

IMAGES OF ABUSE

A review of the evidence on child pornography

Summary of research and findings

Emma Renold and Susan J. Creighton with Chris Atkinson and John Carr

Aims and purpose of the review

Commissioned by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), this report provides an overview of the findings from a literature review into our past and current knowledge of child pornography, or 'images of abuse' as it is now referred to. With very little written specifically on child pornography, and with much of the data subsumed within broader studies of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, the report goes some way to outlining the findings extracted and collated from studies conducted over the past two decades. These include: how child pornography has been, and is currently, defined; what is known regarding its scope and character (within and beyond the UK), findings relating to patterns of production, distribution and consumption, the effect upon children and young people used to produce child pornography. There is also an extensive chapter detailing the impact of computer technologies in the transformation of child pornography into a global cottage industry, where boundaries between consumers, distributors and producers of child pornography become blurred.

Defining child pornography

- Child pornography is not a separate genre outside of other forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation, but one practised within a cycle of exploitation. Furthermore, what constitutes child pornography is contingent upon different legal, cultural, moral, religious beliefs and codes
- Differences in what constitutes the legal definition of the age of a child, for example between the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and many European countries, needs to be resolved, particularly for the production of coherent cross-national comparisons
- There is no specific UK law on the content or classification of a pornographic image but it is an offence to take any 'indecent' photograph of a child. What counts as 'indecent' however is subject to interpretation

- It is necessary to distinguish between the use of materials for sexual gratification and materials that record or depict the sexual abuse of a child. While pictures of semi-naked children playing on the beach may sexually stimulate an individual, it does not constitute child pornography. Child pornography is a visual record of the sexual abuse of a child, either by adults, other children or which involves bestiality
- The UK legislates against the production, distribution and possession of child pornography. However, there are still countries within and beyond Europe that do not have possession and distribution laws. Consequently legislative loopholes do exist and are exploited. Of concern is that UK extra-territorial power to prosecute those who sell or possess child pornography abroad only applies to those countries in which possession and distribution is a crime
- Existing laws have been adapted or amended to cater for the rise of crimes on the internet and computer-generated child pornography. However, different countries hold different definitions and laws, and the technological advances of the internet respects neither international boundaries or criminal jurisdictions. It is possible to produce child pornography in one country, distribute it in another and consume it in yet another country.

Scope and character

- Global figures regarding the number of children used in pornography are often guestimates, subsumed within data on child prostitution and child trafficking
- Most of the studies, which indicate the number of children exploited in child pornography, emanate from the United States. UK data is restricted to small case studies, survivor stories, Home Office statistics and police operations
- UK prevalence studies of child sexual abuse rarely include questions on children being exposed or used in pornography. A recent NSPCC study, however, has estimated that less than one per cent of the child population has been exploited through child pornography
- Police operations and individual cases, reported in the media, highlight the number of offenders involved in the production, distribution and possession of child pornography, and often cite the number of images and videos seized. They do not, however, generally indicate the number of children abused, or provide an adequate understanding of how child pornography is part of a cycle of sexual exploitation. Data on this is gained from small or isolated case studies
- US studies suggest a link between involvement in child prostitution and involvement in child pornography. There is very little UK research that examines the relationships between child prostitution and child pornography

- Both UK and US research demonstrate the production of child pornography within child sexual abuse rings. Some UK studies, however, do not include pornographic involvement in their questionnaires. The percentage of child pornography reported within sex rings in some US studies is higher than that reported from studies in the UK
- Recent media reports and police seizures have focused on the problem of child pornography and the internet. However, little systematic and reliable data is available
- Recent research on child pornography and the internet found 140,000 child abuse images and concluded that the volume was increasing
- Recent research on the use of the internet by adults with a sexual interest in children has focused more on the risks to children from this activity.

Patterns of production, distribution and consumption

- From the late 1970s to mid 1990s there was a shift from the professional commercial to the amateur non-profit making production and distribution of child pornography produced predominantly within a cottage industry with and for 'paedophiles'.
- There is a fear that making child pornography for commercial gain is re-emerging with the advent and widespread use of the internet and new computer technologies, particularly as much of the child pornography today can only be accessed via credit cards
- The number of multiple offences of possession, production and distribution, both local, national and international, marks the impact of the internet and questions the use of old typologies, as boundaries between amateur and commercial, makers and collectors become blurred
- There is evidence to suggest that child pornography is used for sexual stimulation, to legitimate and normalise offenders' sexual activities with children, to maintain a permanent record, to ensure a constant source of material at the age of sexual preference and as a tool for grooming, entrapment and blackmail
- Child pornography must continue to be viewed as instrumental in the on-going sexual abuse of children, that is, within organised abuse (prostitution, sex rings and trafficking), within and outside the family and with adults and children, both known and unknown
- Child pornography needs to be understood, not as a separate genre for and by 'paedophiles', but in a wider context in which cultural ideals of beauty are youth, and the media is reliant upon the sexualisation of children for financial gain.

Impact upon children

- The impact on children and young people exploited in child pornography, and its consequences, is a neglected and under-researched area. This is primarily due to the difficulty of isolating impacts of child pornography from other sexually exploitative practices
- Data from four studies goes some way to enhancing our understanding of the impact during exploitation, during disclosure and following children's exploitation of being used in child pornography
- Children can experience intense feelings of powerlessness, knowing that there is nothing they can do about others viewing pornographic pictures/films of themselves (and sometimes their coerced sexual abuse of others) indefinitely
- Children express concerns over how pornography will be viewed (i.e. that they enjoyed it or were complicit in its production)
- Children are aware that the sexual abuse they endured to produce the pornography can be distributed commercially or non-commercially for the arousal of others. They are also aware that it can be used to groom and abuse other children
- Children suffer in the knowledge that there is a permanent record of their sexual abuse, which can subsequently prevent, delay or exacerbate the fear of disclosure
- This knowledge has implications for the need for long-term support and treatment of the children involved, and for possession offences to reflect the harm that indefinite circulation can cause. There is also a need for more UK research into how child pornography investigations are handled (especially the impact upon children when pictures are used to identify them), and more generally, regarding the impact of being used and abused in child pornography.

Child pornography and the internet

- The internet is fast becoming one of the main mediums for the distribution and consumption of child pornography, as evidenced by the number of police operations and seizures. The emergence of a range of new cyber crimes, of which child pornography offences were a key part, led to the establishment of a new police unit, the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit
- Fears and hazards surrounding the internet include its potential to produce child pornography through scanners, digital cameras, technologies which allow the creation of child pornography without using a 'real' child, and on-line abuse through e-mail,

internet relay chat and video conferencing technologies. It can also facilitate global communication networks via newsgroups, chatrooms and bulletin boards. The ability to make communications anonymous with encryption software and re-mailing, and hide text through steganography, also causes great concern.

- Reliable and systematic research regarding the use of the internet and newsgroups to produce, consume and distribute child pornography is limited
- European and UK attempts to police the internet focus on:
 - self-regulation by ISPs and on-line users;
 - the introduction of the Internet Watch Foundation;
 - the setting up of a government task force;
 - increased legislation for internet crimes and the development of protective software;
 - public awareness campaigns and guidelines for the internet industry.

Renold, E. and Creighton, S. J. (2003) *Images of abuse: a review of the evidence on child pornography*. London: NSPCC.

ISBN: 1842280309

£7.50

The report offers a number of recommendations for legislation, policy, practice and further research on the topic.

The full report is available to purchase from NSPCC Publications and Information Unit, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3NH, tel: 020 7825 2775. It can also be ordered online from NSPCC inform - www.nspcc.org.uk/inform.