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The COPINE Project

Ethel Quayle*

Summary: Each new technological advance has brought with it abusive practices towards children. This is also the case for the Internet. This article describes the collaborative work of the COPINE research project in the context of how children are made vulnerable through the new technologies. It focuses on images as evidential material, the primacy of child victims, and the behaviour of offenders in their engagement with abuse images. Finally, the challenges and difficulties in developing systematic assessment and intervention materials will be explored.

Keywords: Child abuse images, Internet sex offenders, COPINE Project.

Introduction

While there is widespread recognition that the creation and use of abusive images of children on the Internet constitute a major area of social concern, our understanding of these issues is limited. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine another similarly important area, commanding enormous political and media attention, that is so lacking in basic policy development, supportive research and conceptual enquiry (Taylor and Quayle 2005). The COPINE Project has been at the forefront of developing understanding in this area through its programmes of action research and analysis and its close relationship with law enforcement, probation, prison and child welfare communities. This article describes the origins and nature of the project, and briefly summarises some of the results of its work.

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Origins of COPINE

COPINE is an acronym that stands for COmbating Paedophile Information Networks in Europe and was the name of the project that received the first European Commission funding for work to explore the nature of the problem of abuse images and the Internet and to hold the first major international conference in this area (in Dublin in 1998). In reality, the COPINE Project is not one project but a collection of projects, all of which are related to the ways in which children are made vulnerable through the new technologies.

As the availability of the Internet increased in the late 1990s, its benefits quickly became apparent, as did its problems. Collaborative work between what was to become COPINE and the Paedophile Unit of the London Metropolitan Police highlighted the significance of abusive images as an element of child sexual exploitation, along with the growing role of the Internet as both a medium for distribution and a factor in its own right. From this context the Project developed four distinct emphases:

- Images as evidential material.
- The primacy of child victims.
- The behaviour of offenders in their engagement with abuse images.
- The development of systematic assessment and intervention materials.

Over the years a considerable attempt has been made to retain a focus on victimisation rather than on offending. However, it must be noted that almost ten years after the first funded project for COPINE, our knowledge of victimisation remains scant. Paradoxically, we know considerably more about those who offend than we do about the children in the images (see Middleton forthcoming).

Our work would not have been possible without collaborative engagement with other government and non-government organisations and supportive funding from the European Union.

Images as evidential material

It is apparent that very many people access images that may be indicative of sexual interest in children. However, not all images that appear to be attractive to adults with a sexual interest in children are necessarily illegal

(Taylor *et al.* 2001). Internet images lie along a continuum, which can be expressed in terms of the degree or level of victimisation (which may not necessarily relate to the capacity for an image to generate fantasies). Understanding the nature of victimisation shown in abuse images is an important but controversial issue, the significance of which has been reflected in the sentencing guidelines for offences related to possession of abuse images in the UK (Court of Criminal Appeal Division 2002). These guidelines relate sentence length on conviction of charges related to possession of abuse images to the content of the images. A further reason for focusing on image qualities is that offenders' collections of images reflect their level of engagement with the material, as well as providing visible evidence of sexual fantasy and, on occasion, of sexual assault.

Until recently the term 'child pornography' was used to describe these images, but this term carries with it complex connotations, allowing comparison with the depictions of 'consensual' sexual activity between adults that are widely available from newsagents and video retailers. Such a view of pornography is of course contentious, and authors such as Itzin (2002) have presented a compelling argument that pornography per se is 'instrumentally causal in the aetiology of sex offending'. In the context of children, however, there can be no question of consent, and use of the word 'pornography' may effectively allow us to distance ourselves from the true nature of the material. Many practitioners therefore prefer the term 'abuse images'; however, it must be recognised that in many countries, including Ireland, the term 'child pornography' has a legal meaning and, at least within that context, will continue to be used.

Different jurisdictions have different legal definitions of child pornography, and some have no definitions at all. Of the 184 Interpol member countries, 95 do not have legislation that specifically addresses child pornography and 41 do not criminalise possession of child pornography, regardless of intent to distribute (ICMEC 2006). This means, for example, that the production and distribution of child pornography in Thailand is not seen as illegal, while the accessing of such material by someone living in the US would probably be seen as both illegal and pathological.

Outside of high-tech crime units, the majority of people working in the area of Internet offending will never have seen child pornographic images from the Internet (Quayle and Taylor 2002b). In part this relates to the

legislation in many countries that criminalises possession. However, this leaves a difficult situation where communication between professionals (for example the police, child protection workers and the judiciary) becomes problematic, and highly subjective terms are used to describe the content of the images held by an individual. The development of the COPINE Scale (see Figure 1) was an attempt to provide a typology of Internet child pornography images (Taylor *et al.* 2001), based on an analysis of publicly available images obtained from newsgroups and websites.

Figure 1. The COPINE Scale

Level 1: Indicative

Non-erotic and non-sexualised pictures showing children in their underwear, swimming costumes etc. from either commercial sources or family albums. Pictures of children playing in normal settings, in which the context or organisation of pictures by the collector indicates inappropriateness.

Level 2: Nudist

Pictures of naked or semi-naked children in appropriate nudist settings, and from legitimate sources.

Level 3: Erotica

Surreptitiously taken photographs of children in play areas or other safe environments showing either underwear or varying degrees of nakedness.

Level 4: Posing

Deliberately posed pictures of children fully clothed, partially clothed or naked (where the amount, context and organisation suggests sexual interest).

Level 5: Erotic Posing

Deliberately posed pictures of fully, partially clothed or naked children in sexualised or provocative poses.

Level 6: Explicit Erotic Posing

Pictures emphasising genital areas, where the child is either naked, partially clothed or fully clothed.

Level 7: Explicit Sexual Activity

Pictures that depict touching, mutual and self-masturbation, oral sex and intercourse by a child, not involving an adult.

Level 8: Assault

Pictures of children being subject to a sexual assault, involving digital touching, involving an adult.

Figure 1. The COPINE Scale (cont'd)**Level 9: Gross Assault**

Grossly obscene pictures of sexual assault, involving penetrative sex, masturbation or oral sex, involving an adult.

Level 10: Sadistic/Bestiality

- a. Pictures showing a child being tied, bound, beaten, whipped or otherwise subject to something that implies pain.
- b. Pictures where an animal is involved in some form of sexual behaviour with a child.

The Sentencing Advisory Panel (2002) in England and Wales published its advice to the Court of Appeal on offences involving child pornography. It believed that the nature of the material should be the key factor in deciding the level of sentence, and adapted the COPINE Scale to five levels. It dropped levels 1 to 3 completely, arguing that nakedness alone was not indicative of indecency. The proposed structure was therefore that COPINE levels 4 to 6 constitute sentencing level 1 and COPINE levels 7 onwards each constitute an individual sentencing stage (Gillespie 2003). These levels are under revision again and it is likely that further minor changes will be made.

The use of such an objective measure increases the likelihood of consistency across sentencing without necessitating that all involved view the images, and is increasingly being used in countries outside England and Wales (Cooper 2008). One difficulty, however, is that while the typology was created as an indicator of how children are victimised through Internet child pornography, it is increasingly being used by the courts as a measure of the seriousness of the offence, or even the dangerousness of the offender. This trend is problematic, in that there is little evidence to indicate whether, for example, viewing images of children sexually engaged with animals is more likely to increase the risk of a contact offence than viewing images of children who are clothed (Middleton forthcoming). However, a meta-analysis of recidivism studies by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) did suggest that sexual recidivism was associated with two broad factors: deviant sexual interest and antisocial orientation. Deviant sexual interest is indicated through an enduring attraction to sexual acts that are illegal (for example sex with children or rape) or that are highly unusual (for example fetishism and autoerotic asphyxia). This may be of relevance in

relation to Internet offences, but this is yet to be confirmed (Quayle 2008).

The primacy of child victims

Research within the COPINE Project has always taken child protection and the primacy of child victims as its principal focus. But the sad reality is that there is very little published research that relates to victimisation through the production of abuse images (Svedin and Back 2003). Indeed, the few studies that have been conducted in this area predate the Internet.

One of the fundamental problems in understanding the consequences of victimisation through the production of abuse images relates to our ability to distinguish these effects from the impact of other sexually exploitative practices. In part this is problematic because of the close connections between abuse images, intra- and extra-familial abuse and studies of ritualised abuse. What we can conclude, is that there is no single response pattern to sexual abuse and that this is likely also to be the case for the consequences of image victimisation.

In the context of abuse images, there are four substantial studies which have sought to examine the impact of 'child pornography':

- Burgess *et al.* (1984) examined children's involvement in pornography and sex rings.
- Silbert (1989) examined child pornography production in the context of child prostitution.
- Svedin and Back (1996, 2003) studied a group of children exposed to both the production of pornography and intra- and extra-familial abuse.
- Scott's (2001) study was in the context of ritual abuse.

The populations in each of these studies vary and only the more recent data from Svedin and Back (2003) relates to Internet images.

All four studies are broadly similar in the accounts that they give of the symptoms the children produced during the abuse. Again it is difficult to disentangle the consequences of the abuse per se (physical symptoms such as urinary infections and genital soreness, as well as behavioural symptoms such as sexualised behaviours) from the consequences of being photographed. However, Svedin and Back (1996) give details

amongst their sample of restlessness, depression, hunger, exhaustion, concentration difficulties and aggressive behaviours, which are not immediately associated with sexual exploitation. Silbert's (1989) study also suggested that children who were exposed to longer periods of exploitation suffered more intense emotional reactions, such as feelings of isolation, fear, anxiety and emotional withdrawal.

What is apparent in relation to these studies is a pattern of enforced silence. The children studied by Svedin and Back (1996) were reluctant to disclose the abuse and the authors suggested that the recording of the abuse exacerbated, and in some cases prevented, disclosure. Even when confronted with the visual evidence of their abuse, children continued to limit disclosure, telling people only what they thought they already knew. Silbert (1989) had earlier coined the phrase 'silent conspiracy' to describe this silence.

It is unclear as to whether the sense of shame and humiliation often reported in these studies relates to the photography itself or the fact of disclosing it to others. It may also be that children fear being thought to be complicit in the abuse or photography through the evidence of, for example, their smiling faces. Scott (2001) reinforced this idea in the description of how abusers had shown children films they had made of them as a way of demonstrating their level of engagement and enjoyment.

Silbert (1989) made reference to the long-term effects of being photographed as being more debilitating than those in the short or medium terms, and that these are compounded when children are involved in more than one form of sexual exploitation. This may also be exacerbated by the knowledge that others may see or distribute the films. One account given to the COPINE Project by a victim of abuse images talked of feeling fearful every time the post arrived, overwhelmed with anxiety that it would contain photographs and that her mother would see them. Silbert (1989) described such feelings as 'psychological paralysis'. Such feelings are also accompanied by the knowledge that their photographs may be used to exploit other children (Svedin and Back 1996).

This research clearly has implications for children involved in the production of Internet abuse images. They are confronted by the knowledge that the images can never be destroyed and that they may continue to be viewed and used by many thousands of people. The age of the child at the time of the production of the abuse images may also

be relevant. In an interview through the COPINE Project with a now adult victim, it became apparent that the images, which spanned a time period up to when she reached pubescence, had now been scanned and distributed through the Internet. As an adult woman, she was probably still identifiable from these images. It may be that when images are taken of very young children, the radical physical changes that take place as a result of growth and physical development offer at least some protection from future identification when such children reach adulthood (Taylor and Quayle 2005).

Our analysis of offender accounts from the COPINE Project also allowed us to examine in detail what actually happened to children who were photographed. Through this analysis it emerged that, in relation to the Internet, there were different levels of victimisation through photography that related to the degree of involvement of the child in the process. Expressing this seemed important to us because it enables a focus on issues additional to, or perhaps compounding, the actual sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, the COPINE research also suggests that the resources available to such victims (at least in the context of the UK and Ireland) are often inconsistent and poor. Studies such as those of Svedin and Back (1996) emphasised the need for long-term support and the destruction of materials. Clearly the latter is impossible in the context of the Internet and this alone may be a major exacerbating factor, making closure difficult to achieve. In relation to long-term support, there needs to be more training offered to child protection workers in this area, and inevitably more resources made available to explore and to generate appropriate therapeutic strategies and contexts in which they can be used (von Weiler 2008).

There are also implications for law enforcement in how cases are managed. In Svedin and Back's 1996 study, some of the children only acknowledged the abuse when they were confronted by the photographs, which depicted various sexual acts between themselves, other children and the abusers. These children were not given a choice about this disclosure, nor to whom the information was to be disclosed. Although there may well be justification for such practices, in terms of acquiring evidence for prosecution purposes, this highlights how legal and law enforcement priorities can exclude or override the needs of these children. It also highlights in a specific way a more general point about ethical problems that relate to the child's knowledge that others (either

from within or without a child protection framework) have witnessed the abuse, a consequence of which may be exacerbated feelings of humiliation and shame. The child is no longer gatekeeper to the disclosure of what has happened to them. There are further important related ethical issues that concern the confrontation of an adult abused as a child when his or her pictures are discovered in a seizure of Internet abuse images.

In more recent times concern has been expressed about the exposure of children to both harmful material and a medium that might facilitate sexually problematic behaviour (Quayle 2007). Kanuga and Rosenfeld (2004) have argued that, 'While it might not be possible to precisely define what constitutes normal sexual behaviour, there should be concern for young people with a relatively narrow perspective who are exposed to frequent images of behaviours such as sodomy, group sex, sadomasochistic practices, and bestiality'. To date, there is very little published research that helps us understand what it is that young people do (as opposed to what they may be exposed to) that constitutes sexually problematic behaviour in relation to the new technologies. There is evidence, however, of three classes of problematic behaviours which might help in our understanding of the issue. These are: soliciting or sexually harassing behaviours; downloading, trading and production of child abuse images; and self-victimising behaviours (Quayle and Taylor 2006).

Self-victimising behaviour is evidenced through self-generated material, an example of which was described in a report in the UK's *Daily Mail* (Levy 2005). Police and social services were called in after six Suffolk schoolgirls took topless photographs of each other and posted them on the Internet. The 15-year-olds posted the pictures on a website they had set up and one of the girls was arrested on suspicion of taking indecent photographs of a child. The COPINE Project's research with Barnardos and the NSPCC would suggest that such sexually problematic behaviour is not isolated and appears to be increasing.

The behaviour of offenders in their engagement with abuse images

There are four broad classes of Internet sex offending: downloading, trading, production and Internet solicitation (also called grooming).

These are clearly not mutually exclusive categories. All revolve around engagement with the Internet and the possession of abuse images. Downloading child abuse images is invariably a purposeful activity. For some people we might conceptualise downloading as a largely passive way of collecting images, perhaps from websites or from peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. Although it may involve searching for material (and therefore interaction with Internet processes), such passive collecting is unlikely to include substantial direct social engagement with other people engaged in similar activities. However, awareness that there are large numbers of people similarly engaged may heighten the individual's justification of such activities.

Not all collectors of abuse images move from passive collecting to contact or communication with others. But social contact can be very important in legitimising and normalising sexual interests. The drive for material to trade may also provide the stimulus for the production of new material. Most highly abusive images are largely, but not exclusively, produced in a domestic context. Research from COPINE suggests that where child victims have been identified, they are almost invariably part of the offender's real or acquired family, or on the receiving end of a caregiving relationship (Holland 2005). Where offending takes place in these circumstances, such offences may relate to the need to sustain and increase credibility amongst others, and as a way of gaining access to other desired images of child abuse, as well as an expression of sexual behaviour. It is significant that 'newness' of images is central in ensuring status within a trading community, and giving access to such images is a source of power to the producer. It is also apparent that images may be created according to the producer's personal fantasies or perception of the market.

We have no idea of the numbers of such people who offend on the Internet. We can examine conviction rates, but these reflect only the countries where possession and distribution of child pornography is illegal and where there are either the resources or inclination to act upon detection. In the US, Wolak *et al.* (2005) reported that law enforcement made an estimated 2,577 arrests during a twelve-month period in 2000 for Internet sex crimes against minors. Two-thirds of offenders who committed any type of Internet sex crime against minors possessed child pornography, with 83% of these possessing images of children between the ages of 6 and 12 years, and 80% having images explicitly showing sexual penetration of minors.

In another US study, Finkelhor and Ormrod (2004) examined child pornography patterns from the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The data from 1997 to 2000 on 2,469 crime incidents involving pornography revealed that over those three years pornography offences increased by 68% and juvenile victim/child exploitation pornography offences increased by 200%. Yet at the time of this report, only a small minority of all pornography offences known to the police was coded as involving a computer.

However, these statistics reflect only those who are caught. Data provided by one leading UK Internet service provider suggested that it blocked more than 20,000 attempts to access child pornography on the Internet per day in July 2004. The COPINE Project's unpublished data relating to the CROGA Internet self-help site for people experiencing difficulties in relation to child pornography recorded 8,684 users of the site between June 2004 and April 2006. Similarly, in the UK, statistics from Stop it Now! (2006) suggested that between 2002 and 2005, 45% of calls to its helpline were from people experiencing problems in relation to their own behaviour, a significant number of whom were using, or feeling a compulsion to use, the Internet.

The primary function of abuse images is as an aid to sexual arousal, where many of the images accessed (but not all) are used for masturbatory purposes. Offenders may be selective in the images used in terms of, for example, specific age groups, physical types, gender of the child or a particular sexual activity. Images may also be selected to concur with earlier contact offences or new offending fantasies. For many people involved in accessing abuse images, levels of masturbatory behaviour appear to increase with access to the Internet (Quayle and Taylor 2002a, Sheldon and Howitt 2007).

Abuse images also function as collectibles, and a medium for exchange and trading. Offenders often call themselves 'collectors', and use this term to differentiate themselves from 'paedophiles'. In this sense collecting abuse images in many ways is no different to the collection of any other artefacts, except that their content is illegal and they function as an aid to sexual arousal. Offenders can rapidly build up large collections of images and such rapid acquisition is often accompanied by the ability to trade or exchange images, while maintaining relative anonymity. For some offenders this undoubtedly facilitates the building of community networks, and as a general point, the importance of the 'collection' for some offenders cannot be underestimated. Internet abuse images of children are often given a sense of structure and unity by being

created as part of a numbered or named series. Inevitably, as with other 'collections', status is gained from having a 'complete' collection, and referral back to 'old images' often takes second place to seeking out new material, which is an important aspect of collecting per se. In some cases this may directly lead to the production of new material through the abuse of children in the offender's immediate social network (Quayle and Taylor 2003).

For many people with a sexual interest in children, abuse images can be used to facilitate social relationships with like-minded individuals. Child abuse images and social relationships are almost exclusively seen in the context of offenders who trade images and who use synchronous or asynchronous forms of communication to link up with others. The exchange of images and the discourse surrounding this practice (which may or may not be sexually related) enables social cohesion and allows for the rapid acquisition of images through trading networks (Taylor and Quayle 2003). Such networks appear to have their own social hierarchies, associated with the number of images, the ability to complete picture series and the level of access to new or unusual material.

For many offenders, establishing online relationships provides important social support that often replaces unsatisfactory relationships in the offline world. What is more problematic, in the context of excessive or compulsive Internet use for sexual purposes, is the likelihood not only that the individual is using the Internet to change or avoid negative mood states, but that the material accessed is highly reinforcing, particularly as access often culminates in masturbation (Quayle *et al.* 2006b, Middleton *et al.* 2006).

Whilst the primary focus for concern is of course the images, our research also suggests that the Internet itself can have an effect on individuals with problematic sexual behaviour, emphasising again the significance of a notion of process in understanding engagement with abusive images and the Internet. For such people the Internet is not just a passive means of communication. In summary, the Internet may:

- Alter mood.
- Lessen social risk and remove inhibitions.
- Enable multiple self-representations.
- Show evidence of group dynamics.
- Validate, justify and offer an exchange medium.
- Challenge old concepts of regulation.
- Disrupt and challenge conventional hierarchies.
- Empower traditionally marginalised people and groups.

Abusive images of children seem to serve a variety of purposes for those who collect them. As already emphasised, this is best conceptualised as a process, rather than a state, and an individual may move between different kinds of engagement with child abuse images depending on context. In understanding the function of abuse images for the offender and how this relates to the Internet, we can start to build a conceptual model that allows us to examine offending activities that relate to abuse images as such a process (Quayle and Taylor 2003). This is important as adult sexual interest in children on the Internet embraces both legal and illegal activities.

The risk of the commission of a contact offence against a child

The risk that someone accessing abusive images of children on the Internet will commit a contact offence against a child is a question that is currently posing immediate concerns for practitioners working in the area of risk assessment. Yet again, there is very little to inform judgements about which Internet offenders may also pose a risk to children within an offline environment, and much of the research that has examined the relationship between viewing pornography and offending behaviour predates the Internet.

Marshall (2000) suggested that there is not a causal link between viewing pornography and sexually offending behaviour, but that it can accelerate psychological processes, enhancing the cognitive distortions of offenders. Seto *et al.* (2001) also felt that the evidence for a causal link between pornography use and sexual offending remained equivocal, and concluded that people who are already predisposed to offend are the most likely to show an effect of pornography exposure.

Seto and Eke (2005) examined the criminal histories and later offending activities of child pornography offenders. Of 201 adult male child pornography offenders, those with prior criminal records were significantly more likely to offend again in the same way during the follow-up period, and those who had committed a prior or concurrent sexual offence were the most likely to offend again, either generally or sexually. However, it is not clear from this study how many of the offenders had used the Internet to access child pornography. Finkelhor and Ormrod (2004) found only a modest association of general pornography crimes with child victimisation. However, Wolak *et al.* (2005) studied child pornography possessors arrested in Internet-related

crimes and found that 40% of their sample were 'dual offenders' who sexually victimised children and possessed child pornography.

An interesting and challenging study by Seto *et al.* (2006) investigated whether being charged with a child pornography offence was a valid diagnostic indicator of paedophilia, as represented by an index of phallometrically assessed sexual arousal to children. Their results indicated that child pornography offenders had almost three times the odds of being identified as a paedophile phallometrically than offenders against children. They suggested that child pornography offending is a stronger diagnostic indicator of paedophilia than is sexual offending against child victims. However, such a conclusion poses problems for us in how we make sense of the many thousands of people who seem to be accessing child pornography every day. Do we conclude from this that our understanding of the numbers of people who may be classified as paedophiles is a gross underestimate of the prevalence within the general population? Another possible, or at least partial, explanation for the results of this important study may lie in the nature of the stimuli themselves, and that for men who have spent long periods downloading and accessing child pornographic images and masturbating to ejaculation to them, the visual stimuli themselves are highly salient, and perhaps more so than for others who use private fantasies or actual children as the focus of their arousal (Quayle 2008).

The development of systematic assessment and intervention materials

As yet there is only a small literature relating to Internet sexual abuse, and even less that has assessment as its focus. There is even confusion as to what constitutes Internet sexual abuse as, while the term is most frequently used in relation to people who commit sexual offences against children online, it could also be argued that it should include offences against any age group, such as cyberstalking (Adam 2002). In relation to the COPINE Project's research, the focus has been on the former category, in part because it reflects a large number of individuals who, in recent times, both are evident in the criminal justice system and have a presence online as consumers. We can infer this from the volume of abuse images clearly available online through media such as Web Pages (which is only one of the many sources). In 2007 the Internet Watch Foundation

in the UK reported that ‘it managed a 34 per cent increase in reports processed by its “Hotline”. The reports led to the confirmation of 10,656 URLs, on 3,077 websites, containing potentially illegal child abuse content. 82.5 per cent of all the websites were apparently linked to the US or Russia, up from 67.9 per cent in 2005’ (IWF 2007).

The COPINE Project’s research has attempted to examine how we might adequately assess Internet sex offenders, but the reality is that we still know very little about this group and how comparable they are to those who commit offences against children in the offline world. It is apparent that there are similarities between these categories of offender, but there are also differences, and as yet there is insufficient data for us to be able to make reasoned, rather than emotive, predictions about future behaviour. As yet there are few dedicated assessment tools for those whose offences relate to the Internet (Middleton forthcoming, O’Brien and Webster 2007). Internet sex offenders are often referred to as paedophiles, and are often conceptualised as a homogenous group. Indeed, our stereotypes of this offender group are often reinforced by many of the educational campaigns aimed at keeping our children safe.

In the context of diagnosis and sex offenders, Marshall (2007) has suggested that categorical models such as DSM (American Psychiatric Association 2000) leave a lot to be desired and that a more useful approach would be to rate the features of each type of sexual offender along dimensions ranging from normal to seriously problematic. Marshall argues that, ‘Considering the problems of each client to be numerous, and to lie along definable dimensions, is likely to more accurately guide assessment (and risk assessment) and treatment, and should serve to circumvent the considerable difficulties (and likely failures) that arise from the “one size fits all” approach to treatment’. With this in mind an initial, tentative attempt can be made to describe some of these dimensions as they might apply to Internet sex offenders, offering a structure that may guide clinical assessment (Quayle forthcoming).

Assessment clearly has a relationship with intervention and therefore the research on Internet sex offenders has been used to arrive at guidelines as to how the concerns raised in this article might be approached therapeutically. In doing so the heterogeneity of this client group and the need for assessment and intervention strategies to reflect this have been stressed (Quayle *et al.* 2006a). This has also been reflected in the work commissioned from staff involved in the COPINE Project

by the Probation Service in the production of a handbook on sex offenders.

As an acknowledgment of the mismatch between availability of resources and those who are seeking help, COPINE has also been involved in the development of an online resource (CROGA) for people engaging in illegal activity in relation to abusive images of children on the Internet (Quayle 2005). This site is now managed by one of the research partners – Lucy Faithfull Foundation – as part of the services offered by Stop it Now! and hopefully will provide a resource for clients, practitioners and non-offending family members.

As previously stated, unpublished data from CROGA suggest a considerable number of people are self-identifying as engaging in illegal activity in relation to child pornography. Duff and Willis (2006) outlined the issues raised by the increasing number of clients who present to forensic services with a limited offence history but who have disclosed that they are at risk of sexually offending against children. While this study does not focus on Internet offenders as such, it raises important questions about the usefulness of current risk assessment approaches for understanding and developing treatment plans. It is suggested that in this population risk must be embedded within a psychological formulation that places the individual and his or her likelihood to offend within a descriptive context that includes an understanding of the nature of their disclosure and thus, potential triggers. Duff and Willis call such individuals ‘offenders-in-waiting’. With the opportunities that the Internet and the new technologies afford for people to engage in highly problematic sexual behaviour, along with the proliferation of violent and sexualised content, it may be that there are many more ‘offenders-in-waiting’ than had previously been predicted. The author’s current research in relation to P2P networks and the distribution of abuse images would seem to support this.

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