attention. Recent research, though, has shown that while the level of online solicitations of children

may be declining, the proportion encountering unwanted exposure to sexual material appears to be increasing (Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor, 2006).

There is, within much of this literature, a focus upon victims or victim-offender interactions.

However, one of the unique and most potent features of the internet, in relation to CSA, is its ability to enable individuals with a sexual interest in children to make contact with each another. There is a small but growing literature on this phenomenon. Most of this has been concerned with offenders who come into contact with one another as a result of their mutual interest in, and use of, CAIs. Taylor and Quayle have shown that such interaction fulfils a variety of functions, including the acquisition or provision of CAIs or technical (i.e. computing) or security advice, and socialising (Taylor and Quayle, 2003; Quayle and Taylor, 2005).

Both research (O'Connell, 2001) and practice (Middleton, 2004) have found that for some of these individuals, this interaction satisfies a more specific role; namely, that of fuelling their fantasies. Initially, this was discussed primarily in relation to CAIs and the sexual gratification which offenders derived from viewing - or more specifically masturbating to - these images (Quayle and Taylor, 2002). While offenders might usually undertake this activity in isolation, whether online or offline, sometimes it is a shared activity, again either online or offline. More recently, attention has begun to focus on the existence and use of online communications between offenders, where they discuss their common desire to sexually abuse children (CHIS, 2004).

As disturbing as these contacts are, they do not, in themselves, entail the abuse of children.

However, within the general literature on internet CSA, there have been sporadic reports of this interaction leading offenders to incite, or conspire with, one another in the commission of CSA.

These reports can be divided into two broad groups. The first comprises cases where the offenders' contact is online only. Mullins (1997), for example, describes instances where the sexual abuse of children has been filmed and then distributed over the internet for other offenders to view in real time. Hughes (1997) states that offenders have used the internet to advertise child sex tours and provide advice and information to facilitate the sexual abuse of children. O'Connell (2000) has identified offenders who provide advice on internet-initiated grooming of children.

The second group of reports relate to cases where offenders proceed to meet offline. Save the Children (2003), for instance, report on a case, centred on Denmark, where an international network of offenders, who were initially involved in the internet-based exchange of CAIs, subsequently met up in order to sexually abuse one another's children. At least one child was moved internationally for this purpose. De Angelis (2000) refers to a North American case in which 'a young man in Massachusetts was charged with using a BBS [electronic bulletin board system] to enlist the help of a teenager in kidnapping a child for sex' (p.52). Tate (1990) describes how offenders used bulletin boards on Minitel - a French forerunner of the internet - as far back as 1987, to obtain and provide children for sex. Eight such 'clubs' were identified in the Paris area alone.

Given the concern these cases should engender and the fact that there has been an awareness of them for almost 10 years, it is striking that they have not been subject to any systematic or dedicated

discussion, let alone research. As a result, little is known about these cases. It is this absence of knowledge, which this paper seeks to address.

It does this by drawing upon the findings of a major study into international and internet CSA. The aims of this study were to establish the typology, extent and nature of a range of different categories of international and internet CSA known to the police or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), in the UK, and to identify the implications of these cases for policy and practice (see Gallagher, Fraser, Christmann and Hodgson (2006) for full details of this project). This paper focuses upon one of these categories, which this author has labelled 'internet-initiated incitement and conspiracy (IIIC) to commit CSA' (Gallagher et al, 2003) - and in particular, the typology, extent and nature of cases known to the police.

Method

Terminology

There is, owing to its multi-disciplinary nature, considerable variation in the terminology used in child protection. In the light of this, it was felt appropriate to provide the following explanation and definition of the terms employed in this paper:

abuse: this is employed in place of the more conventional criminological term of
 'assault'

- CAIs: this term is increasingly coming to replace that of ‘child pornography’, as it is felt to better reflect the nature of the images in question
- case: all the victims and offenders (and the offences they carry out) who are linked together in an incident or episode of CSA
- child: child and young person under the age of 18 years
- IIC to commit CSA: where an individual has used or has tried to use the internet to *initiate* contact with another person and has subsequently incited, or conspired with, him or her to commit CSA
- offender: a person who is suspected of committing CSA in a case of IIC, irrespective of whether this has been proven in a criminal trial
- victim: a child who is suspected of having been sexually abused in a case of IIC, irrespective of whether this has been proven in a criminal trial

It is recognised that use of the term ‘victim’ and ‘offender’, in *suspected* cases, is open to criticism but these were considered the most suitable terms. It is also worth noting that in virtually all of the cases which feature in this research, there was good evidence that offenders were involved in IIC to commit CSA.

Data sources

Interviews were carried out with police officers, each of whom had investigated - usually a different - IIC case. 14 officers were interviewed in relation to 13 cases. (Two officers were interviewed

separately regarding the same case.) They ranged in rank from Police Constable to Superintendent. Searches were made of police files in relation to nine IIC cases. Both interviewees and files were drawn from a variety of sections within the police, including child protection, criminal investigation, paedophile units and vice units. Moreover, they represented police services in several different parts of the UK.

A search was carried out among reports made to High Tech Crime Units (HTCUs) between January 1999 and December 2002 in one metropolitan and two shire county police services. (HTCUs have the central role, within police services, for the examination of computer-related media and should, therefore, have a complete record of all such reports made to the police.) These police services were selected on the basis of their proximity to the research office. Searches were carried out among 311 computerised reports (CSA-related offences only) in the metropolitan police service, 253 paper-based reports (all offences) in shire county 1 and 294 paper-reports (all offences) in shire county 2.

Instruments

The interviews utilised a semi-structured interview schedule which consisted of two main parts. The first part covered the specific IIC case and comprised the following four sections: case background, police investigation, work undertaken by other agencies in the UK and work undertaken abroad. The second part covered policy and practice more generally, relating to a range of international and internet CSA cases. The main purpose of these interviews was to identify the investigative and broader practice issues raised by IIC cases. The interviews were, though, also useful in providing

information on the nature of cases. IIC cases tended to be quite extensive and complex, with the result that many of the interviews took between two and three hours to complete.

A structured data extraction form was designed to record information from case files. This form covered the following nine areas: file content, case summary, offences, victim(s), suspect(s), police intervention, other agency interventions, outcomes, and policy and practice implications. The primary purpose of these searches was to obtain information on the nature of cases. Police files tended to include numerous types of information, including case summaries, offender, victim and other witness statements, and specialist reports, such as those from computer examiners and medical doctors. Although police files were well organised, they tended to contain copious amount of information – again owing to the scale and complexity of IIC cases. Data extraction took between one and five days per case.

A basic data extraction form was used to record information from the search of HTCUC reports. This was designed to log the year of the report, the nature of the suspected offence (including the specific type of internet CSA, if applicable) and a brief summary of the case.

Procedure

Approval for the research was obtained from the representative of the Association of Chief Police Officers responsible for child protection. Permission for the research was then obtained from each of the chief constables of the 52 police services in the United Kingdom. The initial intention had

been to obtain, via a national postal questionnaire survey (NPQS), a complete record of all IIC cases known to UK police services in the designated survey period of January 1999 to December 2002. This database was then to be used to provide a random sample of cases to be studied through the interviews and file searches. Owing to a poor response on the NPQS, this stage of the research had to be abandoned and a convenience sample of IIC cases was obtained. These were drawn from that part of the NPQS which had been completed, the search of reports to the three HTCUs and informal communications with police officers.

As cases were identified, a member of the research team approached an investigating officer and asked him/her to consent to an interview and provide access to the file. Most interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The intention had been to interview an investigating officer and search files for each IIC case that was identified, thereby producing a series of case studies. Owing to the non-availability of some files, it was not possible to utilise both of these methods for every case. The number of file searches and/or interviews that were carried out, and the cases that they covered, is shown in Table 1. As the table shows, although complete information could not be obtained on all cases, the overall number that were studied ($n=13$), while not huge, was not inconsiderable, especially when taking into account that this was the first attempt to study this phenomenon.

Table 1 here

The process for identifying IIC cases in HTCUC reports was the same whether records were in a computerised or paper form, and comprised studying the report to determine whether the case was suspected of involving a) a sexual offence, b) a child victim, c) use of the internet and d) incitement or conspiracy to commit CSA.

Data collection took place over a 20 month period, from August 2002 to March 2004. Further details concerning the methodology of this research project can be found in Gallagher et al (2006).

Ethical considerations

The research gained ethical approval from the University of Huddersfield's Research Ethics Committee.

Analysis

The large majority of information in this study came from two sources: police interviews and file searches. These two sources have, for the purposes of this analysis, been treated as a single data set. This was felt to be appropriate on the grounds that the information from each of these sources was largely in the same form (i.e. qualitative) and had an overlapping content (i.e. the nature of IIC). Moreover, specific interview and file data could often be matched up, given that it often referred to the same case. The data was subject to template analysis as described by King (1998), and Miller

and Crabtree (1999). This technique enables themes in qualitative data to be highlighted and organised. It is considered to be especially suited to studies such as the current one where some of the themes in the data are known in advance, allowing for the development of a preliminary coding template. Owing to the relatively small number of cases, the author did not make use of any qualitative data computer software programmes but undertook the analysis on a manual basis.

Findings

Typology

Although the research was quite modest in scale, IIC proved to be sufficiently diverse whereby it was possible to develop a reasonably sophisticated typology of these cases. This typology is based upon the defining feature of these cases i.e. the offenders' *modi operandi*. As shown in Figure 1, four types of case were identified: an offender either offering, or seeking, a child for sexual abuse, one offender inciting another person to sexually abuse an (unspecified) child, and two (or more) individuals conspiring together to sexually abuse a child. Each of these could be sub-divided according to two other criteria: whether the case comprised online offending only or had progressed to offline CSA, and whether the offenders and/or victims were resident in the same or different countries.

Figure 1 here

Vignettes

The following vignettes are based upon cases identified during the course of the research. They are intended to provide a more tangible sense of the nature of IIC cases. As these vignettes suggest, IIC cases tended to be quite idiosyncratic, which helps explain why the typology of these cases, as shown in Figure 1, was relatively diverse. The details of these cases have - in the interests of anonymity - been changed or generalised but without altering their essential character.

Offenders offering children for sexual abuse

A police unit with expertise in investigating internet CSA offences was monitoring newsgroups used by individuals with a sexual interest in children. In the course of this work, they detected video images of a child being abused by an adult male. The police felt that these images might have been taken in the UK. The police analysed the images further, undertook other intelligence gathering work and determined that the offender might be one of two particular men in the UK. The unit then reported the case to the police in the area where the more likely of the two suspects lived.

This police service executed a search warrant, seized computer and other recording material (for example, digital cameras, videos, photographs and CDs) and arrested the suspect. Examination of this material showed that this was the offender in question and revealed that he had taken still and video images of himself committing sexual offences, including rape, against the child. He had also recorded himself physically abusing the child - acts which were carried out for his sexual gratification and that of other

offenders who were able to view these scenes over the internet. It subsequently transpired that the offender had been abusing this child for 7 years, since s/he was three years of age. He had also sexually abused this child's friend, having made the first child operate the recording equipment.

Further investigation revealed that the offender had been exchanging CAIs with numerous individuals throughout Europe and North America whom he had met over the internet. In the course of recording the abuse, the UK offender took requests, over the internet, from these other offenders, as to what clothes the child should wear and the manner in which s/he should be abused. These offenders were, then, not only watching the abuse of this child online, but also directing it. As well as sending CAIs over the internet, the UK offender had been swapping CAI videos with an offender in Eastern Europe. These were imported and exported through the post.

Some of these offenders had also travelled internationally in order to abuse the children to which each of them had access. The UK offender had travelled to a Scandinavian country and was believed to have sexually abused the child of one of his co-conspirators. On returning home, he emailed the Scandinavian perpetrator and stated that: "You can come here and teach my child some lessons" - a reference to the group's interest in corporal punishment. During the course of an internationally-coordinated police operation against these offenders, a French offender was arrested en route to abuse the child of an offender in Austria.

Among the UK offender's CAIs, were ones showing a 3-4 year old child being injected, via a hypodermic needle, presumably with a drug designed to sedate her, and then being raped. This child was eventually traced to New Zealand. The UK offender was tried in respect of a variety of sexual offences against children and received several life sentences.

Offender seeking a child for sexual abuse

A foreign police service covertly monitoring newsgroups for individuals sexually interested in children, identified an offender in the UK who expressed a desire to obtain a girl between the ages of 7 and 13 years for “oral, anal and vaginal sex”. An undercover police officer contacted the offender stating that he could provide a child if he [the offender] could travel to his country. A meeting was arranged but the suspect failed to appear. In subsequent communications with the undercover police officer, the offender stated that he was now thinking of abducting and raping a child (in the UK). On learning of this, the foreign police service approached their counterparts in the UK, and advised them to identify and apprehend the offender. The foreign police service introduced the offender to an undercover UK police officer, presenting him as their “UK contact”. The suspect again outlined his desire to obtain a 7-13 year old girl to whom he “wanted to do everything”. A second meeting set up but the suspect again failed to show. However, a third meeting was organised where the suspect believed he would be paying £300 for a 10 year old girl but, where instead, he was arrested and subsequently convicted.

Offenders inciting one another to sexually abuse children

The police became aware of the main offender in this case as a result of his involvement in a worldwide network of offenders who were distributing CAIs over the internet. His computer had received over 800 visits, during which time approximately 400 files had been uploaded and 300 downloaded. Subsequent examination of his computer revealed that he was in possession of approximately 12,000 CAIs. CAIs were found on both his work and home computer.

This offender worked in an institution for children in the UK but was in contact with individuals throughout Europe and the Middle East. This group of offenders not only discussed the sexual abuse of children, and the filming of these offences, but also encouraged and advised one another in these activities. Some of these conversations focused upon how miniature cameras could be used to take covert, indecent photographs of children - including those in the institution where the main offender worked.

Another individual in this case, who was based in a UK academic institution, claimed to be part of a extensive child sex abuser network which had access to large numbers of children who were sexually and physically abused, on a regular basis. This individual could not be traced though - or at least only as far as the server in the academic institution.

The main offender in this case was found guilty of distributing indecent images of children, for which he was imprisoned, made subject to a sex offender order and placed on the Sex Offenders' Register.

Offenders conspiring to commit CSA

An adult male entered an internet chatroom seeking to identify another male for the purposes of a three-way sexual relationship with his (female) partner. He eventually identified an individual who appeared to be interested in his proposition and over a period of time a number of internet-based communications took place concerning sex between adults. Subsequently, however, the second male initiated a conversation surrounding his wishes to "abduct, abuse, torture and murder a 15 year old girl". In succeeding exchanges, this man suggested a detailed plan as to how this could be brought about. This included a method by which a girl could be tricked to getting into one of their cars, after which she would be taken to the isolated home of the second male where she would be abused, tortured and finally murdered.

Eventually, the first male reported the matter to his local police service, explaining to them that, initially, he “went along” with this discussion but when he began to feel that the second man was serious, he decided some action should be taken.

The second male was arrested by the police in the area in which he lived and his computer equipment was seized and examined. Police found CAIs on this computer, along with search terms which indicated his interest in images of children being subject to abduction, bondage, torture and murder. The police charged him with “incitement to commit murder, rape and torture” but the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute him on these charges. He was convicted, of making indecent photographs of a child under 16 years, and fined.

Extent

Table 2 shows the number of IIC cases identified through the search of *reports* to three police HTCUs. As the table makes clear, the number of reports, over the four year survey period (1999-2002), was very small, comprising 3, 1 and 5 cases. Moreover, these cases comprised only a very small proportion of all computer-related CSA reports. In shire county 2, for example, which had the largest number of reports ($n=5$), IIC accounted for only 3.8% of all the CSA-related cases reported to the HTCUs.

Table 2 here

Shire county 1 was one of three police services where searches had been carried out among all *recorded* CSA offences. (These searches had been undertaken to establish the number of recorded *international* CSA cases.) Again, the cases searched were those recorded between January 1999 and December 2002 - the same period as that which had been used for the HTCUC searches. In this time period, shire county 1 police service recorded 982 CSA offences. Thus, the one IIC case *reported* to the HTCUC in this police service, constituted only 0.1% of all *recorded* CSA offences recorded in the period 1999-2002.

The three police services in which the searches were undertaken covered areas with a combined population of approximately four million people (Office for National Statistics, 2003). *If* these three police services were representative of the UK as a whole, then nationally there would - extrapolating from these figures and rounding up to the nearest whole number - have been 124 IIC cases, known to the police, in the UK, from 1999-2001, or 31 cases per annum. (It is stressed, though, that it is not known how representative these police services, and the areas they covered, were in relation to the UK as a whole.)

Nature

Victims

The majority of the children in IIC cases featuring in the police interviews and file searches were female, lived in single parent or reconstituted families and came from homes which were

economically disadvantaged - due to parents/carers being in relatively low paid occupations or being unemployed. At the same time, and in spite of the small number of cases studied, there appeared to be some diversity among victims in terms of social and demographic factors. Their ages ranged from quite young children (under the age of five years) to adolescents, some were male and some were drawn from homes which were reasonably prosperous. Owing to the international nature of many of these cases, there was also some variation among victims in terms of their nationality, ethnicity and culture.

Children experienced many different forms of CSA. These ranged from being made to feature in indecent photographs or films, through gross indecency and indecent assault, onto rape and buggery. Sometimes this abuse was viewed over the internet by other offenders. For many of these children, the sexual abuse they suffered, as a result of the IIC, was not the first time that they had been maltreated in this way. Most of these children had already been sexually abused by the person (or persons) who determined their involvement in the IIC case. Nor was sexual abuse the only maltreatment these children experienced. Concomitant with sexual abuse, some had also suffered physical abuse, emotional abuse and/or neglect.

It was not possible to establish in any clear way the number of victims (or offenders) in these cases. However, cases often involved multiple victims (and offenders), with numbers ranging, at a minimum, from several to double figures.

Offenders

The large majority of offenders in the interview/file search cases were male, and were unemployed or in occupations with a low socio-economic classification (SEC). Many were separated or divorced and/or lived in reconstituted families, or alternatively had never had any form of cohabiting relationship. As with victims, though, there was a degree of diversity within this group. Offenders' ages ranged from young adults (late teenagers/early twenties) up to the relatively elderly (60 years plus), some were in higher SEC positions, and some had children - whether or not they lived with them at the time of the offence - while others did not. Likewise, while many offenders were heterosexual, some were homosexual and others bisexual. Some were 'fixated' or 'preferential' child sex abusers, while others were 'situational' or 'regressed' offenders (Groth, 1979). Again, owing to the international nature of many of these cases, there was also a fair amount of variation among offenders in terms of their nationality, ethnicity and culture.

What was notable about some of these cases is that a small proportion of offenders were female. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that in order to secure the degree of control over a child whereby he or she was traded online or offline, men sometimes required the assent, at least, of the child's mother or female carer. In many of these cases, though, it appeared that these females were not restricted to facilitating the offending but were actively involved the CSA.

Victim-offender relationship

Offenders who provided victims were, generally, closely related to these children, being their parents/carers, other family members or relatives, close acquaintances or persons working with children. Those who were seeking children, had children provided to them or were conspiring in the abuse of children, were invariably strangers to their victims.

Modus operandi

As the *modus operandi* of the offenders was the defining feature of these cases, it is this aspect that is to be the focus of most attention in terms of findings. These particular findings are presented in two sections. The first is concerned with the modus operandi as a process i.e. the process by which offenders used the internet to incite, or conspire with, other people to commit CSA. The second describes what are felt, by the author, to be key additional features of the modi operandi of these offenders which mark out IIC from other CSA cases. Again, these findings are based primarily upon the cases featuring in the police interviews and file searches.

Process

The template analysis suggested that there were four critical themes or questions in relation to offenders' use of the internet and their subsequent attempts to incite, or conspire with, other people to commit CSA:

1. Why did offenders wish to make contact with like-minded individuals, and incite, or conspire

with, them to sexually abuse children?

2. Why did offenders use the internet, specifically, in order to achieve this?
3. How did offenders use the internet to make contact with like-minded individuals?
4. What did offenders do once they had made contact with these like-minded individuals?

Why make contact?

For some offenders, their purpose in making contact with other people was quite straightforward: they wished to obtain a child in order to sexually abuse him or her. It is now well established that most CSA involves offenders and victims who are well known to one another (Cawson et al, 2000) i.e. most offenders have fairly ready access to children, along with the opportunity to sexually abuse them and avoid detection. Some offenders, though, are not in this situation - hence their attempts to make contact with other individuals in the hope that they might provide them with a child to abuse. Other offenders, who similarly did not have access to potential victims, did not hope or expect to be provided with a child, but intended to conspire with another person to procure a child for sexual abuse. Sometimes, abduction was the means by which this was to be brought about. Some offenders had access to children who they were already abusing but wished to assault additional victims, and consequently went on to the internet to identify individuals with whom they could exchange children.

Other offenders, whether they were seeking to obtain or provide children, were driven by more of a 'social' motive i.e. they had a desire to socialise and share their 'interests' with other individuals.

In some instances, offenders were motivated by the gratification which they derived from one, or more, of the following: *being watched* as they sexually abused a child; the knowledge that other people were receiving gratification as *they watched* a child being sexually abused; witnessing the child (over whom they had control) *being sexually abused by other persons*; and, participating in the sexual abuse of a child on a *group basis*. Other offenders appeared to be moved to incite others to commit CSA simply by the thought that a child, elsewhere, would be sexually abused.

Much of this gratification was, not surprisingly, sexual in nature. Some offenders, however, were also driven by the status that their control over the child, or more precisely *the sexual abuse of the child*, gave them within the communities of offenders that have sprung up around internet CSA and the use of CAIs in particular (Taylor and Quayle, 2003). There were, though, yet further malevolent intentions behind this interaction, with some offenders being driven by a sadistic motive. These offenders obtained gratification from the further (emotional) distress children experienced through having their abuse viewed by other people or being abused by additional other people. Other offenders, again, derived a sadistic pleasure from the physical abuse of a child which they or others inflicted.

Why use the internet?

The second major question to address is why offenders chose to use the *internet*, specifically, to make contact with one another. The answer to this is fairly simple but also of crucial importance in

understanding the phenomenon of IIC. These offenders were, or wished to be, involved in very serious criminal offences i.e. the sexual, and sometimes physical, abuse of children. If they were detected, this could entail not only grave legal sanctions but severe social opprobrium (Silverman and Wilson, 2002). Consequently, their interest or involvement in CSA had to be concealed. This, though, meant it was very difficult to identify like-minded individuals. As previous research into multiple offender CSA has shown (Gallagher, 1998), such interaction, where it has taken place, has generally been rare and restricted to fairly closed groups, such as families and acquaintances, persons working with children or individuals who have met in prison. However, the internet, because of the anonymity it usually affords its users, has produced a revolutionary change in this situation in that, for the first time, offenders are able to identify and contact like-minded strangers both very effectively and very privately.

How was the internet used?

Before engaging in incitement or conspiracy, offenders had to accomplish the following three objectives:

1. Identify another individual who appeared to be sexually interested in children;
2. Establish that this individual was genuinely sexually interested in children; and
3. Establish a relationship with this individual.

Identifying an individual who is sexually interested in children

The internet is an excellent means of communication between people who are known to one another about matters which are legal. However, the internet is also a very good system for contacting people who a) are unknown, and b) share the same illegal interest. More specifically, numerous internet protocols exist which expressly indicate, or can be used to help establish, an individual's proclivities - including sexual interest in children. Chief among these are newsgroups - the names of which often render their nature self-evident - websites, chatrooms, email, instant messaging and peer-to-peer software.

Establishing that individuals are genuine

Having located someone who *might* be similarly sexually interested in children, the offender then had to establish that this person was genuine, as opposed to being, say, an undercover police officer. To some degree, they ascertained this in the same way that people generally seek to verify the motives of a stranger. In the main, this consisted of the exchange, over time, of internet-based information or communications, and more general discussions. Ultimately, some judgements as to whether an individual was bona fide were made on the basis of intuition and/or trust. Some offenders, though, resorted to more specific checks or tests, such as asking the individual in question to send them CAIs - something which they believed law enforcement would not do on legal or moral grounds.

Establishing relationships

Having identified someone who is sexually interested in children, the offender then had to construct a relationship with this person. The way in which offenders achieved this did not seem to be very different to the way in which relationships in general are established. Initially, the individuals concerned exchanged information and views with one another in a somewhat tentative manner. Then, if this preliminary interaction was felt to be successful, it might increase in its frequency and intimacy, with some offenders progressing to talking to one another over the telephone and in a few instances meeting in person. Thus, many of these relationships progressed from the impersonal to the personal. However, some individuals, at a relatively early stage in these relationships, discussed not only their sexual interest in children and the CSA they would *like* to carry out, but also on occasions the CSA they *had* carried out, with more impersonal information, such as employment, cohabiting situations and other 'interests', being volunteered simultaneously or at a later point. In fact, the desire to discuss and share their sexual interest in children was often a powerful driver, not only in initiating contacts but also in the subsequent development of these relationships.

What offenders did after making contact?

Once offenders had established these relationships, they were then in a position to embark upon IIC to commit CSA. Eight different types of subsequent offence scenario were identified. These are set out in Figure 2. As the figure shows, these scenarios differed from one another according to three main criteria: the degree of intent on the part of offenders, the level of contact between offenders and the risk of CSA.

Figure 2 here

The primary purpose of the schema set out in Figure 2 is to show the eight main offence scenarios identified in the course of this research. Implicit within this schema is the notion that these scenarios were quite discrete phenomenon. However, perpetrators could progress through these scenarios, becoming involved in increasingly serious offending. Indeed, what this schema could be seen as highlighting is the existence of a continuum - or more precisely continua - within IIC cases.

As the second row of Figure 2 reveals, these eight offence scenarios can be reduced to three broad sets of cases. In the first set of cases - which were not known to involve CSA - individuals met online and discussed their mutual interest in sexually abusing children (offence scenario 1). In some instances, this then progressed to the individuals meeting offline, where they would continue and develop this exchange (2).

Mock

In the second set of cases, specific attempts were made to bring about CSA, either by offering a child for sexual abuse (3), seeking a child for sexual abuse (4) or one person conspiring with another to obtain a child for sexual abuse (5). These cases represented something of an interim group, whereby offenders ranged from those who *may* have been engaged in bogus attempts to incite or conspire, to those who had a strong desire to sexually (and sometimes physically) abuse children. None of these cases progressed to offline meetings or the sexual abuse of children. Nevertheless, what appeared to be clear in many of these cases was that the offenders were serious

in their interest in CSA and their attempts to incite or conspire with another person to bring this about.

The third set of cases was those where a child was sexually abused following internet contact between offenders. Some offenders became involved in this set of incitement or conspiracy cases as a result of their attempts to obtain CAIs online (6). On seeking out such images, they were told that they would first have to produce and provide their own, personal CAIs. This then led the individuals to take CAIs - either of a child naked or being abused - using a victim to whom they had access but had not abused previously. Other cases were much more interactive, where the person with care of, or control over, the child, used a camera connected to an internet-enabled computer to send live moving images of that child being abused to another offender (7). There was considerable variation in the nature of these images, ranging from pictures of naked children to scenes of children being subject to serious sexual, and on occasions physical, abuse. This offending could be quite organised and elaborate with the 'viewing' offender making requests as to how the child should be abused. In a small number of instances, viewing offenders posted clothes or other items they wished to have incorporated in the abuse scene to the person controlling the child. The remaining cases in this set involved offenders meeting up with one another to sexually abuse children (8). Quite often, these cases would be a progression from those which had initially featured online CSA.

Key features of offenders' modi operandi

In addition to the *process* described above, the *modi operandi* of offenders in IIC cases was marked out from that in other CSA cases by a number of other key features, as described below.

Physical abuse

It was clear that a sub-group of offenders was motivated by a desire to perpetrate and/or witness the physical abuse of children. Sometimes this was in a form which could be likened to corporal punishment and seemed, invariably, to have been carried out for the offenders' sexual gratification. Offenders varied in the severity of the physical abuse they perpetrated. At the extreme end of this scale, children were left with permanent physical damage.

Sadism

Although it was not a feature of all IIC cases, it was striking that in some cases offenders appeared to be driven by not only a sexual interest in children but also sadistic motives i.e. they derived gratification from harming children, usually through sexual abuse but sometimes by physically abusing them.

CSA-promoting communications

A further key feature of IIC cases was the online communication between offenders concerning the sexual abuse of children. These communications took a variety of forms. Some consisted of

'conversations' between offenders using, for example, email or instant messaging, in which they shared their interest in, and desire to, sexually abuse children. These conversations could be lengthy and graphic. It was not unusual for them to discuss extremely serious sexual and physical abuse of children, even to the point - as in the fourth vignette above - of abduction, torture and murder. Other offenders took matters still further and produced extremely elaborate accounts of the CSA they wished to perpetrate, including, for example, how they would gain access to a child and the specific acts they would carry out. Indeed, some of these took the form of narratives or stories and they could assume a currency among those with a sexual interest in children - in the same way as CAIs have done (Taylor and Quayle, 2003). Some offenders went on to meet up with one another in person where they continued their discussions of CSA.

Fantasy

Fantasy was an important motivation for some offenders and was manifest in two distinct ways. The first of these concerned the CSA communications discussed above. Some offenders engaged in the fantasies inherent in these communications in order to become sexually aroused. Others collected such communications and used them subsequently for masturbatory purposes. In this way, CSA communications seemed to be fulfilling a similar role to that of CAIs (Quayle et al, 2006). The second manifestation of fantasy was among a sub-group of offenders who *appeared* to be engaged in mock attempts to incite, or conspire with, other people to commit CSA. Some suspects claimed this on being interviewed by the police and/or were found not to have access to the child whom they were offering for abuse.

Child sex abuser networks

Some instances of IIC comprised only two or a very small number of offenders. IIC could, though, lead to the formation of quite major child sex abuser networks. In the current research, some of these networks were not only large but were highly organised and secretive, and very effective in facilitating CSA. It seems likely that the number, and also possibly the size, of child sex abusers networks is increasing as a result of the contact which is taking place between offenders over the internet.

The continuum of offending - extended

As suggested in the discussion surrounding Figure 2, IIC cases can be thought of as existing along a continuum (or continua) with at least some offenders moving progressively further along it terms of their behaviour. Following on from the findings set out above, concerning other key features of IIC cases, this idea of a continuum can be extended. The resultant continuum is shown in Figure 3 in a simplified form. As the figure indicates, contact between offenders initiated over the internet may lead in some of its most serious manifestations, to child physical abuse, sadistic acts against children and the formation of child sex abuser networks.

Figure 3 here

Discussion

As innovative as this research is, it is necessary to acknowledge its limitations, before its findings can be placed in a wider context and their importance assessed. Chief among these limitations were the scale and representativeness of the research. It was possible to carry out only 14 interviews and nine file searches relating to IIC cases. Similarly, searches of reports to HTCUs were carried out in only 3 of the 52 police services in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the research was confined largely to a quite specific group of cases, namely those which were *reported* to the *police* in the *UK*. It did not include cases that were unreported, not linked to the UK or known only to other agencies in the UK. Even then, the researchers had to be more pragmatic than systematic in the way in which they selected cases. Finally, where cases were international, the researchers were seldom able to obtain data from foreign law enforcement agencies.

Taking into account these factors, it is evident that some caution has to be exercised in interpreting the findings of this research. More specifically, it has to be recognised that these results are not as reliable nor as generalisable as they would have been had they been based on a large scale, representative and quantitative study. Indeed, in some respects, it might be more appropriate to

think of the research as having identified indicative themes which need to be validated in future research dedicated to IIC.

Notwithstanding these limitations, it should be noted that the research drew upon the experience of a range of personnel in the police - the agency which has primary responsibility for IIC cases. Moreover, the research used different methods such that the quality of the data can be seen to have been enhanced through the process of triangulation (Denzin, 1989). It is felt, therefore, that this research has identified, and provided important data on, a new and significant category of internet CSA.

As diverse as it is, IIC does seem to be a relatively rare phenomenon. This research found that local police services in the UK each investigated approximately one report per annum. Even allowing for the high rate of non-reporting of CSA cases (Cawson et al, 2000), it appears that IIC - in terms of the *number* of cases - does not constitute a major child protection problem. In this respect, IIC cases are comparable to internet-initiated grooming cases - reports of which also made up approximately 0.1% of all recorded CSA cases. By contrast, cases involving internet-based CAIs were quite common, with police services investigating scores, and in some instances hundreds, of these cases per annum (Gallagher et al, 2006).

In terms of their nature, and in particular victim and offender characteristics, (known) IIC cases appeared to be similar to (known) CSA cases in general - such as those comprising children placed on child protection registers (Creighton, 1992) and those referred to social services departments

(Gibbons, Conroy and Bell, 1995). For instance, a majority of victims were female and a large majority of offenders male. Likewise, while many offenders were from disadvantaged backgrounds, there was some diversity within this group, in terms of SEC, but also cohabiting, relationship and parenting status, and sexuality. There were some differences between these and other CSA cases in, for example, the involvement of more stranger and female offenders, but these tended to be the exception.

Where these cases were distinct is in respect of the offenders' *modi operandi*. Offenders' use of the internet to groom children for CSA and obtain CAIs, has been discussed in the literature (Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak, 2000; and Taylor and Qualyle, 2003). Similarly, the existence of (offline) attempts to incite or conspire with others to commit CSA have also been documented (Gallagher, 1998). Nevertheless, use of the internet, and incitement and conspiracy, in relation to CSA, remain - *individually* - unusual *modi operandi*. The *combination* of these makes IIC to commit CSA especially unusual. The series of features associated with IIC cases, such as the perpetration of physical abuse, offenders who had (other) sadistic motives and the creation of CSA networks, makes the *modi operandi* of these offenders yet more unorthodox.

As for placing these results in the context of the wider literature, this is problematic owing to the fact that - as explained in the introduction - there is very little published, and even less research, on this phenomenon. What there is, though, does provide some support, for the above findings. Palmer and Stacey (2004), for example, constructed a typology based upon internet and mobile phone-related CSA known to Barnardo's, a UK children's charity. While this study had a much broader

remit than that incorporated within this paper, two of the types of case it identified reflected some of differentiation used in Figure 1. These cases were ‘children sold online for sexual abuse *offline*’ and ‘children sold online for live sexual abuse *online*’ (author’s emphasis).

One of the very few pieces of published research measuring the extent of cases involving some element of IIC is that by Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005). These researchers collected data concerning arrests for ‘internet-related sex crimes against minors’ from a national sample of US law enforcement agencies. In a sub-sample of 126 cases involving ‘family and acquaintance offenders’, they found that only 2% of these cases entailed use of the internet to ‘advertise victims in prostitution cases or sell minors to other offenders’. Mitchell et al (2005) echo another of the findings of the current research in their statement that ‘these arrests [for all internet-related sex crimes against minors] still constitute a relatively small proportion of arrests involving all sex crimes against minors’ (p.56).

Both Palmer and Stacey (2004), and Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005), emphasise that a large proportion of internet-related CSA cases involve offenders who are known to their victims, as opposed to being strangers. Palmer and Stacey remark that in relation to ‘Children sold online for live sexual abuse online[e]vidence is emerging that children, sometimes very young, are being abused in this way by people well known to them: family members, friends of the family and trusted adults such as teachers or youth leaders’ (p.28). That IIC cases – like CSA cases in general (Cawson et al, 2000) – involve many familiar abusers may also help explain the similarity between these two sets of cases in terms of victim and offender characteristics.

Finally, Kuchta and Hillman (2003) reinforce one of the most important findings of this research concerning the distinct nature of the offenders' *modi operandi* in relation to, for example, not only use of the internet, *and* incitement and conspiracy, but also associated features such as physical violence against children. They describe an FBI investigation into a US and Canadian network of child sex abusers who went under the name of 'the Spanking Society'. Members of this network sought to witness, and obtain images of, children being subject to 'corporal punishment' and initiated contact with one another over the internet for this purpose. Offenders sent these images to each other either over the internet or through the post in the form of videos. It appeared that all the members of this network had a special interest in children being brutally beaten. One child was left incontinent, whilst another was found to have had a permanent physical disability as a result of the physical abuse. At least 10 people, most of whom were the victim's parents or carers, were convicted of an assortment of offences, including soliciting, and conspiracy to commit, sexual and physical assaults.

Conclusion

Much concern has arisen over the last 5-10 years in relation to internet CSA. Virtually all of this concern has centred on two categories of case: the grooming of children for sexual abuse and the use of CAIs. However, this research found that there exists a third major category of case, that of IIC to commit CSA.

While these cases are quite diverse in terms of their typology, they are, at least in respect of *known* cases, relatively rare. They appear, moreover, to be quite similar to known cases of CSA in general in regards to victim and offender characteristics. Where these cases are distinct, though, is in relation to the offenders' *modi operandi*. These *modi operandi* comprise use of the internet, along with incitement and conspiracy, to commit grave crimes against children, involving not only sexual, but also physical abuse. On these latter grounds, it is argued that IIIC should be seen as an emerging, serious and challenging child protection problem.

Two broader implications arise from this research. The first is that discussions of internet CSA need to consider not only victims, and victim-offender contact, but also offender-offender interaction. Secondly, the research shows that there is another small, but important, type of offence which students with a wider interest in the criminology of the internet (see, for example, Wall, 2001; and Jewkes, 2003) should take into account.

That said, it has to be recognised that even with the publication of this research, little is known about IIIC. There is, in fact, a pressing need for more research on this phenomenon. Such research should seek to validate the current study, exploring the same key questions concerning typology, extent and nature. However, any such study would need to be considerably larger in scale and more systematic in order to provide more reliable and generalisable data. Furthermore, it should utilise a more comprehensive organisational base, drawing upon cases known to the full range of statutory agencies, the private sector (especially Internet Service Providers), NGOs (such as the charities

which come under the CHIS umbrella - Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety) and the Internet Watch Foundation - the national reporting hotline. In addition, and equally importantly, future research should seek to explore, much more thoroughly, some of the critical issues concerning IIC. Chief among these are the methods by which those who are sexually interested in children make contact with one another and the effect this contact has upon their subsequent behaviour.

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TABLE 1 *Information sources for IIC case studies*

| Source (police) | N | % |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Interview and file | 9 | 69.2 |
| Interview only | 4 | 30.8 |
| File only | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 13 | 100.0 |

FIGURE 1 *Typology of cases of IIC - based upon offenders' modi operandi*

| Types | Sub-types |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. An individual offering a specific child for sexual abuse | • online (only) |
| 2. An individual seeking a child for sexual abuse | • offline (additionally) |
| 3. One individual inciting another to sexually abuse an unspecified child | • national |
| 4. Two (or more) individuals conspiring to sexually abuse child | • international |

TABLE 2 *IIC cases identified through searches of CSA reports to HTCUs in three police services (1999-2002)**

| Police service | Type of CSA-related report | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|------|-----|-------|
| | Incitement/ conspiracy | | Non-incitement/ Conspiracy | | All | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Metropolitan** | 3 | 1.0 | 308 | 99.0 | 311 | 100.0 |
| Shire county 1 | 1 | 0.8 | 129 | 99.2 | 130 | 100.0 |
| Shire county 2 | 5 | 3.8 | 125 | 96.2 | 130 | 100.0 |

*This analysis is based upon figures for CSA-related investigations only. Figures were obtained for non-CSA, internet-related investigations involving, for example, fraud, physical assault and hate crimes, but these are not reported here.

**This is not a reference to the Metropolitan (i.e. London) Police Service. Rather, the term is used in a generic sense to refer to the fact that the police service covered a predominantly urban area.

FIGURE 2 *Offence scenarios in IIC cases*

| DEGREE OF CSA | | | <i>Generally increasing intent on the part of offenders, contact between offenders and/or risk of CSA</i> |
|---|---|---|---|
| Set 1: Not known to involve CSA | Set 2: Attempted CSA | Set 3: CSA committed | |
| 1. Mutual discussion i.e. glorification and promotion of CSA <i>(online offender contact)</i> | 3. Offering a child for CSA <i>(online offender contact)</i> | 6. CAIs produced in order to obtain other CAIs <i>(online offender contact)</i> | ↓ |
| 2. Meeting up to discuss CSA <i>(offline offender contact)</i> | 4. Seeking a child for CSA <i>(online offender contact)</i> | 7. Children being shown naked or being sexually abused <i>(via online web-cam)</i> | |
| - | 5. Conspiring to commit CSA <i>(online offender contact)</i> | 8. Children sexually abused <i>(offline offender contact)</i> | |
| <i>generally increasing intent on part of offenders, contact between offenders and/or risk of CSA</i> → | | | |

FIGURE 3 *A continuum of behaviour and offences in IIC cases*

