

‘Just a Few Clicks: Internet Sex Offenders – Public Protection in a Technological Age’

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Aims of this session

- To **introduce** you to my Research – ‘A Critical Evaluation of the Reintegration Experiences of Child Sex Offenders in the Community’;
- To present findings through the participant and professional **‘voice’** along with literature relating to internet offenders

The Research Project – A Brief Explanation

- Semi-structured interviews: 10 men who were convicted child sex offenders living in the community (the participants) and 11 professionals;
- Six of the participants had internet related offences;
- Themes of **Resettlement**, **Stigma** and **Risk Management** were discussed;
- Findings suggest that managing, policing and reintegrating internet sex offenders in the community is complex, as the men presented as **vulnerable, isolated and afraid of community responses**;
- Finding also suggest that internet offenders have stricter restrictions in the community than their contact-only counterparts.

The background of the slide is a deep blue gradient. In the upper left, there is a dense, out-of-focus cluster of fiber optic cables, with many individual strands glowing with bright white and yellow light, creating a starburst effect. In the lower right, four black network cables with RJ45 connectors are shown in sharp focus, arranged diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right. The text "Internet Offenders" is positioned in the upper right quadrant, overlaid on the blue background.

Internet Offenders

Internet Offending – Literature

- Seto (2013) states there is insufficient data to help establish what works in the community with internet sex offenders;
- Internet offenders '**present a particular challenge**' for policing and those assessing the risk of further offending (Grubin, 2016: 150);
- The typology of the internet offender is becoming more diverse as further research is conducted (DeHart et al., 2016);
- The rates of recidivism are low (Seto, 2013; Goller, et al. 2016);
- Perhaps it is the nature of detection and arrest that helps deter future offending (Brown, 2017).

Internet Offending – Challenges for policy

- Internet offenders are risk-managed in the community in the same way as other sexual offenders;
- However, they may have extra stipulations that they are prohibited from using the internet on any device (Thomas, 2016);
- Case law has suggested the **blanket ban** on the use of the internet as part of a Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) is not only '**onerous**' (R v Hemsley, [2010], EWCA Crim 225) but '**impermissible**' (R v Smith & Others [2011] EWCA Crim 1772);
- Except in cases of public protection (Thomas, 2016).

Voices

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a striped shirt and a patterned tie, is seated at a desk. He is looking down at a laptop screen, which is in the foreground and partially obscures his torso. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the laptop screen. The background consists of a wall with a repeating pattern of stylized, light-colored leaves or feathers on a darker, olive-green background. The overall mood is serious and contemplative.

“Internet offenders are only a few clicks away from offending...how do you police that?”

(Professional 11)



“You never think you're gonna get caught do you?”

(Participant Andy (70's))

Adam (40's) and Employment

“I’m looking for work and I can’t go on computers, I can’t go on the internet, so actually looking for work on the internet is a no-no...”

- Training and employment are factors that promote a reduction in reoffending (Maruna, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Laws and Ward, 2011).

“At the minute I go to the job agency once a week...and sit with my advisor and look online for jobs”

- Job hunting for participant Adam was limited due to **internet restrictions**, as **public protection** was favoured (Feely and Simon, 1992; Lussier, 2016).

Contact only offenders, in general do not face
internet restrictions

Thus affording them seemingly better
chances at successful reintegration

George (60's) and Daily Life

- Participant George was an old and infirm man, alone (no close family) and in a new town:

“The thing with having the internet is that I wanted to pay my council tax online. I can’t do it, so I have to traipse down town to go to the office to sort that out...which is difficult when you don’t know the area.”

- Social isolation is a factor that may increase risks of sexual offending (Horley, 2008);
- Chen and Schulz (2016) suggest that older people who are isolated and lonely, rely more than ever before on social media and the internet to interact with others.

We take the internet for granted – What would your life be like without it?



Summary

- It was apparent that the internet offenders had more difficulty in adjusting to modern day life than those men whose offences were exclusively contact based (offender-victim);
- This difficulty may have adversely increased their risks of reoffending, due to isolation and less access to reintegrative factors that promote desistance from crime;
- Public protection and policing measures outweigh the need for effective resettlement;
- For those who are managing risk – are they part of the solution, or the problem?

A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The image is heavily stylized with a strong blue color cast and a soft, out-of-focus background. The text "Any Questions?" is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

Any
Questions?

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