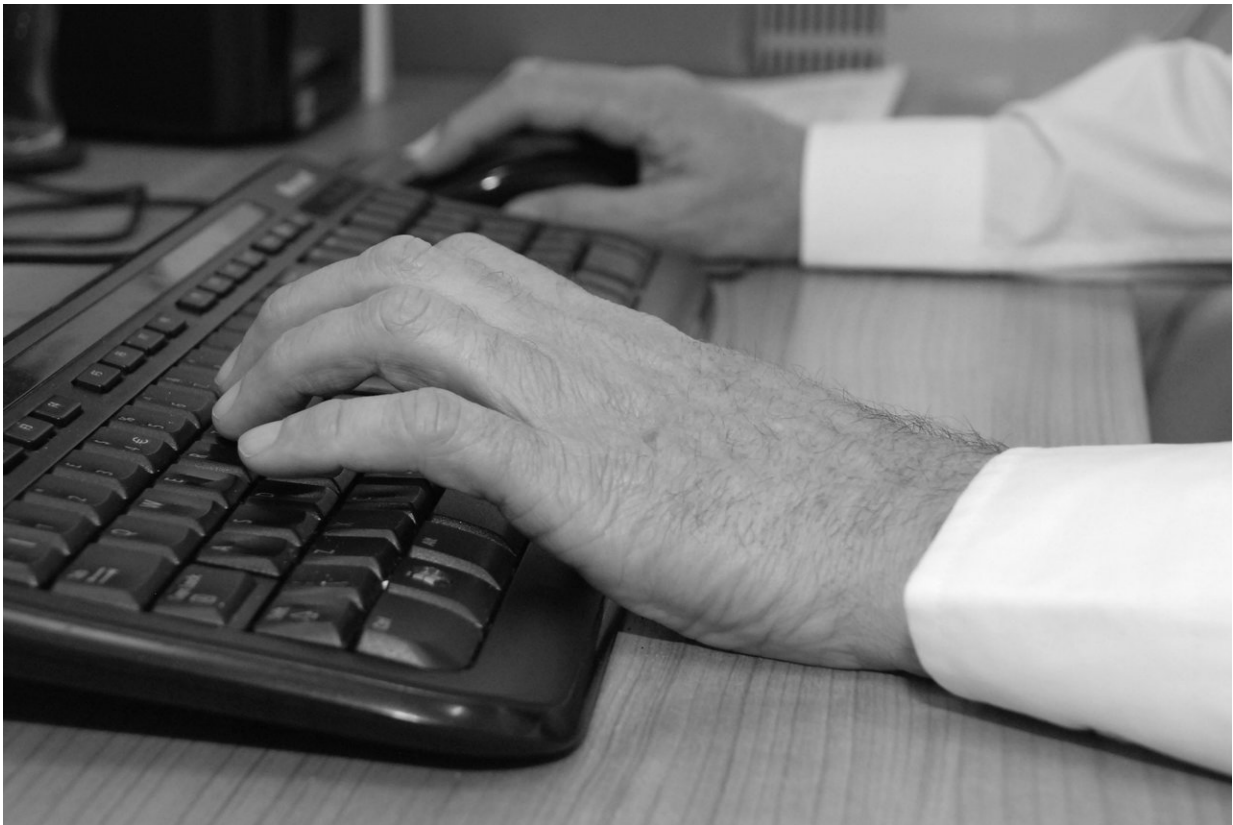


Child sex abuse much greater than believed with more women committing offenses

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Online child sexual abuse -- hands on computer. Credit: University of Huddersfield

Research by a team of academics at the University of Huddersfield alerted the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) to the

probability that the number of offenders who both view online images of children and who engage in contact or the physical sexual abuse of children is much higher than usually believed.

This is one of the main findings of a 184-page report submitted to the Inquiry by Dr Nadia Wager and University colleagues, Michelle Rogerson, Carla Reeves, Kris Christmann, Simon Parkinson, Bernard Gallagher, Rachel Armitage, Maria Ioannou and John Synnott. The team were commissioned by the IICSA to conduct a review of the existing literature to help quantify the extent of online [child sexual abuse](#). They also discovered that more women than previously thought are committing offences such as online grooming.

Dr Wager argues that their conclusions have significant implications for assessing risk in known perpetrators and for the safeguarding of children and young people.

The IICSA has recently completed a week of public hearings dealing with the internet and [child sexual abuse](#). The report by Dr Wager and the team at the University of Huddersfield - was one of the documents that fed into the debate.

Over the course of six months the team reviewed and analysed research that has been carried out around the world into online child sexual abuse. Importantly, the analysis found there had been relatively little work done to establish the true extent of it in the UK.

Police records for crimes involving child sexual abuse are the main statistical source, but it is difficult to disentangle from these the number of offences that are online-facilitated, says Dr Wager.

Data collected by agencies such as Childline and the NSPCC also provide useful insights, although it has limitations as they tend to be a

measure of help and advice seeking, both of which might be influenced by factors such as changes in public awareness.

Dr Wager recommends that the UK follows the example of several overseas countries by using confidential self-report victim and perpetrator surveys as a means to estimate the prevalence of online abuse. Surveys could be sent to randomised households, as is the case with the general Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Female abusers

It is from self-report surveys conducted overseas that the team arrived at some of their main conclusions, such as the surprisingly high numbers of women who perpetrate online child sexual abuse.

Official crime figures lead to the assumption that the overwhelming majority are male. However, states the report, "the findings from self-report studies examining online sexual requests and grooming show that a sizeable minority of perpetrators, between a quarter and a third, are female.

"While the self-report surveys that have identified this gender composition have not been conducted in the UK, if applied to the UK these findings have significant implications for interventions and treatment of perpetrators."

Another key finding is that the rate of crossover between image-related and contact offending is considerably higher than is estimated from studies that focus on cases that have come to court.

According to Dr Wager's report, "this has implications for both risk assessment and management of individuals identified as perpetrating image-related offences and for safeguarding considerations for children

and [young people](#)".

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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