Understanding Transnational Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by British Men Against Filipino Children

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UNDERSTANDING TRANSNATIONAL ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE BY BRITISH MEN AGAINST FILIPINO CHILDREN

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I, Abbie Gillgan, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- Where I have drawn on or cited the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- None of this work has been published before submission.

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Abstract

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) causes significant harm to victims, with governments and organisations around the world seeking to prevent and tackle it. To support these efforts, the factors that facilitate this crime must be understood. Research shows that online CSEA offending is facilitated by a range of sexual, psychological, and non-sexual factors, but there is no consideration within the existing literature of the factors that facilitate online CSEA that occurs across national borders. This research helps to address this gap. Specifically, this study explores the factors within Britain that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 CSEA professionals based in the Philippines and Britain, this research explores the range of factors that these professionals perceive as facilitating transnational online CSEA. Many of the factors that apply for online CSEA offending in general apply for transnational online CSEA, including sexual motivations, offenders' desire for power, and permission-giving thoughts that excuse or normalise abuse.

This study uniquely surfaces and examines facilitating factors that may be present in transnational online CSEA offending. A key finding discussed throughout this study is the role of racism, with geographical distance and cultural and physical differences between themselves and their victims providing a means for offenders to dehumanise their victims and justify the abuse. This study also finds that the media, pornography, and online communities can play a significant role in shaping social attitudes about race and sex that can act to facilitate or excuse transnational online CSEA. These factors are explored through the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model, developed for this research to enable an exploration of the range of factors that exist within an offender's whole environment, including the role of the internet and technologies in facilitating this abuse. The findings from this research are used to develop a set of recommendations for government, technology companies and for further research. These should be considered and taken forward to support the development of effective evidence-based solutions that will help to prevent transnational online CSEA from occurring in the first place.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The internet has created countless benefits to individuals, businesses, and governments globally, with new and emerging technologies presenting further opportunities. However, the internet also creates opportunities for criminal groups and those seeking to cause disruption or harm. As governments around the world grapple with online harms, research is needed to help us understand how these harms manifest and what more can be done to prevent them. These harms are often front and centre in media and public discourse, whether it's the role of mis- and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2020), the use of artificial intelligence and deep-fake technology to thwart and undermine democratic processes (Vazquez Llorente, 2023), or the increasingly sophisticated methods used to defraud innocent citizens (Metropolitan Police, 2024). There is particular concern about the victimisation of children online, and perhaps most significantly so in relation to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), with civil society organisations, victims, and survivors among those calling for action (NSPCC, 2023).

This research contributes to our understanding of online CSEA that occurs across national borders. Specifically, this research explores the form of online CSEA that involves men from high-income countries, paying for, and directing the real-time abuse of children in low-income countries. While online CSEA is a global crime, this research focuses on transnational online CSEA perpetrated by British men, to provide insight into what Britain can do to tackle and prevent this form of offending. This study surfaces the range of factors that professionals perceive as facilitating this form of abuse within Britain. I have chosen to look at the targeting of children in the Philippines, while recognising that offenders target children around the world. The Philippines is a recognised hotspot for the transnational livestreaming of online CSEA. This is often attributed to three key factors: widely spoken English language, easy and affordable access to high-speed internet, and widespread poverty (IJM, 2020).

This thesis is based on semi-structured interviews with a range of professionals working with victims and perpetrators of online CSEA in both the Philippines and

Britain. This includes policy makers, law enforcement and those working in the charity sector. I have adapted and further developed a socio-ecological model which is 'a theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors' (Kilanowski, 2017: 295) (see chapter 4). This model enables an exploration, analysis and grouping of the breadth of factors that facilitate this form of online CSEA, as surfaced through my interviews. This conceptual framework has also supported the development of evidence-based recommendations that seek to contribute to existing efforts to prevent this abuse – and therefore the harm it causes – from occurring in the first place.

Research aims and objectives

This research aims to surface and explore the factors within Britain that facilitate online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) of children in the Philippines by British men. The factors surfaced and discussed in this research are what the professionals that participated in this research perceive to be facilitating this form of abuse. My objective is to improve the understanding of this under-researched area to contribute to existing work by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the technology sector and governments to tackle and prevent this form of offending. The findings from this research contribute unique knowledge to our understanding of transnational online CSEA offending. This has been used to develop recommendations to support and advance the work of policy, front-line and law-enforcement practitioners (chapter 9).

My research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. *What are the factors within Britain that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men, from the perception of a range of professionals working in this field?*
2. *What are the implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice?*

Online offenders target children all over the world, but I have chosen to focus on the Philippines as this is the known global hotspot for this form of abuse. There are numerous complex economic, social, and historic reasons for the Philippines being a known global hotspot. This includes 'a historic commercial sex industry and

underground reputation as a sex trafficking source country and destination for traveling sex offenders; a robust money remittance infrastructure; widespread, inexpensive internet access through broadcast-capable mobile devices; and English language proficiency throughout all social strata at levels which are much higher than other developing countries' (IJM, 2020:17). Furthermore, British offenders are among those known to target children in the Philippines (*ibid*). I am conscious not to imply or perpetuate the view that this is a Filipino issue, as there is also research and evidence demonstrating that similar trends are seen in other countries, for example Thailand (Ecpat, Interpol and Unicef, 2022) and South Africa (Ecpat, Interpol and Unicef, 2022b). My hope, therefore, is that this research encourages further work to explore how and why similar offending is occurring in other countries, with this research providing a framework for doing so.

My research explores why British men are drawn to this specific form of CSEA, and why the Philippines is so often targeted by these offenders. Due to the lack of existing research in this area, my personal interest, and belief that I am best placed to consider this issue from the British perspective, I have focused on what is happening in Britain (demand side factors) rather than focusing on the factors within the Philippines (supply side factors). Transnational online CSEA, whereby offenders use the internet to target children in other countries, and the Philippines in particular, is relatively well documented by front-line organisations and law enforcement. However, as discussed in the literature review (chapter 3), there is a lack of academic research that explores this form of child sexual abuse and how it can be prevented. This is particularly the case in relation to the demand side of transnational online CSEA, so my research contributes to addressing this gap. This also relates to my own positionality, as I recognise that my role as a white British researcher is to explore factors within Britain and what more should be done to tackle this issue on the demand side, rather than to speak to a culture and nationality of which I do not belong nor fully understand (see chapter 4 on Methodology for further discussion).

The aim of this research is to explore the facilitating factors that my participants identify and, using a socio-ecological approach, consider how these factors operate at different levels of society – individual, social and cultural, and structural. As discussed in chapter 4, by adopting and applying my socio-ecological model I have been able to

make a unique contribution to our knowledge about transnational online CSEA offending. This approach has facilitated a new means of exploring the breadth of factors that facilitate online CSEA, including the impact of offenders' whole environment – both on and offline. This contrasts with current literature, which is predominantly focussed on individual level factors, such as an offender's beliefs, experiences, and psychology.

Through a greater understanding of what leads offenders to targeting children in the Philippines, this research supports the development of evidence-based prevention work, to accompany existing efforts to pursue those who have already committed an offence. This includes recommendations for research and policy practitioners (see chapter 9). My hope is that these recommendations are considered and taken forward by policy professionals and academic researchers working in this field.

Overview of the Online CSEA threat

In this section, I provide an overview of the online CSEA threat, harm this causes to victims, and the scale of that harm. This section is important to both position my research and to provide a rationale for why this research is needed.

Online CSEA typologies

Online CSEA involves the sexual abuse of children that is facilitated by or occurs on the internet. To help understand this threat, Levy and Robinson (2022) have developed a breakdown by type of online CSEA:

1. Consensual peer-to-peer indecent image sharing

This is 'where two children or young people voluntarily exchange nude or explicit images with each other' (*ibid*: 4). While this activity is illegal as it constitutes the sharing of indecent imagery, there are UK law enforcement processes in place to ensure children are not normally criminalised.

2. Viral image sharing

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) (which could be images or videos depicting the sexual abuse of a child) may be shared in disgust or misplaced humour and can then

go viral online. While the intent of the sharers may not have been to cause harm, the widespread sharing of CSAM causes harm and distress to victims. These images account for a significant proportion of CSAM that is reported by online services to the USA's National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, but these are filtered out before being passed to UK law enforcement to investigate (*ibid*: 4).

3. Offender to offender Indecent image/video sharing:

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is images or videos that depicts the sexual abuse of a child and may have been created by an offender or may be images a child has taken of themselves, e.g. following grooming. CSAM may also be created by artificial intelligence tools ('gen-AI') that generate images from user's written commands.

Offenders use online services to share this content with other offenders, including via direct messaging services and on dark web offender forums. This behaviour is captured by the offences relating to indecent photographs of a child within the Protection of Children Act 1978 (England and Wales), Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, and the Protection of Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.

4. Offender to victim grooming:

Offenders use online services to identify potential victims and communicate with them to cause or incite a child to engage in sexual activity. Grooming is a multistage process that can include: **targeting children**, often based on their vulnerability; **gaining access** to children by establishing trust; **trust development** to establish a close or romantic relationship; **desensitisation** by introducing sexual content or touch; and **maintaining control** over the child, such as through blackmail or shame (INHOPE, 2023).

Offenders use online services such as social media and gaming to identify children. They are known to target services used by children, and then attempt to move children into more private online spaces to evade detection (Ofcom, 2023). There are several offences in UK law that relate to these behaviours, namely within the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

5. Offender to offender communication

6. Offender to offender group communication

Offenders can use online services to interact and share information. This could be 1:1 communication or group communications. The purpose of this communication is to 'normalise their behaviour, share tradecraft and techniques and even to plan real world abuse' (*ibid*: 4).

7. Streaming of on-demand contact abuse

Real-time video calls between two or more individuals may be used to enable real-time abuse directed and paid for by an offender who is not physically present with the child.

It should be noted that the term 'livestreaming' is also used to refer to when a child 'goes live' (i.e. uses a live broadcasting feature on a social media platform) to share real-time content with other users of the platform. These livestreams may be used by offenders to initiate contact with a child and to encourage the child to share sexualised content, either via the livestream or later in private messaging.

These two models of livestreamed CSEA are so vastly different in terms of offender modus operandi and the victims that are targeted that it is unhelpful to group them together. Throughout this thesis, I have opted to refer to transnational livestreaming of CSEA, as earlier defined, when discussing the former of these two types of livestreaming.

While there are no UK offences that are specific to the livestreaming of CSEA, livestreamed content is captured by the indecent photograph offences (Protection of Children Act 1978 (England and Wales), Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, and the Protection of Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1978).

Harm to victims

While the primary aim of this research is to explore and understand the offenders of transnational online CSEA and the factors that facilitate their crimes, the aim of any work or research on CSEA must also be to prevent harm to children. Understanding the various ways that CSEA causes harm to victims of CSEA and impacts the

outcomes for these children provides important context to this work and a justification for this research. In this section I provide an overview of academic research and knowledge from front-line organisations to highlight the impact of and harm caused by CSEA on its victims.

According to the NSPCC, the effects of sexual abuse can include anxiety and depression, self-harm, relationship problems and post-traumatic stress (NSPCC, 2020a). This is supported by numerous academic studies that show a link between CSEA and mental health disorders including depression and anxiety (for example Sahle et al, 2020; Bigras et al, 2021). A study exploring risk factors for eating disorders found 'highly suggestive evidence support[ing] the association between childhood sexual abuse and bulimia nervosa' (Solmi et al, 2021:316).

There is also discussion within the literature about the ways that the impacts of and the extent of harm caused by child sexual abuse varies between individual children. For example, one study found different symptoms depending on the age groups of victims, with pre-schoolers more likely to experience anxiety, nightmares and PTSD, while adolescents are found to experience higher rates of depression, suicidal and self-injurious behaviours and substance abuse (Kendall-Tackett et al, 1993). Sneddon et al (2016) argue that the outcomes for victims of all forms of CSEA may be influenced by the victim's age, the frequency and duration of the abuse and who the perpetrator was. Varied impacts of CSEA are also shown in the testimonies of victims and survivors who took part in the Truth Project.[1] For example, of those who experience CSA in the 1990s, 23% have experienced sex and intimacy impacts, 92% experienced an impact on their mental health, and 38% said that their physical health had been impacted (Truth Project, 2022:109). A literature review by the UK's CSA Centre argues that we must consider the role of intersectionality when seeking to understand the impact of abuse, as all children experience multiple identities and social positions, such as race, socio-economic background, sexuality and disability. These can compound the impact of abuse or a child's ability to access support (Vera-Grey, 2023).

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[1] 'The Truth Project was a core part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') alongside public hearings and research. It was set up to hear and learn from the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales.' (Truth Project, 2022:1).

Child sexual abuse is also associated with negative educational and employment outcomes for victims and survivors, demonstrating the long term and pervasive nature of the harm for many children. One meta-analysis of research on violence in childhood found that 'girls who experience sexual violence [during childhood] are three times more likely to be absent from school than girls who have not experienced sexual violence' (Fry et al, 2018:21). Further, children 'who have experienced sexual violence have a probability of 14% for not graduating' (*ibid*) from school. The Truth Project found that as many as 40% of girls and 43% of boys (N = 5,862) who are victims and survivors of CSEA reported that their abuse impacted their schooling or employment.

Research has found that there are additional impacts of CSEA when the abuse occurs or is shared online. Victims of online CSEA may experience feelings of guilt and self-blame (Beckett et al, 2019), dysfunctional levels of sexualisation, psychosocial distress (TDH, 2013), and ongoing trauma from knowing their abuse is permanently recorded online (Martin, 2014). The Phoenix 11, a group of adult survivors of online child sexual abuse have spoken and written about the impact of their abuse into adulthood. These survivors discuss the impact of their online childhood abuse, including 'the constant fear that there was widespread and continuous distribution of the most horrific moments of our lives' (Phoenix 11, 2021). These fears are widespread, with a survey of adult survivors of CSA conducted by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection finding that as many as '70% of the survivors worried about being recognized by someone because of the recording of their child sexual abuse. In fact, 30 respondents reported being identified by a person who had seen their child sexual abuse imagery' (C3P, 2017). One study finds five major ways in which the online element of CSEA 'complicated and contributed to the impact of the abuse' (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2020:6). These are as follows:

a) The permanence and reach of the images.
b) Loss of control over who was viewing them and 'indirect' revictimisation by this additional viewing.
c) Immersion, fatigue and poor concentration, which was exacerbated when the offender maintained contact throughout the night and impacted upon performance and behaviour at school.

d) Self-blame related to complying with offenders' requests that focused on their actions in the physical absence of a perpetrator (rather than recognising the grooming and manipulation of them by the offender).

e) Negative responses from friends, family and schools compounding the impact.

For victims of transnational online CSEA in the Philippines, they are likely to experience the impacts of both contact abuse because of the physical sexual abuse perpetrated by the facilitators, and the impacts of online abuse because of the offenders directing, viewing and potentially recording their abuse via a livestream. Children may not report CSEA due to 'embarrassment, shame or fear of others' reaction' (Beckett et al, 2019). For children in the Philippines, there may be additional barriers to reporting, including that 'most victims are prepubescent (12 years-old and younger) and trafficked by family members making proactive disclosure and reporting rates abysmally low' (IJM and University of Nottingham, 2023: 10).

Such harms can take years for victims to overcome, with access to support in childhood or adulthood being critical to help many of these children recover from their abuse (Truth Project, 2022).

There are numerous legislative and voluntary efforts by technology companies, law enforcement, governments, and NGOs to tackle CSEA and support children in their recovery from abuse (see chapter 2). However, more needs to be done to both identify this form of transnational abuse and prevent it – and the harm it causes – from occurring in the first place. This research seeks to evidence the factors that facilitate this abuse to support the development and adoption of effective, evidence-based national and international prevention efforts by front-line, policy and research practitioners.

Scale of online CSEA

There are numerous challenges when seeking to understand and gather data on the scale of the online CSEA threat. This includes the hidden nature of online CSEA, the challenges that victims face in both recognising and reporting their abuse (Beckett et al, 2019), and challenges experienced by law enforcement and online services in effectively detecting it, as discussed later. However, the following section provides an

overview of the data we hold on the scale and prevalence of online CSEA. While data in this space is imperfect, it does help to demonstrate the substantial demand for online CSEA with Britain, and indeed, around the world.

In 2023, online platforms such as messaging and social media services made nearly 36 million reports of suspected online CSEA to the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children[2] (NCMEC, 2023a). Nearly 180,000 of these industry reports relate to content uploaded by users in the UK (NCMEC, 2023b). It should be noted that these figures just represent the instances of online CSEA that are detected and reported by online services. However, there is variation in the efforts by online services to proactively detect CSEA, and increasing use of privacy enhancing technology designs, such as end-to-end encryption, are making it harder for online services to detect, and therefore report, online CSEA (eSafety Commissioner, 2023a). These industry reporting figures therefore likely represent a smaller fraction of the total scale.

The industry reports that are UK-linked are referred to the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) for investigation (NCA, 2020a). These reports contribute to monthly arrests of around 800 child sex offenders and the safeguarding of approximately 1,200 children (NCA, 2022).[3] Further, the NCA's recent assessment is that there is between '680,000 and 830,000 UK based adult offenders who pose varying degrees of risk to children' (NCA, 2023).

The scale of online CSEA and the demand for it is further demonstrated by the work of the UK's Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), who receive reports and proactively search for online CSEA. In 2023, over 275,000 webpages were confirmed as containing child sexual abuse imagery – an increase of 8% on 2022 (IWF, 2024). Data from the Internet Watch Foundation shows not only the changing scale of the threat over time, but also the changing nature and severity of online CSEA. For example, the amount of category A images (the most extreme forms of child sexual abuse material,

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[2] The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is the US cyber-tipline. Technology providers are legally required to report identified CSEA to NCMEC under USC §2258A: Reporting requirements of providers. https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title18-section2258A&num=0&edition=prelim

[3] These figures include online and contact offending but highlight the scale of the risk to children.

including penetrative sexual activity with a child) identified by the IWF has increased by 38% between 2021 and 2023 (*ibid*). The IWF have also seen an increase in the number of young children depicted in CSAM, with a 65% increase in self-generated images containing 7–10-year-olds between 2022 and 2023 (*ibid*).

While the increase in self-generated images is partly explained by consensual image sharing among peers, it also points to the concerning prevalence of online grooming. As discussed above, offenders are known to use online services to coerce and blackmail children into sharing sexual images. Data collected by the NSPCC, through Freedom of Information Requests to UK Police Forces, found that nearly 34,000 online grooming crimes against children have been recorded in the UK between 2017 and 2023 (NSPCC, 2023b). The hidden nature of online grooming, and the barriers children face to reporting this abuse, such as shame (as discussed above), mean that these figures likely underrepresent the true scale of the threat.

A recent study by Childlight on the global prevalence of CSEA (including online) provides further insights into the scale of this crime. This study is based on 'a comprehensive systematic review conducted in six official UN languages and a meta-analysis of the findings.' They estimate an overall prevalence of online CSEA of 8.1% of the global population, with girls (8.7%) slightly more likely than boys (7.5%) to be victims (Childlight, 2024:7). However, the authors note the high variability of prevalence estimates, highlighting the need for further work in this area. The data in this study is also broken down by type of online CSEA, with 12.6% of children estimated to 'have been victims of non-consensual taking, sharing and exposure to sexual images and videos in the past year' and 12.5% of children globally have been subject to online solicitation in the last year (*ibid).*

Research also provides insight into the availability and ease of access of online CSEA for those who want to engage with it. The dark web[4] is a known means of accessing, viewing, and sharing CSAM, which some offenders are drawn to due to the ability it affords them to hide their identities (Wang et al, 2023). However, recent research has

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[4] The dark web refers to encrypted online content that can only be accessed using special software / browsers, e.g. TOR. Content on the dark web is not indexed, meaning it cannot be found using conventional search engines. The dark web provides users with significant privacy and anonymity.

found that 77% of those searching for CSAM encountered it on the open web (Protect Children Finland, 2024).[5] Pornography websites were the most common place where offenders reported seeing CSAM (32%), followed by social media (29%) and regular websites and messaging apps (12% each). This demonstrates the proliferation and ease of access to CSAM across all parts of the internet, resulting in as many as 50% of respondents in this research saying they first encountered CSAM accidentally (*ibid*).

There are particular challenges in understanding the scale of livestreamed CSEA. This is because the real-time nature of the crime means there is unlikely to be evidence on an offender/victim's device, unless one party screen records and saves the abuse. The livestreaming of CSEA is also likely to take place over encrypted video services, such as Skype, where real-time detection of the abuse is incredibly challenging (further discussed in the following section on Technological efforts and challenges in identifying online CSEA). However, anonymous online surveys offered to individuals searching for CSAM on the dark web provides some interesting insights. Of the 8,484 respondents to these surveys, 45% said they watch livestreamed CSAM (Protect Children, 2021). The authors of this research suggest that more offenders are engaging with livestreamed CSAM as opportunities to travel were restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that livestreamed content meets the demand for 'fresh' and customised material (*ibid*).

There is also evidence and data to demonstrate the significant scale of the CSEA threat in the Philippines. Of the 31.8 million industry reports made to NCMEC in 2022, over 2.5 million were referred to the Philippines (NCMEC 2022b). However, this likely does not capture instances of CSEA that are livestreamed, which is inherently difficult to detect, as discussed above. Additionally, Philippine law enforcement agencies are less able than countries like the UK to allocate law enforcement resources to tackling the livestreaming of CSEA (*ibid*). A recent study by the University of Nottingham, Ipsos Philippines, and International Justice Mission (IJM) provides some insight into the scale of online CSEA in the Philippines, based on nationwide surveys with 3,600 households. This research found that in 2022 alone, 'nearly half a million children in

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[5] This research is based on anonymous online surveys of 'individuals searching for children sexual abuse material on dark web search engines.' There were over 30,000 responses in 21 languages.

the Philippines have been trafficked to produce child sexual exploitation material' (IJM and University of Nottingham, 2023: 11) – that equates to 1 in every 100 children. The offenders viewing this material could be anywhere in the world but are 'typically in Western countries' (*ibid*: 8). A previous study by IJM estimated that in 2017 there were over 80,000 'IP addresses that were used to access CSE [child sexual exploitation] linked to the Philippines' (IJM, 2020:9).

Technological efforts and challenges in identifying online CSEA

Law enforcement and technology companies have implemented a series of technological solutions designed to detect and combat online CSEA. While such technologies are not the focus of this study, in this section I provide an overview of some of the key technological solutions, and their limitations, as important context to inform later discussions.

Hash matching technologies for known CSAM

Hash matching technologies are a long standing, widely used method for identifying child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Images and videos that are confirmed as containing child sexual abuse, usually by independent verified experts (such as the UK's Internet Watch Foundation) are given a unique digital fingerprint, or 'hash'. These hashes are added to hash lists, which can then be used by online services to search their systems to identify and remove content that matches these hashes. Microsoft's PhotoDNA is the best-known example of a hash matching technology. Microsoft state that 'PhotoDNA is used by organizations around the world and has assisted in the detection, disruption, and reporting of millions of child exploitation images' (Microsoft, 2024).

There are two types of hash matching. **Cryptographic** hashing identifies files that are identical to a hashed file. **Perceptual** hash matching allows for the identification of similar images. This is to account for image manipulation, such as cropping or editing of images, which offenders may do to evade detection. The accuracy of hash matching technologies is largely accepted as exceptionally high, with cryptographers from the United Kingdom's Government Communications Headquarters saying such technologies are 'generally relatively robust to image manipulation and have excellent

false positive rates, leading to a manageable2 workload for those who act upon these detections' (Levy and Robinson, 2022: 8). There are claims the technologies are up to 99.9% accurate at identifying CSAM (European Commission, 2022). However, the accuracy of hash matching technologies is dependent upon the quality of the underlying hash list, and the way that the list is implemented by a service (e.g. the threshold for when an image is considered 'close enough' to a hashed file to be flagged as CSAM) (Ofcom, 2023).

<u>Automated content classifiers for new CSAM</u>

While hash matching technologies are effective at enabling online services to identify and remove known CSAM, other technologies are needed to identify novel, or previously undetected, CSAM. This is imperative to enable the detection of children who are currently experiencing abuse, so that these children can be safeguarded.

There are examples of image classifiers that use machine learning techniques to identify novel CSAM. Such technologies analyse images to assess whether they are CSAM, for example, by detecting content that contains both children and nudity. Examples of such technologies include Thorn's Safer, which includes an image classifier to detect new CSAM, and a text classifier to flag conversations that may indicate instances of child grooming (Thorn, 2020).

<u>Detecting the Livestreaming of CSEA</u>

The livestreaming of CSEA is a particular challenge as it occurs in real time, often over encrypted video services, and generally leaves no evidence on the offenders' or victims' devices. While there are promising signs of technologies being developed to identify the livestreaming of CSEA,[6] these are not currently widely deployed or supported with a strong evidence base. Where this offending occurs across borders, the challenges for law enforcement and technology companies are even greater. This highlights the need for greater focus on prevention.

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[6] See for example SafetoNet. They claim that their HarmBlock technology uses advanced AI to block 'harmful and illegal visual content in real-time' (SafeToNet, 2024)

It is for the reasons I have discussed in this section – the harm caused by online CSEA, the scale of the CSEA threat, and the numerous challenges in detecting offenders – that research relating to the prevention of online CSEA offending is so vital. By understanding more about the factors that facilitate people in Britain committing transnational online CSEA offences against children in the Philippines, this study aims to support the development of evidence-based prevention work. It will provide insight into an under-researched area of online CSEA offending with a focus on how Britain can respond to an issue that is, at least in part, of our making.

Key terms and definitions

In this section I set out what terminology I have chosen to use in this research and provide a brief discussion about the complexity and challenges of these various terms and why terminology matters.

Child sexual abuse

There are multiple terms used by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), governments and academics to refer to the online sexual abuse of children, further complicated by the different ways this crime is defined and understood within different cultural and national contexts. In this section, I provide an overview of the different terms used to describe online child sexual abuse, discuss their use, and set out which terms I have opted to use and the reasons for doing so. I am mindful of the impact of different terms and the way that certain terminology can cause further victimisation or minimise the nature of harm caused by abuse. This section is detailed and covers a range of child sexual abuse types, which reflects the complex and sensitive nature of this area.

The UK Government uses the term online child sexual exploitation and abuse (Online CSEA) to refer to the full breadth of the threat. There is not currently a definition of online CSEA within UK legislation or statutory guidance, but the UK Government's Online Harms White Paper defines it in the following way:

> **Online CSEA:** *when 'child sex offenders use the internet to view and share Child Sexual Abuse Material [CSAM], groom children online, and live stream the sexual abuse of children'* (HMG, 2019).

This White Paper was a precursor to the Online Safety Act 2023. While this Act does not define online CSEA, it does provide a list of offences (Schedule 6 of the Act) that services regulated by the Act should consider to be online CSEA. This includes the host of offences relating to sexual activity with a child (Sexual Offences Act 2003), and offences relating to indecent photographs of a child (Protection of Children Act 1978; Criminal Justice Act 1988; and the Coroners and Justice Act 2009).

The Philippine government uses the term online sexual abuse or exploitation of children (OSAEC). This is defined in Republic Act no. 11930 (2022),[7] as follows:

> *'the use of ICT [information and communication technologies] as a means to abuse and/or exploit children sexually, which includes cases in which offline child abuse and/or exploitation is combined with an online component. This can also include, but is not limited to, the production, dissemination and possession of CSAEM; online grooming of children for sexual purposes; sexual extortion of children, sharing image-based sexual abuse; commercial sexual exploitation of children; exploitation of children through online prostitution; and live-streaming of sexual abuse, with or without the consent of the victim'* (Section 3 (t)).

While reviewing existing literature and during data collection I noted that NGOs and practitioners working in the Philippines commonly used the term online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) to describe the full breadth of the threat. While this term may now have been somewhat replaced following the introduction of the above Act, which had not passed at the time of my data collection, I have included the International Justice Mission's (IJM) definition of OSEC for completeness:

> **OSEC:** *'The production, for the purpose of online publication or transmission, of visual depictions (e.g. photos, videos, live streaming) of the sexual abuse or*

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[7] The Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act.

> *exploitation of a minor for a third party who is not in the physical presence of the victim, in exchange for compensation' (IJM, 2020).*

Although intended to cover a broad range of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, my interaction with professionals in the Philippines suggests that OSEC is often used to specifically refer to the livestreaming of child sexual exploitation and abuse. There are various models of livestreaming CSEA, including 'children's own use of self-broadcast live-streaming apps now being exploited by offenders' (NCA 2018:26), with Facebook and Instagram among those that enable children to 'go live' to their connections. In the context of the Philippines, it generally refers to the overseas live-streaming model, whereby 'adults offer payment or other rewards to direct and view live streaming video footage of children in another country performing sexual acts in front of a webcam' (TDH, 2013:11). The overseas live-streaming model often involves an intermediary, most commonly a relative to the child (IJM, 2020:11), that commits the act of abuse against the child or tells the child what to do, under the direction of the paying offender. The recommended term for this in the internationally recognised 'Terminology and Semantics guidelines' for CSEA (known as the Luxembourg Guidelines) is 'live-streaming of child sexual abuse' (Greijer and Doek, 2016:47). However, there does not appear to be an agreed term that is specific to the overseas live-streaming model, with 'webcam child sex tourism' (TDH) and 'cybersex trafficking' (IJM) among the terms used by NGOs.

In this thesis, when referring to the whole online sexual threat to children, I have opted to use the UK government term 'online CSEA', as defined above. This is because my focus is on the demand side of the threat to children, and I am writing primarily for a British audience. During data collection, I used the terms 'online CSEA' and 'OSEC', depending on the location of my participant.

As this research focuses on online CSEA in which the perpetrator and victims are in different countries at the time of the abuse, a specific definition for this type of online abuse is needed. The Luxembourg Terminology Guidance does not include a definition for this type of online CSEA, but it does provide a definition for the offenders of it:

'Transnational child sex offenders: *This term describes a modality of perpetrators of child sexual exploitation: those who sexually engage with children outside of their country of nationality or habitual residence*' (Greijer and Doek, 2016: 88).

To mirror this language, which is also widely used within Britain for online CSEA that occurs across different countries, I have adopted the term transnational online CSEA, which I define as follows:

Transnational online child sexual exploitation and abuse: *online CSEA offending in which the victim and perpetrator are in different countries at the time of the abuse. This could involve victims and perpetrators in any part of the world but is particularly associated with online abuse in which offenders from high-income countries, such as Britain, abuse victims in low-income countries, such as the Philippines.*

Transnational online CSEA can involve offenders paying for and directing the abuse of their victims in real-time. This is often referred to as livestreaming of CSEA. However, as discussed, the term livestreaming is used to refer to various types of real time CSEA. For the live-steaming element of transnational online CSEA, I use the term transnational live-streaming of CSEA:

Transnational livestreaming of CSEA: *online CSEA that takes place on a live video sharing platform where the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) are in different countries. The abuse may be directed and viewed by an offender(s) in real time using video-calling software, or the sexual abuse of a child may have been videoed and then later broadcast to offenders using livestreaming technologies.*

While adopting multiple and new terms risks causing confusion, this reflects the limitations of existing literature and terminology to recognise transnational online CSEA and transnational livestreaming as a specific and unique part of the online CSEA threat.

An additional form of child sexual abuse that has relevance to this research, despite being a form of contact (rather than online) abuse, is where offenders travel for the

purpose of sexually abusing a child. This is primarily considered within the literature review, but also intersects with findings from this research relating to the relationship between travelling overseas to abuse children and committing transnational online CSEA. The Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines recommends the term 'sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism' as this can be used 'without stigmatising and/or otherwise harming the victim' (Greijer and Doek, 2016: 54). This contrasts with the alternative term 'child sex tourism', which fails to reflect that this is a form of exploitation that causes harm to the child. SECTT is defined below.

> **Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT): '***sexual exploitation of children that is embedded in a context of travel, tourism, or both. The offence can be committed by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers and longer-term visitors.'*

Offenders

Those who perpetrate child sexual exploitation and abuse are referred to in various ways across academic literature, grey literature, and the media. Different terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but importantly have different meanings and evoke different responses.

The term paedophile is often used to describe those who commit CSEA offences. However, Paedophilia is a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, which has a specific definition used by health and psychology practitioners. The definitions vary slightly between the taxonomic tool developed by the American Psychiatric Association (the DSM), and the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD):

> *Paedophilic disorder:* 'Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger)' (DSM-5).
>
> 'Pedophilic disorder is characterised by a sustained, focused, and intense pattern of sexual arousal—as manifested by persistent sexual thoughts, fantasies, urges, or behaviours—involving pre-pubertal children. In addition, in

order for Pedophilic Disorder to be diagnosed, the individual must have acted on these thoughts, fantasies or urges or be markedly distressed by them. This diagnosis does not apply to sexual behaviours among pre- or post-pubertal children with peers who are close in age' (ICD-11).

Academic literature on CSEA has found that not all those who engage in online CSEA would meet the diagnostic criteria set out above to be defined as having a paedophilic disorder (see literature review). Further, most of my participants could not comment on whether the people who commit online CSEA offences that they referred to during my interviews (whether specific individuals or when referring more generally to CSEA offenders) would meet these diagnostic criteria.

I have therefore opted to use the term 'CSEA offender' (or 'offender') to refer to those who commit online CSEA offences (as defined by UK and Filipino law). While this term is not overly emotive, it still captures the severity of the behaviour by recognising that it is an offence, and it places the blame on the individual committing the offence and not the victim / survivor. Further, the Luxembourg Terminology guidelines recommend the use of the similar term 'child sex offender' as it has 'a generally agreed meaning and/or can be used without stigmatising and/or otherwise harming the child' (Ecpat, 2016: 85).

Britain and the United Kingdom

The differences between Britain, the United Kingdom, and their constituent countries may not always be understood or used correctly. Throughout this research, I have opted to focus on Britain. Great Britain refers to the geographic region encompassing England, Scotland, and Wales. I chose not to focus on the United Kingdom, which includes Northern Ireland in addition to the countries of Great Britain, as none of my participants were based in Northern Ireland and I did not want to assume that the factors discussed by British participants also applied there.

British offenders: References to offenders (unless otherwise stated) refers to offenders from England, Scotland, and Wales. During my interviews I was careful to refer to British offenders, and if asked, I encouraged participants to interpret this widely as capturing those who are British citizens and/or who live in Britain or have spent a

significant time in Britain. While I did not specify the race / ethnic background of 'British offenders', it was clear in some participants' responses that they were thinking primarily of white British offenders. This is highlighted and discussed where relevant within my analysis chapters.

British participants: Participants in this research were either based in Britain or the Philippines. I did not capture nationality/ethnicity data about my participants, so while most 'British participants' likely had British citizenship, they were included in this research due to their experience of working and living in Britain. Similarly, the 'Filipino participants' in this research were mostly Philippine nationals, but this also includes those who may be immigrants to the Philippines but work and live there. I use the terms 'British participants' and 'Filipino participants' throughout this research for ease and succinctness, to mean 'participants that live and work in Britain / the Philippines at the time of this research', but it does not necessarily mean that a participant is a citizen of these countries.

British offences: Due to devolution, relevant offences may not extend to all parts of Britain. For example, most Sections in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 only extend to England and Wales, with Scotland (and Northern Ireland) often having separate legislation. I have chosen to focus on CSEA offences in England and Wales as my British participants were most familiar with (and working to enforce, in the case of the law enforcement participants I spoke with) these offences. Any references to offences are clarified with information about which parts of Britain these offences extend to.

Throughout this thesis there are also references to the United Kingdom (UK). This is because participants often talked about the UK, rather than Britain. Further, law enforcement and policy makers have a UK-wide remit, and therefore it is more accurate to talk about these bodies in relation to the UK, for example 'UK law enforcement' and the 'UK government'.

Chapter outline

This introductory chapter has provided an overview of the aims and rationale of this research and defined the terms that I have chosen to use in this thesis and a rationale for these. I also set out a detailed account of the nature and scale of the online CSEA

threat. In chapter two I provide the context of this research. This includes key political developments and social factors within the Philippines and Britain that help inform the findings in this thesis. I look at relevant legislation and key events occurring at the time of data collection.

The third chapter provides a comprehensive literature review based on a systematic literature search. This review explores existing literature in three areas of child sexual abuse offending: transnational online CSEA, online CSEA more widely, and the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism. I discuss both the findings of this research and where it is relevant to this study and highlight the gaps in existing literature.

Informed by the findings in my literature review, my fourth chapter sets out my conceptual framework. I provide an overview of the socio-ecological model and how it has been applied and used in previous research. I introduce my 'Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model', which I developed for and apply to this research.

Chapter five provides a detailed account of my approach to research, including my methodology and the research methods I have adopted to answer my research question. This chapter includes a discussion of the ethical challenges faced during my research, my approach to participant sampling and recruitment, and my data analysis methods.

Chapters six to eight are my data analysis chapters. They provide a detailed presentation and discussion of the findings from this research, analysed using my Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model. Chapter five walks through the range of 'individual level' factors that facilitate British men committing online CSEA against children in the Philippines. This includes their sexual preferences; online habits and behaviours; and problematic beliefs, including about race. The next level in my socio-ecological model is social and cultural factors that facilitate this offending, discussed in chapter six. In this chapter I discuss beliefs and attitudes held at a social level within Britain, including attitudes relating to race, nationalism, sex, and pornography. I explore the role of the media in both normalising and challenging problematic social attitudes that may create an environment that can fail to provide a clear message about the harm and severity of CSEA. Chapter seven then looks at structural factors that

facilitate online CSEA by British men, including legislation, law enforcement and the criminal justice system within Britain (and the UK). This chapter also discusses the structural factors within the Philippines and how these can be viewed by offenders as facilitative and permissive of CSEA against children in that country.

I conclude by summarising my findings and highlighting the academic knowledge that this research contributes. I argue for a greater focus on prevention of transnational online CSEA, and the need for demand side countries, like Britain, to take a leading role in protecting children beyond our own borders. This is followed by a set of practical recommendations for further research and policy proposals, informed by the findings in this research and suggestions from my participants. These are focused on the prevention of transnational online CSEA.

Chapter two: Research Context

Following the exponential growth in internet access over the last 30 years, there are now 5.3 billion people around the world that have access to the internet, with 4.95 billion using social media (Statista, 2023a). Children's access to information, communications and services via the internet are vital for providing them with opportunities and equipping them for the future, but as our reliance on the internet grows, so too does the need to understand, manage and mitigate the risks that it brings, particularly to children.

The Philippines: History and culture

While my research is focused on the factors within Britain (demand side factors) that facilitate transnational livestreaming of CSEA against children in the Philippines, these factors cannot be wholly removed from the various factors within the Philippines that result in children there being vulnerable or targeted (supply side factors). I provide further analysis about the links between the supply and demand side factors throughout this thesis, but provide some information here about the broader social, cultural, and political context within the Philippines and how this contributes to making the Philippines a target for offenders and results in some Filipino children being particularly vulnerable.

Made up of over 7,600 islands and located in south-east Asia (see map below), the Philippines is a popular tourism destination with a complex history. This history is commonly summarised as "300 years in a convent, 50 years in Hollywood" (term coined by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil), to represent the Philippines' periods of colonisation under the Spanish and Americans. The Philippines was a colony of the Spanish empire from 1521 until the Philippine revolution, which ended in 1898 (Rood, 2019). The Spanish were responsible for bringing Catholicism to the Islands, which remains the religion for 78.8% of the population (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023a).

Map of the Philippines

(Source: Philippine Embassy of Canberra, 2023).

Upon securing their independence with the help of Americans during the American-Spanish war, 'Spain ceded sovereignty over the islands to the United States for US$20 million' (Rood, 2019:55). This colonial era was violent, with the Philippine-American war (1898-1902) responsible for the death of an estimated 20,000 Philippine combatants and an estimated 775,000 excess civilian deaths (*ibid*: 56). The Americans also established English as a widely spoken language to this day. The US

remained largely in control until granting commonwealth status in 1935, and full independence to the Philippines in 1945 (*ibid*: 64). The US' presence in the country remains through their military bases, with an expansion of these sites announced in April 2023 (US Department of Defense, 2023).

The historical impact of these bases has been significant. For example, links between US military bases and the use and availability of sex workers is well reported, with some arguing that 'the US military has played a role in not only imperialism and attempts at global domination but also the objectification of women' (Weiss and Enrile, 2019: 403). Not just the Philippines, but much of Southeast Asia has a reputation for its well-established sex trade and with this, the sexualisation of local people, particularly women. This is linked to the way the region has been used by the various colonial powers that have ruled it. For example, in a seven-year period during the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the number of Thai sex workers rose from 20,000 to 400,000 due to the seven U.S. military bases established in Thailand (Kuo, 2000: 42). It has been argued that the US military involvement in the 'Far East' has resulted in the characterisation of Asian women as exotic (Uchida, 1998: 161); a stereotype also recognised within the wider post-colonial literature (Ballestrin, 2022:110).

Today, the Philippines has a population of over 109 million, 54% of whom live in urban areas. Over 30% of the Philippine population is under 15 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023b), compared with just 17.8% of the UK population (Statista, 2023b). The World Bank estimates that 18.1% of the population lives below the national poverty line, which increased from 16.7% in 2018 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2023). However, this slight rise follows 30 years of poverty reduction, with the poverty rate having fallen from 49.2% in 1985. Inequality is also high, with the bottom 50% of earners sharing just 14% of national income. The key drivers for decreasing poverty and inequality in the Philippines are said to be '[e]xpanded communication assets, access to basic services and education, and increased employment in services' (Belghith et al, 2022: 26). The relatively high levels of poverty have implications for the vulnerability of children within the country, with poverty named as a key element that has resulted in the Philippines being a 'hot spot' for transnational livestreaming of CSEA (IJM, 2020).

Government policy and legislation

First it is important to situate transnational online CSEA within the UK's legislative framework of CSEA offending more generally. The key offences for the sharing and viewing of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) are found within the Protection of Children Act (1978) (England and Wales). In addition, the Coroners and Justice Act (2009) criminalised the possession of a prohibited image of a child, which captures non-photographic images such as drawing and animations. These offences relate to the possession, sharing and viewing of indecent photographs (and pseudo-photographs) of children. While these offences pre-date mass-internet usage, they do apply to online CSEA offending. Most of the UK's grooming offences are set out in the Sexual Offences Act (2003), including the 2017 addition of sexual communication with a child (S15A). There are concerns about gaps or lack of clarity within existing UK legislation, particularly when it comes to transnational offending (see chapter 8), but offences and restrictions on travel do exist to help address this form of offending – both on and offline.

While those on the sex offenders register are legally able to travel abroad, under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, they are required to notify the police of their intention to travel overseas. The police can apply to a court for a Sexual Risk Order (SRO) where there has not been a conviction, or a Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) if they want to prevent a registered offender from travelling abroad. The police may also 'inform other jurisdictions that a registered sex offender is intending to visit their country' (Home Office 2023: 20). However, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) found that SHPOs with foreign travel restrictions are rarely issued (e.g. only 11 in 2017/18) (IICSA, 2020a). Of particular concern in relation to transnational online CSEA, is the finding from a Home Office review of civil orders that police forces often find it hard to get a court's approval for travel restrictions because judges "rarely associate non-contact offences [e.g. viewing indecent images] with risk of a contact offence" (Home Office, 2019). So, while the law allows for travel restrictions to be placed on offenders, in practice they are rarely issued, and this is likely particularly true for those who have committed online offences.

As knowledge of the online CSEA threat and pressure to address it grows, governments around the world are increasingly taking action to tackle CSEA, with technology companies often the focus of these efforts. In 2018, the UK Government published a Digital Charter (DCMS, 2018), making online safety a top Government priority. Later that year, the then Home Secretary, Sajid Javed delivered a speech on online CSEA, in which he specifically pointed to the livestreaming of CSEA: 'Sickeningly, people from around the world – including from right here in the UK – are then ordering the live-streaming of this abuse, sometimes for as little as £12' (HMG, 2018). This focus and momentum culminated in the Online Safety Act 2023. Online user-to-user services and search engines are newly required to comply with duties to keep their users safe. This includes implementing measures to prevent individuals from encountering CSEA, and platforms must 'mitigate and manage the risk of the service being used for the commission or facilitation' of CSEA (Section 10, Online Safety Act 2023). Where proportionate and necessary, the regulator can require that a service implements, or uses best endeavours to develop, accredited technologies to proactively identify and remove CSEA, including within private communications. Importantly, the scope of the Act includes online video services, including those commonly used for transnational livestreaming of CSEA.

Similar steps are being taken outside of the UK. In July 2020 the European Commission adopted an 'EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse' providing a framework of action for 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2024). Across the Atlantic, US politicians have proposed various legislative efforts to tackle online CSEA and other harms, such as the Eliminating Abusive and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies – 'EARN IT' – Act. Given that most large technology companies are US-based, if the US passes this – or similar - legislation this is likely to have a significant impact on services' efforts to tackle CSEA. However, the US Government must manage tensions between legislative efforts to address online CSEA with their strong commitment to protections around privacy and freedom of expression. For example, the Fourth Amendment (protections against 'unreasonable search and seizures') prevents the US government from requiring companies to proactively search the private communications of US citizens. This means it is left for

companies to decide whether they proactively search for CSEA. Online safety legislation has also recently passed in Ireland[8] and Australia.[9]

The Philippine government has also taken important steps to help address the known proliferation of online CSEA against some of their most vulnerable citizens. In 2022, they passed the 'Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act'. Section 4 explicitly states that various CSEA-related activities are unlawful, including: '(d) To knowingly publish, transmit and broadcast, by any means, any form of CSAEM'; '(g) To stream or live-stream acts of, or any form of, child sexual abuse and exploitation'; and '(i) To introduce or match a child to a foreign national or to any person for the purpose of committing any of the offenses under this Act'. The Philippines have explicitly named the livestreaming of CSEA as an offence, making it explicit that this behaviour is not permitted within the Philippines.

Another recent change in Philippine law (RA no. 11684) is an amendment to the Anti-Rape Law 1997 meaning that rape is now committed 'when the offended party is under 16'. This change in 2021 raised the age of consent from 12 to 16. While the enforcement of these legislative changes is yet to be seen, they demonstrate that the Philippine Government is taking this issue seriously and sending a clear message to offenders that what they are doing is illegal.

Technology and online services

While government efforts to address CSEA are often focused on requiring technology companies to tackle illegal content, there are some examples where companies are taking voluntary steps to identify and remove CSEA from their platforms. For example, some of the largest technology companies collaborated with the Five Eyes governments (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, and the USA) to develop and launch the 'Voluntary Principles to Combat Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' in March 2020. Although voluntary, this allows governments and the public to

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[8] Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 - https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/41/enacted/en/html.

[9] Online Safety Act 2021 - https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2021A00076.

hold the companies who have endorsed these Principles to account. The Voluntary Principles include a commitment that 'companies seek to identify and combat the use of livestreaming services for the purpose of child sexual exploitation and abuse' (HMG, 2020). However, as discussed above, without technological developments that will enable industry to identify when child sexual abuse is taking place via an encrypted live video call, effectively meeting this objective remains a significant challenge.

There are also several emerging technologies that are exacerbating and growing the online CSEA threat. Of particular concern, is the increased use of artificial intelligence tools that can be used to generate photo-realistic images. These tools are being used by offenders to create new child sexual abuse material (CSAM). These images may be edits of real images of children (i.e. deepfake content) or may be wholly 'new' content that is not based on an image of an actual child. These generative AI technologies are making it easier for offenders to create and view CSAM, without the need for access to children. Governments, law enforcement and NGOs have raised the alarm about the use of these technologies, and their impact on the scale and accessibility of online CSAM. Although a real child may not have been harmed in the creation of this content, the IWF have warned that such images still act to normalise a sexual interest in children (2023) and may be part of an offenders' journey into other forms of CSEA offending. Further, such content is creating significant challenges for law enforcement, whose resources are being used trying to identify child victims that do not exist. Generative AI CSAM can be relatively quickly and cheaply made, with such images initially able to evade hash matching technology and creating challenges for those responsible for hashing these images (IWF, 2023b).

This research has taken place during an on-going, high-profile global debate on how to balance security and privacy with safety. Some online platforms argue that end-to-end encryption (E2EE) is vital for protecting their users' privacy as it prevents anyone other than the sender and intended recipient from viewing the content of a message. E2EE is commonly used for secure email services, online banking, specialist privacy platforms and mainstream apps such as Meta[10]-owned WhatsApp. However, the

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[10] Meta is the US head-quartered parent company that owns Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram and the Metaverse (a virtual reality space).

recent announcement by Meta that they are commencing their global roll-out of E2EE across their services[11] has raised significant concern among child safety advocates. With E2EE, platforms are no longer able to use server-side hash matching technologies, with huge implications for platforms' ability to proactively detect and report CSEA. For example, Meta's roll out of E2EE across their platforms is expected to result in at least a 70% reduction in their annual reports of CSEA to NCMEC – that equates to around 14 million fewer reports (Milmo, 2022). E2EE will also prevent law enforcement from gaining access to communications for investigation and prosecution purposes. How this debate - and the technological solutions that accompany it – develops will have enormous implications for the global fight against online child sexual exploitation and abuse, as liberal democracies grapple with balancing their citizens' privacy with the need to protect children from harm.

Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Current efforts to tackle online CSEA follow years of campaigning from NGOs around the world that are working to protect children from abuse. Within Britain, organisations such as the NSPCC, the Internet Watch Foundation and 5Rights are vocal advocates of greater regulation on technology companies, as well developing their own research, resources, and services to help tackle a range of online harms. As child sexual abuse scandals across different cities and institutions within the UK have led to substantial media coverage and public outrage, there has arguably never been greater awareness or focus on the importance of tackling this crime. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse was set up in the UK in 2014 in response to historic and ongoing failings by some organisations to protect children from sexual abuse, and their work is ongoing. The Inquiry conducted an Internet Investigation (IICSA, 2020b), where they heard from experts about the role of the internet in facilitating CSEA. Their report includes recommendations for government, which highlight the need for legislation to force companies to do more, including verifying the age of their users and ensuring that indecent images of children are not uploaded on their platforms.

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[11] See Meta announcement about their end-to-end encryption roll out:
https://about.fb.com/news/2023/12/default-end-to-end-encryption-on-messenger/

Looking internationally there are significant collaborative efforts to protect children online. An important milestone was the establishment of the multi-stakeholder movement, the We Protect Global Alliance, in 2014. It was born out of recognition that online CSEA is a global threat requiring a global response, bringing together industry, governments, and NGOs to develop this global response. NGOs within the Philippines have helped to raise the profile of the issue globally, as well as providing practical assistance to law enforcement, families, and child victims. In response to the specific issue of international offenders livestreaming the abuse of Filipino children the 'Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center' (PICACC) was launched in 2019, bringing together Philippine, Australian and UK law enforcement and the NGO, International Justice Mission, with the 'mission of combatting online exploitation of children through an enhanced global response' (NCA, 2019).

COVID-19

This study took place within the context of a global pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, and the related lock-down measures, have impacted governments, industry, and individuals across the globe. While the full extent of the impact of COVID-19 on online CSEA is yet to be seen, current assessments are that it increased the scale of the online CSEA threat. The NSPCC described the pandemic and lockdown as 'the perfect storm for abusers to exploit existing platform weakness and groom children' (NSPCC, 2020b). Many technology companies' moderators were unable to assess reports of CSEA when working from home, and children and adults were spending more time online. Research suggests that offenders saw and exploited opportunities, with offenders identified on the dark web discussing the opportunities that COVID-19 created to exploit children (NCMEC, 2020). Travel restrictions may also have impacted the nature of offending, with those seeking to travel overseas to sexually abuse children potentially turning to online forms of abuse instead.

Summary

Legislation, industry initiatives and ongoing work from NGOs across the world are resulting in meaningful change and opportunities to positively impact the safety of children online. Increased news coverage, high-profile campaigns and improved

public awareness and concern are also helping to drive action by governments. While there is much cause for hope, significant challenges remain. Technological developments, such as the metaverse and artificial intelligence to generate CSAM, create new means for offenders to exploit children and new obstacles for law enforcement. The debate around online privacy and how our data is used and accessed may lead to substantial changes in how individuals chose to use online services, and how these services protect their users. Finally, the global pandemic created new challenges as industries and governments were forced to adapt to new ways of working where access to the internet was arguably more important than ever.

Chapter three: Literature Review

Literature review method

This literature review is based on the Scoping Study method, which 'is not linear but iterative, requiring researchers to engage with each stage in a reflexive way and, where necessary, repeat steps to ensure that the literature is covered in a comprehensive way' (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005:22). My approach was rigorous but adapted as my familiarity with the literature, and its limitations, developed. Critically, this included redefining and expanding my search terms to identify other related literature that could provide insight into transnational online CSEA.

I opted to use the 'Scoping Study method', rather than other approaches to literature reviews, such as a systematic review. This is because the Scoping Study method is designed to 'map' relevant literature and the 'tends to address broader topics where many different study designs might be applicable' (*ibid*: 4). This was most appropriate for this literature review as the dearth of research specifically on transnational online CSEA meant I have explored the wider CSEA literature to consider its relevance to my research topic. The aim of a Scoping Study is to 'convey the breadth and depth of a field' and therefore 'authors do not typically assess the quality of included studies' (Levac et al, 2010: 69). However, to help ensure the quality of research reviewed, I only included peer reviewed academic research, and grey literature from reputable organisations.

I developed my list of search terms, which can be found at Appendix 1, based on my existing professional knowledge about online CSEA. This meant using the range of terms that I know can be associated with CSEA, including 'grooming', 'child sexual abuse', and 'child sexual exploitation'. I later added the term 'child porn*' as despite this term being regarded as problematic within the British / European context (Greijer and Doek, 2016:39), I noted that it is still widely used within US research. Due to my research focus on the offenders of online CSEA, all my literature searches included 'Offen*', to capture research relating to offenders and offences.

I started by searching for literature that was most directly relevant to my topic. This included searches for literature on online offending against children in the Philippines.

To do so I used the CSEA-related terms listed above, terms relating to 'online' and 'internet', and the term 'Philippines'. These searches returned very few results, so I broadened my search terms to capture online CSEA offending that occurs across borders more generally, using terms including 'Southeast Asia', 'international' and 'cross-border'. These searches returned some literature on transnational online CSEA but highlighted that this is an under-researched sub-threat of CSEA.

I then broadened my literature searches to identify literature that was about CSEA offending more generally, and not specifically about transnational CSEA. These searches returned significantly more results, demonstrating the current dearth of existing literature specifically exploring transnational CSEA offending. These search terms were similar to those used when searching for literature on transnational online CSEA, but I removed any search terms relating to location. I included 'grooming' within my search terms given this is a key part of the online CSEA threat. However, research focused specifically on the grooming threat within the UK has not been included. This is due to the vastly different offender techniques used when communicating directly with a child to groom them, compared with the type of transnational online CSEA that this research explores. For transnational online CSEA, an offender typically engages with adults and pays them for sexual content and therefore does not need to go through the process of directly grooming a child in the same way. Given these differences, I did not think I could generalise from these findings in the same way.

These two initial searches led to my interest in literature on the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT). Research on travelling child sexual abuse offenders was frequently being returned in my searches, and piqued my interest into whether such literature could also provide useful insights into transnational online CSEA. As later discussed, I concluded that this research is insightful, and it highlighted to me some areas that I wanted to consider in my own research. The terms I used to identify SECTT literature were informed by the terms I found within some of the literature that surfaced during my previous literature searches: 'child sex tourism' and 'travelling child sex'. While these are not the terms recommended by the terminology Luxembourg terminology Guidelines (Greijer and Doek, 2016), I noted that these are widely used within both academic and grey literature.

Initially I found that the number of search results I was yielding was too high and/or a high proportion of my results were not relevant. I therefore defined and refined my inclusion / exclusion criteria. For transnational online CSEA and online CSEA I restricted my results to anything published since 2010. I decided this was appropriate as these offences occur on the rapidly evolving online space, so I wanted to focus on the most up to date publications. This helped to reduce the number of search results. However, some academic work included in my literature review pre-dates this. Such work was included due to its value and relevance and was generally identified as it was quoted within another article or was identified in my professional capacity. For SECTT literature, I included academic work published since 2000. This is because there is relatively less academic literature on this form of CSEA and its offline nature means it has changed less significantly in the last 20 years than its online counterpart. To further reduce the number of search results I received, and to increase the likelihood of their relevance, I sometimes specified that terms should appear in the abstract.

I then systematically searched for grey literature using both a search engine (Google) and by searching directly on NGO websites. I developed the list of NGOs by drawing on my knowledge of the topic and professional experience working on tackling online CSEA, and from recommendations from supervisors and professional contacts. For example, having worked at the NSPCC I was familiar with the work and reputations of other NGO organisations working in this space, including the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Ecpat. These organisations are reputable within this field and are known to be credible and impactful. Online research led me to other NGO organisations working in this space, such as Terres De Hommes, whose work on the 'Sweetie Project' has made them well known within this sector. Having worked on online CSEA for many years, my knowledge of the wider CSEA landscape meant I knew the roles of other key players in tackling this threat, including the National Crime Agency (who I often worked with when employed by the Home Office) and the Internet Watch Foundation. These organisations form critical aspects of the UK's response to online CSEA, and I therefore considered including their insights and knowledge as critical.

Full details about my literature searches, including the location of these searches, the number of search results and the specific terms used, as well as the list of organisations whose research I reviewed, are set out in Appendix 1.

Understanding the literature on CSEA offending

This literature review explores academic and grey literature that falls into at least one of the following three categories:

1) Transnational online CSEA offending – literature that discusses and explores online CSEA offending that occurs where the victim and perpetrator are in different countries at the time of the abuse. There is a particular focus on CSEA where offenders are in high-income countries such as Britain, and victims are in low-income countries, such as the Philippines. Information about this category of CSEA offending primarily comes from grey literature as the academic literature on online CSEA contains little exploration of the location of victims and offenders.

2) Online CSEA offending that is not location specific – this body of literature is broader, and includes research relating to online CSEA offending, even where the location of offenders / victims is not referenced or considered in the research.

3) Sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism (SECTT) – this literature looks at CSEA offending where the offender physically travels across borders to commit their offences. While there may be an online element, contact offences are committed or planned.

I address each body of literature in turn and discuss the gaps in each and the importance of my research in addressing some of these. For transnational online CSEA, I set out what we do and do not know about this type of online offending. I then turn to the online-CSEA and SECTT literature to explore the key factors that the literature highlights as facilitating these offences: context of offending, sexual desire, psychology of offenders and non-sexual factors. I consider the extent to which these various factors may be transferable to transnational online CSEA offending.

This literature review contextualises my research and demonstrates that further research is needed to address the significant gaps in our current understanding of

transnational online CSEA. Conducting this literature review shaped and informed my research questions, as I sought to ensure my research contributes new knowledge and addresses the gaps identified in the existing literature. Conducting this literature review also led me to consider socio-ecological models and their potential applicability and usefulness for my research.

Transnational online CSEA

Introduction

As set out in chapter one, I have developed the following definition for transnational online CSEA:

> **Definition of transnational online child sexual exploitation and abuse:** *Online CSEA offending in which the victim and perpetrator are in different countries at the time of the abuse. This could involve victims and perpetrators in any part of the world but is particularly associated with online abuse in which offenders from high-income countries, such as Britain, abuse victims in low-income countries, such as the Philippines.*

This section discusses what academic and grey literature reveals about the factors within Britain that facilitate transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines. There is little academic research that considers why offenders commit transnational online CSEA offences, as confirmed by Merdian et al who state '[a]n emerging risk is the organised online abuse by British nationals of children living abroad, but to date no published research on this behaviour was identified' (2019). However, one recent study by the Australian Government (Cubitt et all, 2021) explores the characteristics of Australian individuals involved in transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines. Given cultural and economic similarities, this research may provide insight into British offenders. However, this section primarily draws upon the grey literature as practice on this issue appears to be ahead of academic research.

The literature from organisations delivering services to children within low-income countries often focuses on the failings or issues within these countries. This includes

poverty (UNICEF, 2016), corruption (ECPAT, 2008) and cultural silence (TDH, 2013:25). While understanding these factors is vital for addressing transnational online CSEA, this is not the full picture. A holistic response to transnational online CSEA requires consideration of factors from both the supply and the demand, and it is the latter of these that my research explores.

Existing literature on transnational online CSEA offending

When considering the factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA within Britain, it is helpful to first consider what is known about who is committing these offences. International Justice Mission conducted an analysis of the 'customers' of OSEC: 'the offenders who drive demand for new sexual abuse and exploitation of children by instructing and paying in-person traffickers to exploit children' (IJM 2020: 51). While little is known about these offenders as Philippine law enforcement efforts are targeted primarily at in-country 'traffickers' – those that profit from selling the sexual exploitation of Filipino children - they found that offenders of transnational livestreaming of CSEA tend to be male, in their 50s and predominantly from 'Western countries'. Many of these offenders had also travelled to the Philippines. Australian research supports this finding, with the average age of known offenders of transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines being 59-years old (Brown et al, 2020). Such research provides an overview of customer characteristics but does not consider whether the factors that facilitate these customers targeting children in the Philippines, differ from the factors that facilitate online CSEA more generally. While this research provides useful insight into the 'who' it tells us little about 'why'.

The literature on transnational online CSEA offending highlights that characteristics about the Philippines (supply side) explains, in part, why there is a demand from countries such as Britain. There are numerous enabling factors that are attributed to the Philippines being a hotspot of transnational online CSEA, as discussed in chapter 1, including English language proficiency, internet access and its historic commercial sex industry (IJM, 2020). While my focus is on the offending of transnational online CSEA and what is happening within Britain, rather than the factors within the Philippines, the two are not completely separable.

Multiple researchers highlight that online predators' knowledge about children's poverty, and vulnerability drive them to target children and their families within low-income countries (Mubarek, 2015; Napier, 2021). The economic disparity between supply and demand side countries also enables and encourages transnational online CSEA offending. Cubitt et al argue that 'the high global demand for CSA live streaming, coupled with the poverty experienced in vulnerable countries such as the Philippines, creates a situation conducive to financially enabled crime' (Cubitt et al, 2021). The low financial cost and ease of international money transfers are well reported as factors that encourage and facilitates transnational online CSEA. For example, research and engagement with NGOs found that a CSA livestream session in the Philippines cost Australian offenders as little as AUS$14-57 (Brown et al, 2020: 3). Furthermore, online chat rooms enable offenders to share tips about the best countries to target (Merdian et al, 2019) and 'share advice with other child sex abusers through the use of code words' (de Vries, 2020: 1124).

Paedophilia, defined as 'a persistent sexual interest in pre-pubescent children' (Seto, 2009:392) is unsurprisingly found to be a factor that facilitates or underlies transnational online CSEA offending but that this is not the sole determinant. Terres de Hommes' 'Sweetie Project' (TDH, 2013) used a computer-generated Filipina girl to show the demand from men for sexual interaction with a child on video chat rooms. Livestreamed child sexual abuse, or what TDH call 'webcam child sex tourism' (WCST) is 'when adults offer payment or other rewards to direct and view live streaming video footage of children in another country performing sexual acts in front of a webcam' (*ibid*:11). TDH argue that paedophilia is one factor that may lead an individual to engage in WCST but that not all offenders will meet the diagnostic criteria of paedophilia. There are also offenders that 'are willing to engage in WCST if the opportunity is presented', meaning 'the market for WCST extends beyond the global population of pedophiles connected to the Internet' (TDH, 2013:19). This finding is supported by research into Australians who have committed CSA offences against children in the Philippines. This found that 'some offences may have been opportunistic in nature … offenders initially paid adult females to engage in sexually explicit acts over webcam, and then moved onto CSA live streaming when it was offered to them by the women' (Napier et al, 2021: 14).

Digital infrastructure facilitates the connection between the supply and the demand. The internet creates opportunities to access children anywhere in the world, and while this provides non-paedophiles with opportunities to offend, it also facilitates offending by paedophiles by providing a 'cheaper, easier, and less risky method for predators to directly target children for abuse' (*ibid*:23). Online services, such as social media and dating sites, are used by offenders to establish contact with Filipino locals who may have access to children or to directly contact potential victims, and Filipino facilitators may initiate contact with potential offenders (Napier et al, 2021). Travelling overseas to commit contact offences comes with risks, and the internet enables contact with fewer risks. The online provision of anonymous payment services is an additional factor that explains why 'most predators exhibit little if any perception of risk when soliciting children online' (TDH, 2013:34). While it is individuals who exploit technology, the way that these technologies are designed and managed can play a role in creating or reducing opportunities to commit transnational online CSEA. This is particularly the case for the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, where permanent files are not necessarily downloaded or shared online, meaning there is little or no evidence of the offending, and making some of the existing technological solutions to detect online CSEA, such as image hash lists,[12] ineffective.

The grey literature provides some insight into the broader societal and cultural factors within high-income countries, such as Britain, which facilitate transnational online CSEA. Ecpat International and Religions for Peace (2016) argue that there are several underlying factors that create or sustain the demand for online sexual exploitation, including when this occurs across borders. This includes gender discrimination, power imbalances, racism, a lack of effective legal frameworks and 'media and advertising practices that contribute to tolerance of the sexualisation of children' (*ibid*:12).

Gaps in the existing literature on transnational online CSEA

Most of the knowledge about transnational online CSEA comes from grey literature. This tends to emphasise what the issue is, reflecting these organisations' objectives

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[12] A database of known and verified child sexual abuse images, which each have a unique code or digital fingerprint, which can be used by companies to scan their sites for these known images (IWF, 2023). See further discussion in chapter 1.

to raise funds and awareness. They also largely focus on the supply side, informed by their frontline work within low-income countries. The grey literature usefully sets the scene and raises the profile of transnational online CSEA in a way that can inform academic and governmental understandings and responses to the issue. More research is needed to test some of the theories of these NGOs and to consider the applicability of their specific front-line experiences to the wider issue and the prevention of offending. This is particularly true in relation to the underlying factors outlined above, such as media and advertising practices. While it is plausible that these factors may play a role in transnational online CSEA, research is needed to test these claims, enabling the development of better-informed solutions that high-income nations can implement to address this form of abuse.

Until a stronger and broader body of research on transnational online CSEA offending is available, that specifically looks at the facilitating factors within Britain and other high-income nations, it is necessary to draw from other related bodies of literature to examine its transferability to transnational online CSEA.

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) offending

Introduction

> **Definition of online child sexual exploitation and abuse:** *when 'child sex offenders use the internet to view and share Child Sexual Abuse Material [CSAM], groom children online, and live stream the sexual abuse of children'* (HMG, 2019)*.*

Given the lack of research, particularly academic research, on the factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA by British people against children in the Philippines, this section explores what the literature tells us about online CSEA offending more broadly. There is a growing body of academic and grey literature that explores perpetration of online CSEA and the factors that facilitate it. This literature sets out several offender typologies that differentiate between offenders based on the type of offending they commit, their motivations, psychological factors, and backgrounds. These typologies and the research that underpins them highlight a broad range of sexual and non-sexual factors that lead to online CSEA offending. Although the online CSEA literature does not explicitly consider the child's location, it does provide significant insight into

the factors that are known to facilitate online CSEA more generally. I discuss the transferability of each of these factors to perpetration of transnational online CSEA by people in Britain against children in the Philippines.

The factors that facilitate online CSEA offending are complex and numerous. As each factor identified within the literature cannot be extensively considered within the scope of this article, I have focussed on the most prominent and relevant. Reviewing existing offender typologies has provided some helpful insights into the types of factors that facilitate offending and how these can be grouped. This includes Finkelhor's (1984) four pre-conditions to offending, which are 1) motivation to sexually offend, 2) internal inhibitors, 3) external inhibitors, and 4) resistance by child. By contrast, Krone's (2004) typology provides nine types of online CSEA offenders, including secure collectors, groomers, physical abusers, producers and distributors. This typology demonstrates the breadth of both motivation and behaviours of online offenders. Merdian et al (2013b) developed a model that highlights three dimensions of 'online child pornography offending', which are 1) Fantasy-driven versus contact-driven offending; 2) Motivation behind child pornography offending, which includes paedophilia, deviant sexual interests, financial motivations, and 'other'; and 3) The social component of child pornography offending. Elliot et al (2008) developed a typology that specifically focuses on the ways that offenders use the internet for child sexual abuse. They group this into 1) dissemination of CSAM for personal / commercial reasons, 2) communication with others who have a sexual interest in children, and 3) maintaining and developing paedophile networks. The various offender typologies and motivations presented in these studies are discussed throughout the following section.

Drawing on these typologies, I have grouped the various factors as follows: the context of offending (the nature of the internet); sexual preferences and desire; psychological and behavioural factors; and non-sexual factors. The existing literature, and therefore the content of this literature review, is heavily weighted towards consideration of factors that lead to an individual committing online CSEA offences, such as individual attitudes, circumstances, experiences, and behaviours, rather than the role of community or societal level factors in facilitating this form of abuse.

The nature of the internet as a space that is accessible, affordable, and anonymity-protecting (Griffin-Shelley, 2014) is likely to be an underlying factor, irrespective of whether online CSEA offending is the result of sexual, psychological, behavioural, or non-sexual factors, or a combination of these. Starting with the nature of the internet therefore provides a useful foundation for the following sections.

The internet enables offenders to hide their crime to varying extents depending on the type of CSEA offence they are committing and the technology they use. The sharing of known child sexual abuse images and videos can be detected by hash lists (see chapter 1) but technology that can detect new, or previously unknown, images and videos is less advanced. Grooming, when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit, and abuse them (NSPCC, 2020c) is made easier by the internet and gives groomers perceived anonymity (Ringenberg et al, 2022). Offenders can create pseudo online identities to trick young people into believing that they are younger than they are (Tener et al, 2015). The design of many social media platforms also enables offenders to identify and connect with multiple children quickly and easily. Perhaps the hardest form of online CSEA to detect is the livestreaming of child sexual abuse. As it happens in real time it is harder to detect and 'once the live feed has been closed there is no evidence that the abuse took place' (Napier et al, 2021: 1). Further, the use of sophisticated encryption technologies can strengthen this sense of anonymity (Armstrong and Forde, 2003).

The nature of the internet also makes it easier for children's vulnerability to be exploited by offenders. Social media and messaging services provide countless, easy ways for offenders to find and interact with children online, often anonymously. It is well documented in the CSEA literature that children experience a range of factors that make them vulnerable to online abuse. Some of these factors are specific to an individual child, such as low self-esteem, loneliness, and bereavement (Whittle et al, 2014), and prior experiences of physical or sexual abuse (Noll et al., 2009). However, the very fact of being an adolescent can result in increased vulnerability online. This is because adolescence 'is a key developmental stage of cognitive, biological, and

psychological growth' which is associated with 'impulsive and risk behaviour' (*Whittle et al, 2013*: 137). This natural tendency to engage in risk taking behaviours, combined with other typical features of adolescence, including seeking new social and sexual interactions and experimentation (Quayle et al, 2012), can make children particularly vulnerable to exploitation online. Opportunistic offenders can take advantage of and exploit these vulnerabilities.

As discussed in chapter 1, the scale of CSEA offending in Britain is vast, with UK law enforcement currently safeguarding around 1,200 children and arresting more than 800 suspects every month (NCA, 2022). However, news coverage highlights that this is 'the tip of the iceberg', with many offenders avoiding arrest in part because of insufficient police resources (Sawer, 2017), which may provide offenders with a stronger sense of safety from arrest. Research suggests that offenders often know that what they are doing is illegal, but they do not believe they will be criminalised (Tener et al, 2015). In this same study, one offender compared sexual activity with an underage teenager with getting a speeding ticket (*ibid*). Demographic, social, and psychological factors also play a role in determining an individual's awareness of the risks associated with OSEC offending (Balfe et al, 2015).

Research also shows that within certain spaces on the internet there are social norms that act to support or encourage offending behaviours. Buller et al argue that 'expansive systems such as societal and cultural values' are among the key determinants of 'sexual exploitation of children and adolescents' (2020:2). This study found evidence that in some low-income countries, including Nepal and Bangladesh, perpetrators of sexual abuse against children are socially tolerated in their communities. There is also evidence showing that online communities can act to provide the same tolerance, and even encouragement, of CSEA offending. A study on groups who sexually abuse children argues that 'the internet's proliferation has created new opportunities for those with a sexual interest in children to seek out like-minded individuals. Fears of stigmatisation and apprehension can be alleviated' (Cockbain et al, 2014:158). The study found 'access to psychological rewards' to be one of the resources gained from group involvement, which includes helping to negate offenders' discomfort with their actions and encouraging further experimentation. In one case, group involvement overtook the sexual motivations:

'Towards the end my preoccupation was community-based, rather than sexually based. I dropped everything for the fact I was in an online community of people I could talk to, that understood me, that I could talk openly and honestly to' (ibid:167).

The online CSEA literature's discourse relating to the nature of the internet as a factor that facilitates offending does not explicitly consider offending against children in low-income countries. However, I would argue, supported by the grey literature, that it is also a relevant factor for transnational online CSEA offending. Livestreaming technologies provide an 'easier and less risky method for predators', encouraging offenders to 'engage in WCST far more frequently than they would otherwise be able to engage in traditional child sex tourism' (TDH, 2013:23). For child sex offenders that target children within their borders, the accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of the internet means they can access children without leaving their homes. For those seeking sexual activity with children *beyond* their borders, the nature of the internet means they can now do so without leaving their country. Sexual activity with children in low-income countries, such as the Philippines, is no longer a "privilege" reserved for those with the means to travel internationally.

Sexual preferences and desire

The online CSEA literature identifies numerous offence-facilitating factors that relate to sexual preferences and desire. This includes paedophilia, non-discriminatory sexual preferences, and pornography consumption. Sexual preference and desire operate in various ways to facilitate online CSEA, often overlapping and accumulating with non-sexual factors, and each with implications for how offending behaviour and the factors that facilitate it should be addressed.

Unsurprisingly, paedophilia is strongly associated with online child sexual abuse image offences (Seto et al, 2010). Merdian et al's (2013a) typology of offenders supports this, with paedophilia identified as one of four motivations for OSEC offending. However, Seto suggests that as many as 'half of child sex offenders against children would not meet diagnostic criteria for pedophilia' (2009:391). This is also found to be the case for transnational online CSEA (see chapter 3).

Non-discriminatory sexual preferences are also discussed within the literature as factors that lead to online CSEA offending. Offenders may be opportunists, rather than intentionally seeking to commit online CSEA offences. For example, one study with 162 male participants with various child sexual offence convictions, found that among these offenders are 'those who access child pornography sporadically out of curiosity or impulse without specific sexual interest in children' (Armstrong and Mellor, 2016:42). One research study exploring the treatment and management of CSA offenders found that some offenders have a hypersexual disorder or compulsive sexual behaviours, and children are not necessarily their sole sexual interest (Seto and Ahmed, 2014:208). In a review of case studies of two clients, Griffin-Shelley argue that easy access to sexual content of children online 'can spark curiosity and lead to sexual exploration that might otherwise have remained dormant or unstimulated' (Griffin-Shelley, 2014:323). These findings about the role of the internet in enabling potential offenders to take up opportunities to engage in CSA raise important questions about how offenders come to engage in online CSEA involving children in the Philippines. This research suggests that the internet can provide opportunities for this type of offending, which opportunist offenders will take advantage of. For such offenders, it may not be about intentionally seeking CSA with children in the Philippines, but rather taking the opportunity to do so when it is presented.

The online CSEA literature also identifies pornography escalation as a sexually motivated factor in offending. Multiple studies have found that there can be an escalation from adult pornography to viewing child sexual abuse material when the former no longer satisfies the offenders' needs (Walker et al, 2018; Merdian et al, 2013a; Winder and Gough, 2010). For example, in exploring the role of pornography use among CSA offenders, Walker et al (2018) argue that the 'most notable and consistent finding' was around progression towards more deviant content over time. This is exemplified by one research participant, who said:

> "*Normal pornography was boring… so I was then looking at child pornography… the pictures gave me the ability to get the climax that I wanted to.*" (Walker et al, 2018:16)

Dines highlights this escalation in her criticism of the adult pornography industry, arguing that 'pseudo child pornography'[13] (or teen porn) encourages a sexualisation of childhood (2010:146). She also points to racist stereotyping within some mainstream pornography, whereby black women are portrayed as 'aggressive and mouthy' (*ibid*:126-7), and Asian women are 'sexually exotic' (*ibid*:124). I agree with Dines that pornography may influence an individual's sexual preferences and attitudes, but further research is needed that considers whether the normalisation of pornography within Britain may facilitate transnational online CSEA, for example by providing a discourse that justifies or encourages sexual activity with children of certain races and ethnicities. This is alluded to in the earlier referenced report from Ecpat International and Religions for peace (2016), which includes the media's tolerance of the sexualisation of children as a factor that creates demand for the sexual exploitation of children.

Psychological and behavioural factors

A significant focus within the CSEA offender literature is on the factors relating to the individual offender, including their beliefs, background, behaviours, and psychology. This research includes comparisons between contact offenders, non-contact offenders (i.e. those that view child sexual abuse material) and mixed offenders (contact and non-contact). This section discusses some of the key themes from this literature.

The role of 'permission-giving' thoughts are frequently discussed within this literature. These are defined as 'statements that may increase the individual's risk of translating internal motivation into offending behaviour' (Kettleborough and Merdian, 2017) to justify their actions. Multiple permission-giving thoughts may be present before an individual engages in online CSEA (Merdian et al, 2013b). They may stem from ignorance through to more seriously perverse and calculated views. For example, offenders may believe or tell themselves that online offending is less harmful than contact offending as they have not created victims (Winder and Gough, 2010). Some

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[13] Pornography in which the performers are adults (18+) but are made to act and appear much younger to the viewer.

offenders – 6% in one study (Merdian et al, 2013b) – justify viewing child sexual abuse material as it prevents them from committing contact offences. This permission-giving thought is facilitated by the internet, as screens provide physical and emotional distance between offenders and their victims. For example, one research participant stated 'when I looked at photographs, I didn't view them [the children in the images] as people. I viewed them as photographs' (Rimer, 2019:165).

Other offenders believe that children enjoy sexual abuse (Sheehan and Sullivan, 2010) or are sexual beings (Bartels and Merdian, 2016). Deviating from Western cultural norms in which children are viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection (Rimer, 2019) enables offenders to view their behaviour as natural and mutually beneficial. One professional, when asked about the thinking patterns of offenders, stated they believe 'kids really want sex, kids are seductive', while another said offenders justify their behaviour because 'they were smiling, they were happy' (Kettleborough and Merdian, 2017).

As previously discussed, there is limited academic literature on transnational online CSEA and therefore no exploration of the role of a child's location (and associated race) in online CSEA offending. However, some of the broader research on online CSEA offending does shed light on the potential role of a child's location – and race. For example, in an ethnographic study with 81 CSAM users, cultural othering ad emphasising the physical distance between themselves, and their victims was found to be a means through which some offenders justified their offending. One participant said 'it was very easy to tell myself it wasn't real…it's not the girl next door. It's someone in Eastern Europe or something' (Rimer, 2019:168). Another participant during a group interview, referring to victims in the Philippines, explained '"Being so poor over there, it's what they have to do to make money" (*ibid*: 167). In another study an offender pointed to legal differences to justify his actions, viewing himself as simply unlucky not to live in a country where viewing these images is allowed (Winder and Gough, 2010).

Targeting children within low-income countries also allows offenders to reconstruct themselves as a saviour: 'I'd rather see them making a living out of posing naked than starving on the streets […] I value life' (Winder and Gough, 2010:126). As there are

no studies that have explored in detail the role of the child's location as a factor in online offending it is not possible to say whether these examples are illustrative of wider patterns. However, that offenders have referenced their victim's location without being prompted suggests that this is a potential facilitating factor, which is something my research explores further.

Evidence shows that, for some offenders, personal circumstances led to behaviours that had previously been unimaginable to them. Engaging in online CSEA becomes a coping mechanism in response to family issues, work stress and financial difficulties (Winder et al, 2015; Merdian et al, 2013b). Stress can also be the trigger that prevents a paedophile from being able to control their urges (Seto and Ahmed, 2014). Legal adult pornography may initially be used as a stress reliever, but more extreme content and images of younger girls and boys are sought over time (Merdian et al, 2013b). Drug addiction (Merdian at al, 2013b), adverse family environments (Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2005:1154) and an individual's own experiences of sexual abuse during childhood (Winder and Gough, 2010) are also all identified as risk factors for offending.

Beyond personal beliefs and circumstance, the literature surfaces other personal and psychological factors that can lead individuals to commit online CSEA offences. While the literature makes clear that offenders are a heterogenous group, online CSEA offenders are disproportionately well educated, frequent internet users (potentially addicts), young, white, and male (Griffin-Shelley, 2014; Navarro and Jasinski, 2015; Shelton et al, 2016). Further research is needed to assess whether this is the result of this demographic's greater internet access and digital literacy, or if this is the result of cultural and social particularities within this group.

Problems socialising and forming relationships are also associated with offending. In one study, 'almost half of offenders had social difficulties with adults' (Seto et al, 2010), and feelings of 'loneliness' and a 'wish to be loved' were mentioned in offender interviews (Merdian et al, 2013b:9). A susceptibility to reckless or impulsive behaviour is another trait found to be more common among offenders (Seto and Ahmed 2014). Studies have found that over 25% of child pornography offenders had prior arrests for non-sexual offenses (Navarro and Jasinski, 2015) and approximately one in eight have

an official history of contact sexual offending (Neutze et al, 2011). However, other studies have shown an absence of other antisocial behaviours among online CSEA offenders (Griffin-Shelley, 2014). One study focused specifically on live-streamed CSA offending in Australia against children in the Philippines found 'there was little interaction between prior sex offences and subsequent live streaming of CSEA' (Cubitt et al, 2021: 8).

Finally, research explores early risk markers of becoming a CSEA offender. For example, one analysis found that certain parental characteristics (young parental age, lower parental education, and parental violent crime) were predictive of child sexual abuse material offending (Babchishin et al, 2019). Male CSEA offenders are also more likely than those in the general population to have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), 'including sexual, physical and emotional abuse, along with witnessing parental violence' (Wurtele et al, 2018:2256).

While there is nothing within the literature to suggest that the psychological and behavioural factors discussed here are only applicable to offenders that target children within their own country, further research is needed before an assessment can be made of the transferability of these as factors that may also facilitate transnational online CSEA offending. Given the availability of images and the factors that create opportunities to offend against children in the Philippines (see chapter 1) it is logical to expect that those driven to online CSEA offending due to psychological and behavioural factors may also engage in transnational online CSEA – whether intentionally or not. It is also likely that offenders can draw on additional permission-giving thoughts when offending against children in low-income countries.

Non-sexual factors

The literature highlights that for some online CSEA offenders, non-sexual factors facilitate their offending, possibly alongside some of the contextual, sexual, and psychological factors discussed.

The sharing of child sexual abuse material is big business as the demand is vast. Early research on what was then named 'child pornography' offending identified 'the entrepreneur' as a category of offender (Taylor, 1999) and 'financial motivation' is one

of four motivation categories within Merdian et al's (2013a) offender model. Similarly, Krone et al (2004) include 'distributor' as one of the nine types of offenders in their typology. Such offenders may or may not have a sexual interest in children but possess 'child pornography with the intent to sell it' (*ibid*: 5). This may be a solely financial transaction, whereby the market for child sexual abuse material is viewed as a commercial opportunity. Images can also form a currency that are traded to gain access to online offender groups and with that, more images (Cockbain, 2014:165), demonstrating an overlap with sexual factors.

In their review of the literature, Bartels and Merdian found evidence that 'the act of collecting itself [is] a distinct function for some CSEM [child sexual exploitation material] users' (2016:22). In one case, images of children were just one of many categories of images within a vast collection and 'were no more sexually arousing to him than images of, for example, cats' (Winder and Gough, 2010:134).

While the literature has not considered the child's location when discussing the selling, trading, and collecting of child sexual abuse material, there is nothing to suggest that entrepreneurs and collectors would not be interested in material involving children from low-income countries, such as the Philippines. Evidence shows that collectors aim to see how many different categories of images they can get (Quayle and Taylor, 2002), and it would be interesting to know whether this includes racial categorisation. For entrepreneurs, the favourable exchange rate may be an additional factor that drives them to acquire material from low-income countries. It is also possible that those engaging in transnational online CSEA record the livestreams to sell, exchange or add to their collection. Without research that considers the child's location in relation to non-sexual motivations for online CSEA offending, it is only possible to speculate on whether these factors also facilitate transnational online CSEA offending.

Conclusion

The CSEA offending literature provides a growing body of evidence about the factors that facilitate offending. While it does not explicitly explore the factors that facilitate online sexual offending against children within low-income countries, including the Philippines, I believe it does provide some useful insight into factors that may facilitate transnational online CSEA. In some cases, parallels can be found with the grey

literature on transnational online CSEA, and offender quotes demonstrate the relevance of these factors in transnational online CSEA offending.

Sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism

Introduction

Definition of 'sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism': *sexual exploitation of children that is embedded in a context of travel, tourism, or both. The offence can be committed by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers and longer-term visitors* (Greijer and Doek, 2016:55).

I have chosen to use the term 'sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism' (SECTT) as this is recommended by the Luxembourg Guidelines (*ibid*: 54) and accurately describes the abusive nature of this type of offending. The term 'child sex tourism' (CST) is also used below as this is frequently referred to within the academic literature, but I avoid its use where possible as this term may legitimise the crime as a form of tourism and does not communicate that it refers to serious criminal conduct (*ibid:*56) (see discussion on terminology in chapter 1).

Unlike the literature on online CSEA offenders, the literature on SECTT does consider the child's location when exploring the factors that facilitate this form of abuse. However, caution is needed when exploring the transferability of SECTT-facilitating factors to transnational online CSEA offending given that the former occurs (primarily) offline. I have grouped the various factors the literature discusses that facilitate SECTT to mirror the discussion on online CSEA offending: the context of offending (the nature of being abroad), sexual preferences and psychological and behavioural factors. I will conclude this section by discussing what these factors may tell us about transnational online CSEA offending.

Context of offending: The nature of being abroad

The SECTT literature emphasises that while some offenders travel locally, SECTT offenders 'mostly originate from developed countries' […] 'while South-East Asia, Central America and Brazil are designated countries with a long history of CST' (Koops

et al, 2017:344-5). The literature identifies various ways in which being abroad, particularly in low-income countries, can be a factor that facilitates SECTT offending.

'Elective sex tourists' are those who engage in SECTT when the opportunity arises (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017), also referred to as 'situational offenders' (Lyneham and Facchini, 2019). For various economic and social reasons, there are more opportunities to commit CSA offences within some low-income countries. Seizing this opportunity is associated with lowered inhibitions when abroad (George and Panko, 2011), which can include 'taking more sexual risks than they would at home' (de Vries, 2020: 1117). SECTT offenders experience social distance with their victims, meaning the sexual encounters become more abstract and less relatable than they would be with a child in their home country (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017). The tourism industry is seen to contribute to this by seeking to make people feel liberated while they are away (George and Panko, 2011).

The nature of being abroad has also changed because of the internet: 'The internet has become the dominant medium through which the seeds of CST are spread' (George and Panko, 2011: 139). It has enabled SECTT abusers to share tips and travel advice, and to act more independently while abroad as travel itineraries can be made online without the assistance of travel agents (Mekinc and Music, 2015).

Legal and resource differences between low-income nations and offenders' home countries are also raised within the literature as factors that can facilitate SECTT. SECTT offenders may exploit the 'low chance of prosecution due to the difficulties of gathering evidence and the (perception of) corruption and impunity in destination countries' (Koning and Rijksen-van Dijke, 2020:15). This is supported by numerous accounts of convicted offenders believing they would not get caught (Mekinc and Music, 2015; Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017) and is discussed by de Vries (2020) as a factor for Canadian offenders that travel to Thailand. The exploitation of resource, legal and economic challenges within low-income countries demonstrates the link between supply and demand factors, as also discussed in relation to transnational online CSEA offending.

Those who travel abroad from high to low-income countries also experience power imbalances that empower and embolden them. Wealth and whiteness can be

exploited to give offenders greater access to children. A heavy reliance on tourism-related income creates a 'client as King' attitude, which gives offenders a sense of entitlement (Hawke and Raphael, 2016:57). One offender from England explained this power imbalance: 'I was culturally and professionally empowered in a country of very powerless people' (Sullivan, 2016:6). Another way that offenders can experience this power over their victims is through volunteer and orphanage tourism ('voluntourism'). This provides child sex offenders with opportunities to offend while abroad, as they perceive it affords them with 'easy and direct access to children living in orphanages through a seemingly legitimate channel' (Lynehamd and Facchini, 2019). Furthermore, there is rarely vetting of those that engage in voluntourism and many are given 'regular, unfettered contact with children' (Farrington, 2016). Similar factors may also apply in transnational online CSEA, whereby the internet – rather than orphanages and NGOs – provides links to these poor communities. The sending of financial support to poor families via bank transfer may similarly be a way for online offenders to establish themselves within a community as a 'good man' and therefore gain access to children online.

In one clear sense, being abroad as a factor that facilitates SECTT cannot be directly translated to transnational online CSEA offending. Transnational online CSEA is perpetrated online and therefore without travelling abroad. However, it is possible that the SECTT-facilitating factors relating to being abroad are, to an extent, also relevant to transnational online CSEA. The social and economic factors that lead to low-income countries being a destination for SECTT offenders also lead online offenders to target children in these same countries, as earlier discussed. Further, SECTT offenders target low-income countries due to the legal and resource differences – differences that also apply if offenders target these children online. Although not physically abroad, the internet may provide offenders with a similar sense of freedom and escapism that the tourism industry provides. One ECPAT report makes this point, arguing that although not physically travelling, online offenders 'travel vicariously via the Internet but the impact of their exploitative behaviour is felt in the destination' (Farrington 2016:24). Further research is needed to explore how these factors that facilitate SECTT may also apply to transnational online CSEA offending.

Sexual preferences

The literature on SECTT generally discusses two types of offenders: elective sex tourists, defined above as those who engage in SECTT when the opportunity arises (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017); and core sex tourists, who 'engage in sex tourism with the intent of fulfilling their sexual desire' (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017:208). The latter of these is also referred to as preferential child sex offenders (Lyneham and Facchini, 2019). For both types of SECTT offenders, sexual motivation may be a key factor in their offending, but it is unlikely to be the sole factor. As with online CSEA, sexual preferences operate in various ways and intersect with other factors to facilitate SECTT offending.

'Elective' or 'situational' SECTT offenders may be sexually motivated to have sexual interaction with local women while travelling but take the opportunity to have sex with a child if the opportunity is presented, meaning age is not the determining factor (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017). It's also argued that the combination of children being readily available and the low price of sexual 'services' from children can spark curiosity among elective SECTT offenders (Koning and Rijksen-van Dijke, 2020). Such offenders may usually be morally averse to sexually exploiting a child, but 'standards and values of the home front may lose their hold on the offender due to the distance from home' (*ibid*: 18), showing how the nature of being abroad intersects with sexual motivations, facilitating SECTT offending. There is also evidence to suggest that ignorance can play a role, with some SECTT offenders unaware that they are having sexual contact with a minor (*ibid*:19).

For 'core' or 'preferential' SECTT offenders, sexual activity with a child is the primary motive in travelling to their destination (George and Panko, 2011). Some of these offenders will be paedophiles with a sexual preference for children (Hawke and Raphael, 2016) and they may have specific age and gender preferences (Koning and Rijksen-van Dijke, 2020). It's also been found that preferential offenders are more likely to be seeking an emotional relationship with a child, and therefore do not view the sexual activity as harmful but as part of a normal sexual relationship (*ibid*). These offenders may also have previous convictions in their home country, which is likely to limit their access to children, so they go abroad to have a 'clean slate' (*ibid:*17).

A sexual interest in children may be the result of the broader sexualisation of childhood and fetishization of its characteristics. Montgomery (2008) argues that the desire for Thai women is partly rooted in their perceived childishness, which the sex industry capitalises on. There is a premium put on virginity, and the innocence it implies. Mekinc and Music (2015) argue that sex tourists seek younger girls as a greater guarantee of their virginity, along with greater assurance of a lack of sexually transmitted diseases. The advertising of virgins by Thai brothels and the naming of bars, such as 'Baby a go-go' (Montgomery, 2008) demonstrates the recognised demand for young girls within low-income countries that have a reputation for and well-established tourism-based sex industry.

A prominent factor the SECTT literature discusses, which the online CSEA literature fails to consider, is the interplay between sexual interest in children and racialised sexual stereotyping. It is suggested that the higher rates of SECTT in 'Eastern nations' is partly the result of 'the demand for ethnically diverse children' (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017). De Vries argues that travelling to abuse children is 'a bi-product of colonialism, where the 'other' is sexualized' (2020: 1117). As discussed earlier, this racial stereotyping occurs within legal adult pornography, and these stereotypes may then be applied to children by SECTT offenders, whether consciously or subconsciously.

Race, power and nationalism

SECTT offending may also be the result of various psychological and behavioural factors relating to individual offenders. Some of these overlap with those discussed in relation to online CSEA offenders, such as personal circumstances. However, in contrast to the online CSEA literature, in the SECTT literature consideration of attitudes about power, race and ethnicity are a prominent feature.

Due to the discussions within the SECTT literature about power and race, it is helpful to situate the following discussion within key relevant theoretical frameworks. The first of these is post-colonial theory. Post-colonial theories enable exploration of how the history of colonialism continues to be relevant today in shaping social attitudes and the perceptions that countries and their citizens hold of themselves. Post-colonialism is an examination of 'the residual political, socioeconomic, and psychological effects of colonialism' (Mercadel, 2022), both on the colonisers and the colonised. Further,

post-colonialism explores 'how contemporary emerging societies in former colonies face the challenges of self-determination and the ways in which they incorporate or reject Western norms and values' (*ibid*, 2022).

Pre-dating but closely linked with post-colonial theory, is Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978). Orientalism is both a theory that highlights how Western discourse constructs the Orient as the Other, and is the practice utilised by Western powers of controlling and managing that part of the world. Said perceives Westerners' views of themselves in stark contrast to those within the Orient, which includes a sense of ownership and entitlement:

> *'Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world's resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being… a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the non-white world but also to own it.'* (Said, 1978:108).

SECTT is found to be facilitated by toxic nationalism, leading to offenders targeting children of the 'out group', towards whom they do not share a sense of unity or identity (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017). Post-colonial theory provides a lens through which to understand why and how these power imbalances have formed and remain.

Feminist theories and literature also provide a useful lens through which to understand and explore the following discussion on SECTT offending. Prominent Feminist thinker, Simone De Beauvoir, is credited with developing the concept of 'the Other', whereby 'woman' is defined by what a man is not (De Beauvoir, 2011). This has been adopted by Black Feminists to demonstrate the Othering of women of colour who are then treated as a homogenous group (Mohanty, 2003). The SECTT literature demonstrates the applicability of this discourse to this form of offending. SECTT offenders may hold 'the belief that the "Other" belongs to a subservient ethnicity [which] could possibly help the perpetrator to rationalise their victimisation of women and children' (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017). 'Social distancing' is used to 'place themselves at one end of the human spectrum and the children they exploit at the other' (Hawke and Raphael, 2016:58). This may explain, in part, why people often 'seek prostitutes whose racial,

ethnic, caste or national identities are different from their own' (O'Connell Davidson, 2001).

It is argued that 'Other' children may be targeted to reinforce an individual's sense of being from a mighty nation (George and Panko, 2011). 'Othering' allows SECTT offenders to construct their victims not just as inferior but also naturally different. Some may claim that early sexual behaviour is the norm within certain cultures (Montgomery, 2008), with the implicit assumption that the children involved are therefore not harmed. For example, a US SECTT offender explained 'the kids didn't seem upset about it…you know it was just, I guess, their life, you know, really' (Sullivan, 2016:5). This is an example of a permission-giving thought, as discussed in chapter 3. The sexualisation of women of colour, as discussed in relation to pornography, creates a justification that Asian women and girls are 'naturally' more sexually willing and therefore the same levels of protection and care that they would expect towards children 'of their own kind' are deemed unnecessary (O'Connell Davidson, 2001).

There is also the suggestion that SECTT offenders utilise the permission-giving thought that they are helping their victims. The economic disparity between themselves and the children they abuse is emphasised, with offenders often stressing that monetary compensation was given (Kosuri and Jeglic, 2017; George and Panko, 2011). There is also evidence of offenders maintaining long-term relationships with their victims and their victims' families. Ongoing financial support is provided to a family, not based on a one-off sexual transaction, but whenever they say they need help. In return the offender gains hero status and has ready access to children when they want it (Montgomery, 2008). Constructing themselves as a helper and having this reinforced through the thanks and appreciation of their victims and their victims' families, allows offenders to address any 'cognitive dissonance' they may feel. O'Connell Davidson argues that the incompatibility of 'I am a good person' and 'I have sex with children' may otherwise cause someone not to commit SECTT offences (2001).

The SECTT literature highlights links between negative personal circumstances and SECTT offending. A lack of coping skills, poor self-esteem or failing with their preferred sexual partners can be a catalyst for seeking sexual interaction with children (Ireland,

1993). This is likely an accumulating factor that may accompany any of the other causes of SECTT offending discussed above and could apply to preferential and situational offenders.

Conclusion

Through an assessment of three bodies of literature, this review has highlighted the many and varied factors that are known to facilitate transnational online child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as highlighting further factors that may be of relevance. The transnational online CSEA literature is limited, but publications from front-line organisations provide some insight into the nature and scale of this international offending, which will hopefully encourage academic research on the issue. Turning to the more developed online CSEA offending literature has enabled a greater analysis of the factors that facilitate offending more widely. However, none of this research explicitly sought to understand how the location of the children an offender targets, and the associated power imbalances resulting from economic and racial differences, may alter the factors that lead to and facilitate their offending. Although limited in number, the offender quotes that reference children in low-income countries demonstrate that for some offenders, the child's location is a factor in their offending, and the justifications they use can vary from other offenders who target children within other high-income countries.

Within both the online CSEA and SECTT literature, personal attitudes held by offenders and the role of permission-giving thoughts appear as prominent factors that facilitate offending. There is one main and notable difference between these two bodies of literature, however. The SECTT literature, through its inherent recognition of the international element of the crime, includes significant discourse on the role of power imbalances based on economic and racial differences. I hypothesise that these specific forms of power imbalance are also relevant to transnational online CSEA offending, as this is also an international crime. I have provided an overview of post-colonial theory as I believe this provides a useful lens to understand and explore the role of power and race in CSEA offending.

Finally, this literature review highlighted to me that the existing literature is predominantly focussed on factors relating to individual offenders – their sexual preferences, attitudes, experiences – rather than factors relating to offenders' wider environment, such as social and cultural norms. Having identified this gap, I have sought, through this research, to identify and explore factors across all aspects of an individual's environment. This led me to developing a socio-ecological approach for my research, as discussed in chapter 4.

This literature review has demonstrated that the existing literature provides a useful foundation for future analysis and understanding of transnational online CSEA, but that the highlighted research gaps must be filled if a holistic, evidence-based response is to be developed to tackle transnational online CSEA. That is what this research seeks to contribute to.

Chapter four: Conceptual Framework: A Socio-ecological approach to understanding CSEA offending

About socio-ecological models

As highlighted in chapter 3, the existing literature on CSEA offending focuses primarily on individual level factors that facilitate CSEA offending. This finding led me to consider how best to surface and explore the range of factors beyond those relating to individual offenders. I identified socio-ecological models as a means of doing so and decided to apply this type of framework to my research design and data analysis. This approach has enabled me to explore the full range of factors within offenders' environments that can help to facilitate their offending.

The socio-ecological model (SEM) is 'a theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors' (Kilanowski, 2017: 295). The model is credited to psychologist Bronfenbrenner, who used this model to explore human development through an exploration of the relationship between an individual and their environment (1977). Bronfenbrenner's model consists of four levels, or systems, which are nested together to form an individuals' complete environment:

1) **Microsystem:** 'the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g. home, school, workplace, etc.)' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 514). These settings are where individuals play a certain role, such as child, parent, teacher, etc.
2) **Mesosystem:** 'comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life' (*ibid*: 515). This includes family, friends, school, workplace, and church.
3) **Exosystem:** 'an extension of the mesosystem embracing other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found' (*ibid*). This includes local-level institutions, such as the neighbourhood, the mass media, and informal social networks.

4) ***Macrosystem:*** 'the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete manifestations.' The macrosystem consists of formal 'blueprints', such as laws and rules, and informal 'blueprints' such as the customs and practices that people within an environment adhere to.

Since its conception, the SEM has been adapted and used in various academic fields, including public health (Banks et al, 2020), mental health (Brooks et al, 2022) and social work (Pardeck, 1988). A similar approach is used in contextual safeguarding which focuses on 'the interplay between different contexts and relationships' within which a child may experience harm, including family, peers, school, and neighbourhood (Firmin, 2017). There are examples of where a SEM has been used to analyse issues that are of close relation to my topic of study. For example, a study by Finigan-Carr et al (2019) adapted and applied the socio-ecological model to understand and explore the environment of victims of commercial child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking:

1) ***Individual level:*** 'personal history, psychological, and biological factors influence how individuals behave and can increase their likelihood of becoming a victim of child sex trafficking' (*ibid*: 56).

2) ***Relationship / interpersonal level:*** 'how individual or intrapersonal factors affect relationships with persons in various microsystems (e.g., home and peer) to increase the likelihood of a victim's involvement in sex trafficking' (*ibid*: 55).

3) ***Community level:*** 'contexts in which social relationships occur, such as schools, neighbourhoods, and workplaces, affect vulnerability to child sex trafficking' *(ibid*: 53).

4) ***Societal level:*** 'the broad societal factors that create a climate in which child sex trafficking is either encouraged or inhibited. These include large, macro-level processes such as health, economic, educational, and social policies that contribute to and perpetuate economic or social inequalities, or conversely, that seek to reduce inequality and create greater social justice' (*ibid:* 50).

Another example is Ecpat International's use of an ecological approach in their analysis of the demand for child sexual exploitation. They propose a model in which the underlying level of demand constitutes systemic factors that sustain children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and therefore perpetuate the demand. This includes sexism, racism, and sexualised media (Ecpat, 2016b). The intermediate level of demand is created and sustained by those who facilitate offenders' contact with children and then reap the economic benefit. This could be family members, traffickers, or peers, and can also include digital technologies themselves (Ecpat, 2016c). The third level of demand is sustained by the direct exploiters - those who themselves engage in sexual exploitation with children. This includes local and travelling offenders, as well as those who access CSAM online (Ecpat, 2016d).

A Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model for transnational online CSEA offending

Informed by my findings in the existing academic literature on CSEA (see chapter 3), I wanted to extend existing socio-ecological models to include the role of technology in facilitating online CSEA. I therefore developed a new socio-ecological model ('Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model') to guide my data collection and analysis. This model is applied to the factors that facilitate British men committing online transnational CSEA against children in the Philippines to enable an in-depth exploration, analysis and grouping of the breadth of factors surfaced by this research. These include:

1) *Individual level:* An individual's personal experiences (e.g. in childhood), psychology, attitudes, values, and beliefs. These values and beliefs may be influenced by the following levels and internalised by an individual. An individual's attitudes may prevent them from engaging in CSEA offending or can act to normalise or diminish the harm caused by CSEA.

2) *Social level:* An individual's immediate environment, including their social context (e.g. family, friends, online connections) and the wider social norms (e.g. values communicated in the media, or within online communities). An individual's social context may provide messaging and norms that prevent or deter an individual from engaging in CSEA or can negatively impact an

individual's beliefs and attitudes to facilitate CSEA offending. This is a combination of levels 2 and 3 in Finigan-Carr's model, and accounts for the role of the internet in broadening and changing an individual's social context and points of social influence.
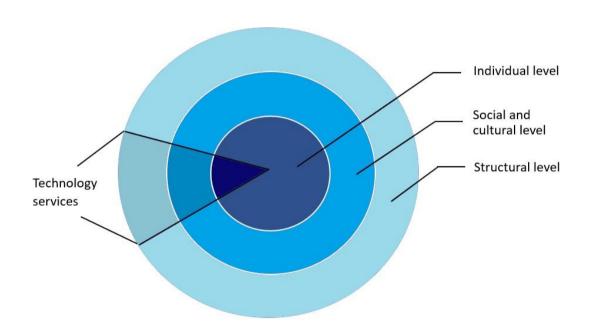
3) **Structural level:** An individual's wider environment and the structures and institutions within a society or culture that organise and shape it. This includes legislation, law enforcement and the wider criminal justice and the child protection systems. Such institutions, when operating effectively, create a prohibitive environment in which CSEA is prevented, identified, and effectively addressed. However, failings by these institutions can facilitate offending and be exploited by offenders.

A SEM is traditionally a ring of concentric circles, with an individual placed in the middle, whereby the influence of each ring reduces as you move outwards. I have adapted the socio-ecological model for this research to account for the role of the internet in breaking down and blurring each of these concentric circles. Technology does not neatly fit within one of the traditional circles of influence, but its role in facilitating online CSEA is raised within the existing literature and came up throughout this research. The role and influence of technology services and the internet is therefore treated as an additional cross-cutting level that applies and is considered under each of these three levels. This is depicted in the diagram below.

There are other socio-ecological models that consider the role of the internet and technologies, coming from the field of child development. This includes The Ecological Techno-Subsystem (Johnson and Puplampu, 2008), which builds on Bronfenbrenner's model by adding an additional ring (the Techno-Subsystem) between the child in the centre and the microsystem. This new ring includes the internet, cell phones, television and computers. Johnson (2010) developed the Ecological Techno-Microsystem to demonstrate and explore the role of internet usage on a child's development within their home, school and community environments. This Techno-Microsystem is a set of overlapping rings, representing communication technologies, a child's social, emotional and physical development, and the child's environment. Further, Navarro and Tudge (2023) propose an update to Brofenbrenner's model, named *neo-ecological theory.* This seeks to account for the

technological changes of the 21st century by, among other changes, splitting the microsystem (innermost circle) into two: physical and virtual.

These examples demonstrate the existing thinking and research exploring the role of the internet in shaping and forming an individual's environment. While my model has similarities with those discussed throughout this chapter, the Technology Conscious SEM provides a novel contribution to the field of online harms. In particular, my Technology Conscious SEM provides a unique way of exploring CSEA offenders' whole environments with the role of the internet considered within each layer.

Diagram 1: A technology conscious socio-ecological model for transnational online CSEA offending

In this research, I have used my Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model in two ways. First, it guided the development of my research methods. Informed by my SEM, I specifically asked research participants about the factors they think facilitate transnational online CSEA on individual, social and cultural, and structural levels. The second use of my socio-ecological model enabled a comprehensive exploration and grouping of the breadth of data collected through my interviews. Applying this socio-ecological framework facilitates an analysis of transnational online CSEA offending that is more complex and multifaceted than the existing CSEA literature provides. It

enables greater understanding of how factors across the whole of an individuals' environment operate in tandem to facilitate transnational online CSEA. This in turn surfaces the various factors that need to be considered when seeking a holistic approach to tackling and preventing this form of abuse. Through application of my technology-conscious socio-ecological model, the following chapters present new and unique insights into understandings of transnational online CSEA offending.

Chapter five: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research methodology, and the methods used for data collection and analysis. This is all informed by my research questions, which, as discussed in chapter 1, are:

1. *What are the factors within Britain that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men, from the perception of a range of professionals working in this field?*
2. *What are the implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice?*

I first set out my methodology and why I have taken an interpretivist epistemological approach when developing and answering my research question, and when designing my research methods. I then give a brief overview of some of the key ethical issues that I have considered and worked through during the process of this research. Next, I provide a detailed account of my research methods, including the approach used in my literature review, the types of interviews I conducted, the recruitment of my participants, and the analysis of my data. This has been informed by the socio-ecological model that I have applied to this study, as discussed in chapter 4.

Methodology

To best answer my research question, I adopted a qualitative methodology, in the form of semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled an exploration of the complexities, nuances, and range of perspectives on transnational online CSEA offending.

> *'[T]he most basic definition of qualitative research is that is uses words as data… collected and analysed in all sorts of ways. Quantitative research, in contrast, uses numbers as data and analyses them using statistical techniques'* (Braun and Clarke, 2013:3-4).

Both qualitative and quantitative data play an important role in understanding the complex threat of online CSEA. Quantitative data provides information about the number of individuals that have been identified as sharing child sexual abuse material, grooming children, and paying to view and direct the sexual abuse of children online in real time. This quantitative data thereby provides a picture of the level of threat, how it is changing over time and how it varies between countries and across different online platforms. Quantitative data also enables us to quantify the number of victims, which is important, for example, for assessing whether enough victim support services are available. It also enables law enforcement efforts to be targeted and resource requirements to be calculated.

In contrast, qualitative research consists of 'an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world' (Van Maanen, 1979:520). I am conducting qualitative research because I want to understand and explore, rather than quantify, the social phenomenon of British people sexually exploiting children online in the Philippines, and the factors that facilitate this. By conducting qualitative research that seeks to understand *why* offenders may target children in the Philippines, this research contributes to the development of evidence-based solutions to prevent offending, therefore preventing harm to a child from occurring in the first place.

My methodology is informed by the interpretivist paradigm, 'which emphasises the meaningful nature of people's character and participation in both social and cultural life' (Chowdhury, 2014:433). Therefore, I believe that as a researcher the way I understand the issue of child sexual exploitation and abuse is shaped by my experiences, beliefs, and place in the world. The same is true of my participants, who answered my interview questions based on their own experiences and positionality. My role is to find knowledge – what professionals think the factors are that facilitate online CSEA – but this knowledge is not objective, and neither is my interpretation of it. Through the interpretivist paradigm, it is understood that knowledge is 'always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:21). Therefore, I am not seeking to, nor do I believe I can, find a single or indisputable truth. Rather an interpretivist qualitative approach allows me

to surface the 'multiple perspectives of reality' (Chowdhury, 2014:433), which I hope provides some insight into the many factors within Britain that may facilitate online CSEA against children in the Philippines. This is particularly pertinent given the broad range of cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds that my participants have.

This interpretivist methodology has also informed my approach to interviews and the way I understand the ethical challenges inherent in international research. I understand that my experiences and the culture that has shaped me influence how I approach this issue and how I am perceived by my participants. I have sought to recognise the power dynamics between me as a white, western researcher and my participants. I have been mindful of the colonialist narratives that shape how low-income countries, and the citizens of these countries are often viewed or may view themselves. It is for this reason that I decided to focus my research on the factors within Britain that facilitate this offending, rather than exploring the role and responsibilities of the Philippines in tackling and preventing the offending of this crime.

Research ethics

Due to the international nature of this research, with participants based in both Britain and the Philippines, I first sought to understand what the ethical requirements were in both countries. This included the ethics approval process that is required through the University of Bedfordshire. Through online research I also identified the Philippines' 'National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research', prepared by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHRS). I reviewed the guidance and found a contact at PHRS to check whether my research fell within scope of the guidelines and related requirements. This contact confirmed that my research was in scope of their requirements and highlighted that this is a sensitive topic that will need to be carefully handled for Filipino participants. Following this, I commenced the process of applying for ethics approval from this board. For both the University of Bedfordshire and the PHRS I was required to complete forms detailing the nature and scope of my research and provide my interview schedules (appendix 2) and participant information sheets and consent forms (appendix 3). Ethical approval was granted from both institutions (appendix 4).

The process I went through to gain ethical approval from two separate committees was vital in helping me understand and reflect upon my role as a researcher. This process helped me to further define the focus of my research as being about British offenders and the factors within Britain, specifically. This came from a growing awareness of my own positionality as a white British researcher, and so I wanted to explore and speak to my own cultural context and not one that I cannot claim to understand. I believe the ethics process also shaped how I conducted my interviews and how I have approached and analysed my data. It has encouraged me to recognise my privilege as a researcher, so I have treated what my participants told me as valid and insightful data that reflects their experiences, just as my views reflect my experiences. Obtaining ethics approval from both the University of Bedfordshire and the Philippine National Ethics Committee were discrete tasks, but conducting ethical research has been an ongoing process of learning and reflection. There have been numerous ethical issues to consider and learn from throughout my research.

One of the key elements in ethical research is ensuring informed consent. Wright Clayton defines this as when 'the research participant fully understands the nature of the project, its foreseeable risks and benefits, and that the primary goal of research is to advance knowledge rather than to help the individual' (2020:185). As far as possible this is what I sought to achieve through detailed information sheets and consent forms, reiterating key points and confirming understanding during my interviews and providing opportunities for my participants to ask questions or withdraw. Additional challenges arose when seeking consent from my Filipino participants as language and cultural differences had to be carefully navigated and understood. For example, I decided to limit my participants to those who had conversational spoken and written English to minimise the opportunities for miscommunication and mistranslation had I relied on translators. I felt this was particularly important given the nature and sensitivity of my research topic. To help address the challenges relating to language differences, I shared my interview questions with a contact based in the Philippines, who provided guidance on terminology.

There are further differences to be aware of beyond language and terminology. UNICEF-commissioned guidance on ethical research within humanitarian settings highlights that '[r]esearchers should seek to understand and address the social context

and complex power relations that may exist between various stakeholders, at every stage in the research process' (Berman et al, 2016:23). The Philippines has a complex historical relationship with 'the West', as they have been both colonised and liberated by Western nations. This means that as a white, western researcher some participants may have felt there was an imbalance of power, for example participants may have elevated me due to my whiteness or may have felt resentment towards me as an outsider. This could have influenced how participants interacted with me, what they felt able to share and how they perceived me. I sought to understand and consider these complex power relationships, and I was cognisant of these relations and sought to avoid reinforcing them through my interactions. I emphasised to my participants that I am interested in their expertise and that I wanted to hear about their experiences and insights into this issue. I also sought to build a positive rapport with my participants to help them feel at ease and able to ask questions.

Another ethical issue that I had to manage as part of this research relates to data protection. I had to take careful steps to ensure I handled participants' data in accordance with the UK's Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This meant securely storing all personal data[14] in a password protected document saved in the University of Bedfordshire's encrypted cloud storage. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) also requires that personal data is minimised, that it is erased within one month if requested by the data owner, and that all data is only kept for as long as can be justified. I provided participants with information about how their data would be handled in my participant information sheets. Participants were asked whether they consent to me holding their data for five years following their interviews. This includes all records I hold of my participants (such as name, organisation, contact details) and the interview recordings and transcripts. Throughout data collection, transcription, data analysis and writing my thesis I have been careful to manage my data in accordance with UK rules and based on the permissions granted by my participants. I have not disclosed the names of participants or included any information in this thesis that could be used to identify my

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[14] 'Personal data' is defined by the General Data Protection Act Article 4(1) as 'any information which are related to an identified or identifiable natural person'.

research participants, and I removed any identifiable information from my interview transcripts before these were submitted to the University of Bedfordshire.

Throughout the research process I have been acutely aware of my own well-being and the impact that this subject has on me. As my professional career[15] also relates to tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse, I spend a lot of my time and mental capacity thinking, reading, and writing about very emotive and difficult issues. This puts me at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma, which the IASR ethics guidance describes as 'the cumulative impact of researching sensitive issues' (2019: 44). Recent events have made it even harder for me to manage and switch off from this issue. Namely, the COVID-19 pandemic meant many of my coping strategies had to change. Further, becoming a parent in 2022 has meant that I am less able to remove myself from this topic, and the impact it has on children and families feels more personal. I have developed several coping strategies, which include regular exercise, frequent mental breaks, talking with friends and colleagues, and receiving counselling.

Reflexivity

I have outlined above the ethical challenges that are inherent in my positionality as a white British researcher doing international research. Building on this, this section sets out how the other aspects of my background and profession impact and influence my perspectives and the approach I have taken to this research, and how my positionality may have shaped the ways I am perceived by my participants.

I have always sought to approach my research reflexively. Reflexivity is defined as 'the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (Berger, 2015:220). In this section I briefly discuss how my positionality led me to this topic, and the ways I think it has impacted my research approach and perspectives.

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[15] I have had various professional roles in different organisations during the process of conducting this research. This includes within the charity sector, civil service, and a regulatory body. While all these roles have been related in some way to the subject matter of this research, my research has remaining entirely independent and separate from my professional career.

This starts with reflecting on my academic background, and the role this played in leading to me researching this topic. As an MSc graduate in International Relations, I am inclined to view and seek to understand social and cultural issues through a global lens, which includes an understanding of the influence of Britain's imperial history. I therefore approached my research with curiosity about whether and how Britain's colonial history may be a factor in transnational online CSEA. I had some existing knowledge of the role of Britan's colonial history in relation to the sex trade in Southeast Asia, having studied this during my Masters, so was interested in exploring whether this may also play a role in CSEA offending. While participants in this research often raised these issues voluntarily, I was open to and encouraging of these reflections given my own interest in this issue and my awareness of the lack of consideration of this within existing CSEA literature.

My interest in the international aspect of CSEA offending was further piqued during my time working at the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) between 2015 and 2018. I was struck by how little consideration there appears to be within the CSA sector of the international aspects of this crime. While this is understandable for a national child protection charity, I noted little focus on the international aspects of CSA across the sector, within research and within the UK government's agenda. This was epitomised for me by the UK government's Online Harms White Paper, which sought to 'make the UK the safest place in the world to be online' (DCMS and Home Office, 2020).

Therefore, when I decided to study for a Doctorate, I knew I wanted to explore and tackle online CSEA as an international issue, recognising Britain's role in making the internet safe (or unsafe) for children beyond our borders. I wanted to do so in a way that was careful not to assume that low-income countries are at fault and / or in need of our help. Instead, I wanted to focus on the issues, shortcomings and factors within Britain that facilitate this abuse, recognising that the faults – and therefore the solutions – are at least in part, Britain's.

I took the decision early on that I wanted to study for my Doctorate alongside work. This was for personal reasons, but also because I wanted to ensure that my research was grounded in practice and that I could apply what I learn through my research to

the job that I do. This decision has influenced my research in various ways. Conducting this research as someone embedded in UK policy means that I have certain biases. Soon after starting my Doctorate, I moved from working at the NSPCC to the Civil Service – first in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and then the Home Office. In both roles I was working on aspects of the Online Safety Bill but led on the sections of the Bill relating to tackling online CSEA during much of my time at the Home Office. In 2023 I joined the CSA policy team at Ofcom, the newly appointed regulator with responsibility for enforcing the Online Safety Act.

There are a number of ways that my professional background has influenced my perspective on online CSEA and the way I have approached this research. For example, my professional position means that I am acutely aware of the UK government's efforts to tackle CSEA and may not always see some of the shortcomings or gaps in this work. It also means that despite my background in International Relations, I have a UK-centric view of online CSEA and have often been required to think about this as a UK issue with UK solutions. My various roles within the public sector have enabled me to engage directly with many online services. While such engagements have been insightful and informative in helping me understand the role and actions of industry, it has also led me to regard some online services as failing to properly invest in and prioritise the safety of children. This has at times made me sceptical about industry and their ability to act voluntarily. These roles have also likely led me to placing a high importance on the role of government legislation and the Online Safety Act, in particular. While many participants organically raised the importance of stronger legislation, I was perhaps more eager to engage in and reflect these discussions given their relevance to my professional work.

I believe that a key positive outcome of my experience working within the public sector is that I am well positioned to make policy recommendations that are targeted at a UK audience, which is one of the key aims of my research.

As well as influencing my own approach to research, my positionality and background may also have influenced how my participants perceived and engaged with me. I was always explicit with participants that my research was entirely independent from the organisations I worked for, including stating this in my Participant Information Sheets.

However, most participants knew where I worked so this may have still influenced the way they engaged with me. I am also aware that my professional role gave me privileged access to participants within the UK, with some participants likely more inclined to participate in the research because of my role. This created some potential ethical challenges as I did not want my role to unduly influence what participants were willing to say. I therefore reiterated throughout my interviews that I was operating as an individual researcher and that their involvement would remain anonymous. In addition to be being more willing to participate, some participants that I had worked with in a professional capacity regarded me as a trusted partner and were likely more open in their interviews due to my 'insider' status. For other participants, particularly those from organisations that relied on government funding, they may have been more guarded or cautious in the way they engaged with me.

Due to unconscious bias, social class, and tied to that, accents, may also influence how I was perceived by my participants. I am a relatively well-spoken middle-class woman, and it is possible that some of my participants may have viewed me as being unable to 'handle' upsetting or graphic information. For example, some participants apologised when using slightly graphic descriptions of CSEA. Being middle-class and well-spoken may also contribute to a view that I am somewhat removed from reality and sitting within the 'Ivory tower' of academia and policy making. By providing participants with information about my academic and professional background, I believe I was able to counteract some of these potential challenges and reassure participants that I am knowledgeable and experienced in this area.

Methods

This section sets out the methods that I used for my research and data collection, namely interviews, sampling, participant overviews, data collection and data analysis. I also explain the reasoning for the approach I took for each of these. These methods are informed by my interpretivist methodology, and I selected them as they effectively enable me to answer my research questions within the limitations of this Doctorate.

Semi-structured interviews

To answer my research questions, I collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The structuring and focus of my interview questions were informed by my Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model. This means that the questions I asked in my interviews sought to explore individual, social and cultural, and structural level factors, with consideration of the role of the internet and technologies within each of these levels.

I chose semi-structured interviews over unstructured and structured interviews as it allows 'some degree of pre-determined order but still ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant' (Dunn, 2005:80). The nature of my topic required some flexibility. As set out in my literature review, this is an under-researched area, and I wanted to allow space for participants to raise issues that I had not considered and for further exploration of those points through follow up questions.

While literature on transnational online CSEA offending is limited, my exploration of the wider literature on online CSEA offending has allowed me to identify some key themes. This includes the role of sexual preferences and desire, attitudes towards children as sexual beings, and the belief that they will not get caught. I wanted to be able to explore the key themes from the literature with my participants, but not be limited to these areas. I therefore asked open-ended questions and tried to enable my participants to influence the direction of our conversation.

Most of my interviews were conducted one-to-one, given the sensitivity of the topic and my desire to draw out detailed responses from each participant. There was one exception to this, where some participants from the same organisation in the Philippines asked to have a joint interview. All interviews were conducted via video conferencing software, because of COVID-19 restrictions that were in place during the time of my data collection. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Again, there was one exception to this, where a participant in the Philippines who had poor internet connection and was struggling to find an appropriate time with the time difference, asked to submit written answers.

Finally, my interview participants were from varying professional backgrounds, and so their perspectives and the types of answers they provided were varied, as discussed in the next section. By taking a semi-structured approach to my interviews I was able to adapt the questions and the terminology I used to suit the profession of the participant or their geographic location. For example, for participants working in Britain I used the term 'online CSEA', whereas for participants from the Philippines I used the term OSEC (see chapter 1 for definitions and terminology).

My full interview schedules are available at [Appendix 2](#).

Sampling

When selecting my research participants, I wanted to ensure I had representatives from a range of backgrounds, professions, and a good balance of Filipino and British perspectives. I chose to conduct my research with participants who are professionals in the field of online CSEA for various reasons. Firstly, while the academic research on transnational online CSEA is sparse, there are a number of organisations working to address this issue directly, so I knew they would be able to provide some insights. I also wanted to consider this issue from both a policy and practice perspective and felt that involving a range of professions would enable insightful discussions about the issue of online CSEA from various perspectives. Finally, I recognise that interviewing offenders of online CSEA would have provided very relevant and direct insights into offender behaviours and motivations, there were time and ethical constraints that made this difficult. Such participants would have also only been able to speak based on their own experience, and perhaps would have been less able to remark on wider offending and the structures within Britain that facilitate it.

I therefore included the following professional groups in this research, as they could provide various insights:

British NGOs – offenders: I wanted to include the perspectives and experiences of those who have worked directly with offenders of CSEA. Some of these participants had provide therapeutic services to transnational online CSEA offenders. These participants were included given their ability to draw on specific examples of offenders

they had worked with, including recalling what these offenders said about their reasons for engaging in online CSEA.

British NGOs – victims and children: Participants from NGOs working with victims and children were included due to their particular insights into the broader nature and impact of online offending. Some of these participants worked in policy and research roles, so had a broad understanding of the CSA threat from an NGO perspective. Although based in the UK, many worked in international NGOs whose work included understanding and responding to international CSEA.

UK Law Enforcement: These participants were from various UK law enforcement agencies, and all had some experience working on international CSA cases. Law enforcement participants were included given their direct experience with offenders (e.g. during investigations, when interviewing suspects, attending court hearings) and their insights into what is / is not working in the UK's criminal justice response to this crime.

UK Policy professionals: Policy experts (from various UK-based organisations) were included in this research to provide the 'big picture' perspective on the online CSEA threat and the UK's policy response to this. These participants were working in various capacities to understand and tackle international online CSEA at the national level.

British Academics: The academics involved in this research had conducted research specifically looking at online CSEA, including some research on transnational online CSEA. Some of these participants had engaged directly with offenders as part of their research, but all were able to provide broad insights into the threat and offenders' motivations.

Filipino NGOs: These participants had a range of experiences, including policy and research within the Philippines, and working directly to support victims and assist in cases involving Western offenders. Some of the Filipino participants from NGOs were able to talk directly about the cases they had worked on and what they understood to be the factors within both the Philippines and Britain that were facilitating online CSEA against children in the Philippines.

<u>Filipino healthcare:</u> Participants from healthcare settings in the Philippines were sought due to their direct work, in a therapeutic capacity, with victims of transnational online CSEA. They were able to talk about the factors within the Philippines that help facilitate CSEA, how these can be exploited by Western offenders, and the impact of this on victims.

I interviewed professionals who work in well-established and reputable organisations in both countries.

While my participants worked in either the Philippines or Britain, I did not ask participants what their nationality was. While I believe that many of the participants were nationals of the country in which they worked, this was not always the case. The key factor in identifying participants was that they could speak with experience and knowledge about the country in which they worked and lived. I took this approach as I believe that nationality of a country is not a pre-requisite to having a thorough understanding of the culture, customs, legislative framework, etc. of a country, and that such knowledge can also be held by those who have lived and worked in a country.

Recruitment

The participants and participating organisations included in this study were selected due to their relevant expertise and knowledge on the topic. I utilised my existing professional network as far as possible, reaching out via email to contacts that I had through my (then) professional role as a Policy Manager on online CSEA at the UK Home Office. I then adopted a snow-ball recruitment method from there, whereby I asked existing contacts to recommend and introduce me to others that they think would provide valuable contributions to my research. While my role in the Home Office was beneficial in connecting me with many of my participants, I was always clear that this is independent research (see footnote 13).

I selected participants that were able to draw on their knowledge of the system-wide response to online CSEA and their professional experiences with multiple offenders and victims to consider what they believe to be the factors within Britain that facilitate online CSEA. This has allowed me to compare very different perspectives. For

example, the experiences and views of law enforcement professionals who are likely to have been involved in arrests and prosecutions of offenders, differ from the views and experiences of those that provide therapeutic support to offenders or their families.

Due to the dearth of academic research on the issue of transnational online CSEA I decided that understanding the views and perspectives of professionals with front line and system-wide experience would offer valuable insight and I hope has helped to lay a good foundation for further research. I did not interview offenders due to the logistical and ethical challenges of recruiting such participants. However, they would have offered an undeniably different and important perspective and should be included in future research that builds on the findings of this thesis.

Participant profile

The table below provides an overview of my research participants and the sectors they are from. For ethical reasons, participation in my research is anonymised.

Country	Sector	Number
Britain	NGO – offenders (therapeutic services)	5
	NGO – victims / children	7
	Law Enforcement	3
	Policy	2
	Academia	4
		TOTAL: 21
Philippines	NGO – all working primarily to support and identify victims; any involvement with offenders related to prosecutions and not the provision of therapeutic services.	8
	Health care (public service)	1
		TOTAL: 9
Britain and the Philippines		**TOTAL: 30**

Note on Philippine participation: I had hoped to include Philippine law enforcement and policy professionals, to better mirror the professions of my British participants and to capture a greater range of perspectives. I was unable to access anyone from these sectors, despite introductions from my some of my other participants. Cancelled travel plans due to COVID-19 made this harder, as I was due to attend a conference in the Philippines that would have had local law enforcement in attendance.

This section sets out the approach I took to data collection and the rationale for my approach.

Piloting and preparing for interviews

The development of my interview schedule was an iterative process. First, I considered the research gaps following a thorough examination of the literature and how my research could help to fill these. As previously discussed, the literature review process led me to adopt and further develop the socio-ecological model, to ensure my research explores the full range of factors that influence an offender's environment – individual, social and cultural, and structural. I drafted interview questions that would enable me to explore all three of these levels with my participants. I then consulted with my supervisors for their views, particularly on ethical and practical considerations. Once I had an initial list of questions, I shared this with contacts from two NGOs – one in the Philippines and one in Britain. This allowed me to test the wording of my questions and how they would be understood within different cultural contexts. This was an important process as '[u]sing words that make sense to the interviewee, words that reflect the respondent's world view, will improve the quality of the data' (Patton, 2015:454). Finally, I conducted one pre-pilot and two pilot interviews in May and June 2020 to test my questions more formally.

In preparation for conducting interviews, I read literature on conducting semi-structured interviews and had training from my supervisor. The process of developing my interview questions and testing these through pilot interviews provided an opportunity to get practice in interviewing. Pilot interviews were also important to allow me to 'quickly learn which questions are confusing and need re-wording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by [my] respondents, [I] should have thought to include' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:117).

Context of data collection and its impact

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the related lock-down measures coincided with the start of my data collection phase. This meant I was forced to conduct all interviews

via video conferencing software (Skype, Zoom and Teams). I also had to cancel a planned trip to the Philippines where I was going to attend a conference and commence my interviews with Philippine participants in person. I had anticipated that some interviews would need to be conducted via video conferencing software, so this was included in my ethics application and approved. Conducting interviews online created some challenges, including poor internet signal and difficulty with rapport building. This was particularly difficult with some of my Filipino participants, where challenges with language differences felt heightened by the interviews being online. This context also meant some participants were interested in discussing the impact of the pandemic on transnational online CSEA, with many raising concerns that travel restrictions and other lock down measures would increase offending.

This research also coincided with heightened national and international activity by Black Lives Matter, giving additional attention to issues around race and racism during this time. In 2013, Black Lives Matter was created in the USA in response to the acquittal of the murderer of a black man, Trayvon Martin. Black Lives Matter defines itself as 'a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes' (Black Lives Matter, 2013). Throughout 2020 and 2021 – coinciding with my research interviews – there were BLM protests across the USA, which spread to cities across the world, including in Britain. These marches were sparked by the murders of two black people in the US – Breonne Taylor and George Floyd, with footage of Floyd saying "I can't breathe" as police officers held him down, circulating widely online. This and other footage elicited widespread shock and strong tensions emerged between police and protestors (Gottbrath, 2020).

Within the UK, public discourse started focusing more on issues of racism, with growing awareness of racism at home and not just in the USA. Examples of this were highlighted in "The report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities" (2021). The publication of the "Windrush Lessons Learned Review" in 2020 (Williams, 2020) further highlighted a history of racist immigration policy within Britain.

BLM is an important part of the context to my research, as it brought heightened awareness of and discourse about issues of race and racism. It was apparent in many

of my interviews that racism was at the forefront of participants' minds during this time, with multiple participants specifically referring to BLM and how this spotlighted racist attitudes within Britain more widely. It is possible that the overlap of this research with the increased BLM activity across Britain impacted participant's willingness, openness, and interest in the role of race and racism in online CSEA offending. These were conversations and perspectives that I welcomed, having noted a lack of academic consideration of the role of race in CSEA offending within existing literature.

Data analysis

To enable a thorough approach to data analysis, I first wanted to ensure data familiarisation. To do so, I personally transcribed the interviews and then reviewed each transcript again. This familiarity has helped me to note themes and potential patterns within my data, and to recall certain points that were raised by participants when writing up my findings.

I coded my data using thematic data analysis. This meant I identified patterns within my data and used an abductive approach when doing so. The abductive approach builds on grounded theory approach which lets 'new theory emerge from data without theoretical preconceptions' (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012:168). It uses both inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning, meaning my analysis seeks to develop a theory, or identify new themes and ideas (inductive reasoning) and test existing theories and identify known themes (deductive reasoning). I came to my data with some existing theories and ideas about what the factors are that facilitate online CSEA by British people against children in the Philippines. I used the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model as my framework for analysis. My existing ideas and expectations were informed by my literature review and existing knowledge of the CSEA threat. I therefore analysed my data with themes in mind, while also expecting and being open to new themes emerging. This approach is summarised by Timmermans and Tavory who explain that 'the abductive approach rests on the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis' (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012:169).

I applied my abductive approach by using NVivo data analysis software, to code my data. This software enabled me to use 'nodes' and 'sub-nodes' to group my data into themes. The top-level nodes that I used were informed by the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model: individual, social and cultural, and structural. The sub-nodes within these were based on the types of factors that participants mentioned, such as 'pornography escalation', 'racism' and 'poor law enforcement response'. Many of these sub-nodes are found within the existing CSEA literature, while others first emerged from within my data. I received NVivo training through the University of Bedfordshire.

The chapters and sub-headings in my analysis chapters (6-8) represent the nodes (levels from the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model) and sub-nodes that I applied to my data during data analysis. Each of these chapters sets out the findings from this research, summarising and synthesising the key points and themes raised by participants, and highlighting areas of disagreement or where further research is needed. I provide some analysis throughout these chapters, highlighting where these findings sit within or add new knowledge to our existing understanding of the CSEA threat. The conclusion provides further analysis and synthesises my findings and the contribution to knowledge that these provide. My analysis of the findings from this research resulted in the development of a set of recommendations (see chapter 9).

Research limitations

The above sections set out in detail the approach I have taken to selecting participants, conducting interviews and analysing my findings. While this has been a considered process that has sought to maximise the usefulness of my interviews and ensure I am able to provide new insights in response to my research questions, I recognise that some limitations remain.

A key limitation in my research findings relates to the number and diversity of my participants from the Philippines. I had hoped to include approximately 15 participants from the Philippines from a range of different backgrounds, including government and law enforcement. This would have enabled a more complete picture of the perspectives of professionals working in the Philippines and could have facilitated some interesting comparisons between the perspectives of, for example, Filipino and UK law enforcement professionals. Unfortunately, I was unable to acquire the number

or types of participants from the Philippines that I wanted to. I believe this was largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having to cancel a planned research and networking trip to Manila in March 2020 meant my primary method for identifying and engaging with potential participants was lost. The snow-ball recruitment method, outlined above, enabled me to make some valuable contributions in the Philippines, as participants helped to introduce me to their contacts in the country. However, despite multiple attempts I was unable to get a reply from any suggested contacts working in Philippine government or law enforcement. That said, I felt that the participants from NGOs working in the Philippines were still able to provide really interesting and helpful insights into the challenges they face. Further, my research focus on what Britain should be doing in response to transnational online CSEA meant that focusing on getting more participants from Britain was potentially more important to address my research questions. I was mindful not to expect participants from the Philippines to be able to suggest what Britain's response should be, and so targeting such questions as Britain-based participants was, I believe, more appropriate.

Another limitation of my research is that my participants were professionals and not those that could speak directly from the perspective of an offender about why people engage in transnational online CSEA. As set out above, I felt that my participants were still able to provide really valuable perspectives on this issue, with many positioned to provide a system-wide analysis that likely could not have come from individual offenders. However, I think that including the perspectives of offenders (and victims) will be critical for future research to ensure we capture a broader set of perspectives, particularly helping us understand offender pathways into this crime.

Chapter six: Individual level factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men

Introduction

This chapter explores individual level factors, which is the first layer of factors within the socio-ecological approach applied throughout this research (see chapter 4). These factors operate to facilitate British men engaging in transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines at the level of an individual. This includes individuals' sexual preferences and their personal behaviours and attitudes. As expected from the prevalence of these issues within existing literature, individual level factors were the most frequently and widely discussed by participants when asked about the factors that facilitate livestreamed offending against children in the Philippines. I recognise that offenders are shaped and influenced by the family, society, and culture in which they operate but this chapter focuses on the factors that operate for an individual offender in helping them to tackle any inhibitions and justify their offending behaviours.

There were a broad range of individual level factors that were discussed during my interviews, and this chapter focuses on the factors that were most frequently raised and for which there was the most in-depth discussions and debates. These are:

- the sexual preferences and interests of individuals,
- an individual's online behaviours and how this can cause offending to escalate,
- problematic offender beliefs towards their victims and about the abuse they are perpetrating, and
- the way that an individual perceives and manages the risk of getting caught.

In each section, I highlight where there was broad agreement, the debates surrounding the extent to which these factors are true for most offenders, and where further research is needed. Some of my participants could demonstrate their arguments with examples from specific cases, whereas others were clear that it was speculation, informed opinion, or their belief.

Many of the findings in this chapter align with what we know about other types of online offenders from existing CSEA literature. What these findings show is that the existing factors known to facilitate online CSEA more broadly are relevant to understanding transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines, but that there are additional layers to these factors and particularities to be considered in relation to this specific type of transnational offending. This can help provide a deeper understanding of why British men may specifically target children in the Philippines, which I hope can facilitate further exploration into how best to intervene to prevent them from offending in the first place.

Sexual interest and preferences

The existing literature on online CSEA highlights that a sexual interest in children is unsurprisingly a key factor that leads offenders to seek sexual interaction with, or content of, children. For example, a sexual motivation is one of Finkelhor's (1984) four preconditions to contact child sexual abuse offending, and Merdian et al's (2013a) typology lists paedophilia and general deviant sexual interest as two of the four motivations for CSAM offending. While existing literature does not explicitly state that this is also true for transnational online CSEA offending, it is unsurprising that this research supports that a sexual interest in children is also a factor for transnational online CSEA offenders that target children in the Philippines.

Transnational livestreaming of CSEA provides an easy, cheap, and quick means for an offender to translate their sexual motivation into sexual abuse with a child. In line with the existing literature on CSEA offending, this research found that whether someone engages in CSEA is more complex and nuanced than a simple question of whether they are a paedophile. There is a further layer when considering the role of sexual preferences when looking specifically at offending against children in the Philippines, and whether an additional factor could be a sexual attraction to Filipino children specifically. My participants had varying views on this, which led to insightful discussions about the intent and approach of offenders.

A sexual preference for children

Some research participants spoke about paedophilia as a key factor, which one participant explained as being 'almost akin to a sexuality; something that tends to emerge in middle childhood, tends to be life course persistent'. A British participant said, 'they'll do it because that is their sexual orientation', with another stating that there are offenders 'who are just naturally attracted to children, and that's always going to be something that's just a characteristic of them'. This suggests that for some offenders, their attraction to children cannot be remedied, but is something that will need to be managed throughout their lives. This aligns with the wider literature, which finds that paedophilia – or a sexual *preference* for children – is a key motivation for other types of CSEA offending (Seto et al, 2010).

Existing literature also suggests that as many as 'half of child sex offenders against children would not meet the diagnostic criteria for paedophilia' (Seto, 2009:391). Similarly, my participants spoke of offenders who do not have a sexual preference for children. A British participant who works with offenders said, 'half the people that we work with have relationships with adults, the majority of people we work with would not describe themselves as only being sexually interested in children, it's not an exclusive interest'. In cases where an offender does not have an exclusive sexual preference for children, there are further questions to be asked about why they start to engage in online sexual interactions with children, and numerous factors are likely to be at play.

Meeting sexual and intimacy needs

As discussed above, many of the offenders who participants in my study have worked with are in consensual adult relationships. The existing literature discusses how some of these offenders are seeking something that they do not have in their other relationships, for example, power and control, meeting sexual wants, and intimacy (see literature review). A Britain-based academic who has worked with CSEA offenders said 'some of these individuals are in relationships, but they're just not in intimate ones. They don't share things.' Likewise, an NGO worker said that sexual material is 'something that [offenders] use in order to meet intimacy needs.' This desire for intimacy was discussed by participants as something that can be particularly present in livestreamed abuse, in a greater way than many other forms of online

abuse. Transnational livestreaming of CSEA often (although not exclusively) occurs following the development of some kind of relationship between an offender and a family in the Philippines over a period. In contrast, the viewing of other types of CSAM may not have a relational element. Another NGO worker who deals directly with offenders set this out as follows:

> *'they may develop a relationship with the child and the provider [e.g. family member] because they may be engaging with them on a regular basis. There was a press report a couple of weeks ago, someone who spent 10s of 1000s of pounds on the same woman and child. Clearly, he may have felt there was a relationship with that woman and child, that he was engaged in something more than simple exploitation.'*

A law enforcement officer gave an example of a case they had worked where the offender had requested that the child hold up signs saying 'daddy [offender's name]'. He explained how there was a relationship that had built up between them that was 'a little bit more deep [*sic*] and a little bit more emotional maybe, than just getting your rocks off.' As the quote in the previous paragraph shows, this can help to legitimise the abuse for the offender, as they view it as a two-way relationship rather than exploitation. Offenders of livestreamed online CSEA against children in the Philippines can also position themselves as providing something positive for their victims due to the financial element of the abuse. This is discussed later in this chapter.

Appearance based sexual preferences and victim hierarchies

My participants tended to agree that there are some offenders who are paedophiles, and some who are not. However, on the question of whether offenders have sexual preferences relating to the physical appearance of their victims due to their race, and whether this may lead them to targeting children in the Philippines specifically, there was more disagreement.

Some participants said that victims' appearance and physical attributes can be a factor in driving offenders to target children of a specific race. One referenced a court case of a British offender who had abused children in the Philippines, and 'the judge comment[ed] on the fact that [the offender] had a particular preference for Philippine

children'. A law enforcement professional working in Britain spoke of a case in which the offender had abused against children in Peru and 'there was no other ethnicity and no other sex, these were Peruvian boys in a very specific age bracket'. Another said that when looking through offenders' devices they can sometimes see clear preferences, for example 'file lists of ten thousand files that an offender has possession of and literally every single one will relate to Filipino boys or just as easily, white girl aged 5'.

The way that offenders search for content was also used to show that the physical appearance of victims, including their race, is a factor for some offenders: 'quite often people will use search terms that are relative to southeast Asia… Because they will type in search terms like 'Filipino boy''. However, this participant also made the point that offenders may be searching for this because 'the Philippines has become very well known as the major hub'. Based on these responses, it is possible that some offenders target children in the Philippines because they are specifically attracted to the physical appearance of Filipino children.

Other participants spoke of a hierarchy of victims, and how white children were often the preference. A participant said that based on online paedophile manuals and dark web offender discussions, for white Western men 'it'll be white kids first, then it tends to jump to Southeast Asian kids, then it'll jump to Hispanic, South American and Central American children, and then finally then they seem to be seeking out African kids.' Another said 'the great majority of online offenders are Western white men. They tend to be attracted to white girls or Southeast Asian looking girls.' These comments from participants suggest that there can be racialised sexual preferences among those with a sexual interest in children. This hierarchy can be understood through a post-colonial lens (see discussion in chapter 3). White children may be some offenders' preference due to Western-defined notions of beauty, but Asian girls are also sought after due to other racialised stereotypes, such as the view that 'Oriental women' have 'unlimited sensuality' (Said, 1987: 207).

Availability and ease of access were other key factors raised by participants when discussing how offenders determine which children to target. Some participants were firmly of the view that this was more relevant than the appearance of victims. The

availability of Filipino children was often linked to the vulnerability of these victims and their families. A professional working in Britain with law enforcement and NGO experience said 'I wouldn't say it's necessarily the targeting of say a Filipino child per se, but I think it is a targeting of children that are most easily accessible through their vulnerabilities'. This corroborates what the existing literature says about offenders' knowledge of children's vulnerability driving them to target children in low-income countries (Mubarek, 2015; Napier, 2021). A participant made this point by arguing that offenders will likely move their 'business' to wherever there is vulnerability to be exploited: 'if we somehow were able to turn off the tap to the Philippines, then these offenders in the UK would be quite happy if [it moved onto] Cambodia' (British participant, law enforcement).

Meeting specific sexual fantasies

In addition to victims' physical appearance, participants discussed the range of other specific sexual fantasies held by offenders. This can include the age of their victims. Some participants suggested that a desire for very young children may drive offenders to target children in the Philippines, given difficulties in accessing very young children in Britain. For example:

> '…they can pay somebody to coordinate and direct the offending and when they need access to very young children, which seems to be a huge factor in a lot of these cases, the age range is really young, baby to five years old, so really young children that won't be accessing the internet themselves…I think that it's likely that an offender will find it very difficult to find a family in the UK who is so vulnerable and so desperate for money that they will consider facilitating this for them.' (British participant, NGO)

The bespoke nature of CSEA that is viewed and directed via livestream was also raised by participants as a factor that drives British men into this form of offending. Offenders may consume sexually abusive content of children via livestream instead of – or in addition to – other forms of CSAM because they can request whatever sexual acts and types of abuse they want to see. For example, a participant said, 'you might be able to download images or videos, but they're not going to be exactly what you

want'. A participants talked about the ways that Filipino facilitators of abuse, such as the family members, will do whatever offenders request:

> *'we've seen from chat logs and things like that, that whatever [the offender] may come out with, individuals there [e.g. the Philippines] will do it. We've had people go off and find other types of people to join the abuse and bring them back when they've been requested to do so [by the offender].'* (British participant, law enforcement)

Participants discussed offenders' high level of control and power through their ability to obtain the exact content they want, all from the comfort of their home. This is not possible to the same extent with any other type of CSEA offending. A British social worker who has worked on overseas CSEA cases talked about how offenders know 'I can get these children to do anything I want' but said 'I don't think that's specific to the Philippines, I think that's some offender's MO [modus operandi] around livestreaming'. The findings from this research suggest that for some of those engaging in transnational livestreaming of CSEA involving children in the Philippines, they may want bespoke content specifically of Filipino children. However, other offenders may want bespoke content, and while they are not concerned about the race of their victims, they know that the easiest and quickest way of getting this bespoke content is by targeting and paying for vulnerable Filipino children.

Online behaviours, habits, and escalation

The internet has enabled greater connection and access to information than was previously imaginable, but how some individuals use this technology and the impact it has on attitudes, beliefs and actions was discussed by participants of this research. In this section, I set out how the online behaviours and habits of individuals can be or become a factor that facilitates their CSEA offending, and the livestreaming of online CSEA involving children in the Philippines in particular. This includes the types of content someone views online and how this can change and escalate over time, including towards more extreme and illegal content. This supports existing literature on online CSEA offending, which as discussed in my literature review, highlights a link for some offenders between pornography consumption and the viewing of CSAM

(Walker et al, 2018; Merdian et al, 2013a; Winder and Gough, 2010). The findings I discuss in this section contribute to a considerable debate among those working to tackle online CSEA on whether legal sexual content is a kind of gateway for some people that leads to individuals accessing child sexual abuse material and engaging in online sexual interaction with children, such as livestreaming.

Although this research focused on the factors that lead to transnational online CSEA, some of the discussions during interviews and set out below were about CSEA offending more generally. Relevant to this discussion is the design and features of online services and how they are regulated, and whether these are contributing to problematic and sometimes illegal online behaviour.

The role of pornography in CSEA offending

During data collection, the role of pornography came up often – sometimes because I specifically asked about it, but usually because it was raised proactively by participants. Views differed, which appeared to reflect the professional position of the participant. Those working in law enforcement were more likely to argue that offenders use pornography escalation as an excuse or defence, whereas those working in therapeutic or mental health services saw pornography as a key facilitator in online offending. The lack of clear evidence on the role of pornography was brought up repeatedly, with some participants highlighting the need for more research in this area.

Some participants were convinced that there was a clear journey from legal pornography to the viewing of child sexual abuse material, with men seeking out more extreme content over time. For example, British participants working with offenders said the following:

> *'[A]lmost all the men I meet who view child abuse material, viewed pornography first. I'm not saying that that's the explanation for their behaviour. I think pornography oils the wheels of disinhibition and it reduces empathy.'*

> *'We need better explanations about why good people do bad things. So, I think one of the keys in all of this is actually pornography. Time and time again what we hear from people who have been arrested for viewing child sexual abuse*

material is that they have arrived at looking at the material through looking at mainstream legal pornography, looking for more and more extreme material over time.'

This escalation was viewed by some participants as taking offenders towards a range of various forms of extreme content, where child sexual abuse material is one category among many. One psychologist I spoke with described offenders' seeking of online content as akin to a drug addiction, where the searching for extreme content gives the dopamine hit. An ex-law enforcement professional talked about the kinds of content they would find on offenders' devices: 'it's not just child abuse material. I'll also see extreme and prohibited, so I'll see animal, bestiality and I'll see sadism'. Another said that on peer-to-peer file sharing sites[16] that are often used for accessing pornography 'there will be lots of different kinds of images, things like beheadings, people getting pushed in front of trains, that type of image, but also within that there will be indecent images of children'. This highlights potential overlaps with online CSEA offending and accessing other illegal content. For example, recent cases have demonstrated that some of those involved in online CSEA are also involved in right wing extremism[17] and animal cruelty.[18] More research is needed to understand these links, as this may aid in the detection and prevention of CSEA offending.

The potential influence of pornography on the online consumption and behaviours of British men was raised as a particular concern in relation to young people. A participant expressed their concern about this:

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[16] 'Peer-to-Peer (P2P) technology is a way to share music, video, and documents, play games, and facilitate online telephone conversations. The technology enables computers using the same or compatible P2P programs to form a network and share digital files directly with other computers on the network' (US Federal Trade Commission, https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/peer-peer-file-sharing-guide-business#Whatis)

[17] For example: https://www.gmp.police.uk/news/greater-manchester/news/news/2022/april/lancashire-man-jailed-following-investigation-by-counter-terrorism-police/ and https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/teenager-charged-far-right-terror-attacks-indecent-images-children-a9395561.html

[18] For example, in 2023 Adam Britton was charged with bestiality, having tortured dozens of dogs, and for possession of child sexual abuse material - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-66920778.

'the fact that it's so easy to access at such a young age and various people have suggested that leads to the downward spiral whereby people go from what might be considered regular pornography to increasingly extreme forms of pornography, and then in some cases towards child sexual abuse material, and the lack of regulatory provisions around that, I'm sure has an impact, however indirectly on this.' (British participant, NGO)

Specific types of pornography and the language used and normalised within it were also raised by some participants as being particularly problematic. Participants spoke of the normalisation of violence, content that depicts sex with young people – such as teen or school-girl porn – and aggressive and demeaning terminology used about women, such as slut and whore. A participant talked powerfully about this and how extreme and even illegal content can become regarded as normal:

'The violence towards women, the aggression in sexuality has become a commodity, and it's normalising what sex and what videos or displays of sexuality are appropriate. It's just the blurring of lines, where now we know, on the mainstream pornography websites there's CSAM on there, there's non-consensual videos, rape videos. I think all of that has served to create this culture where, why is child sexual abuse that horrible? Actually, it's quite similar to a lot of the content that's already out there and being normalized for men and women at very young ages. The longer you've used something that's showing sexual violence or not non-consensual content, that becomes eroticized, or sexualized, it's no longer rape, it's something that somebody is turned on by.' (Filipino participant, NGO)

Participants' concerns about the presence of illegal content, including child sexual abuse material, on otherwise legitimate and legal pornography sites is a well reported issue that has rightly caused significant alarm among policy makers, NGOs and the wider public. For example, a US campaign 'Trafficking hub'[19] has highlighted that sexual content from child and adult victims of sex trafficking has been shared on the popular pornography site Pornhub. Recent research consisting of anonymous surveys

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[19] https://traffickinghub.com/

with dark web CSAM offenders highlights that these are legitimate concerns, as '32% of respondents have encountered CSAM or links to CSAM on a pornography website', with Pornhub the most frequently cited platforms (Protect Children ry, 2024:7). The presence of illegal content on mainstream pornography sites risks normalising child sexual abuse material and makes accessing this material much easier – both intentionally and accidentally.

When thinking about how and whether pornography can be a factor specifically relating to the livestreaming of sexual abuse of children in the Philippines, there was some discussion with participants about racialised pornography as potentially contributing to a demand for sexual interaction with Southeast Asian women and girls. For example, a participant suggested 'if that person has got an interest in Southeast Asian women, which tend to be overly sexualised, again I think because of the media and the adult industry, it breaks down the barriers before you start.' Another said, 'I'm sure there will be pornography links that you can follow that are sex with Asian women or girls, and how they are then depicted in those must have an influence.' These quotes speak to the way that women of colour are sexualised, and pornography has at least helped to cement some of these stereotypes. Gail Dines argues that in pornography, Asian women are depicted as 'sexually exotic, enticing and submissive…naïve, obedient, petite, cute and innocent…will do anything to please a man' (2010:124). Such stereotypes can be used to normalise and justify treating Asian women (and girls) in a way that would not be considered with white women, and further highlights how racialised preferences – potentially formed due to racist stereotypes about the sexuality of these women and girls – can be a factor. The role of racism and racialised sexual stereotypes are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

While many participants believed that pornography played a role in offenders' journeys to illegal content and in desensitising viewers to extreme and violent content, others took the view that the narrative around pornography escalation was unevidenced at best and fabricated by offenders at worse. For example, a participant gave this account of their work with CSAM offenders:

> *'So, whenever I spoke to child sex offenders, one of the questions we'd ask is 'why did you do this, what has led you to look at these images?' and we would*

get a lot of people say it's pop-ups, I click on a pop-up and that's what I get taken through to… if you're suddenly taken through on a pop-up then why have you got three thousand, four thousand images on your computer?' (British participant, ex-law enforcement)

This idea that offenders use the excuse that they accidentally viewed illegal content while looking at legal pornography was also echoed by a Britain-based academic who has done research with offenders. He said, 'Often [offenders] will say, "oh, I just stumbled on it". Again, my experience is that that's a face-saving excuse'. Another participant questioned whether CSEA can be blamed solely on pornography, commenting that 'if you did not just a literature review but a historical review, you'd find out that some people were offending long before pornography was written on the cave walls.' Academic research supports the view that offenders name pornography as a reason for their offending. For example, in one study based on online surveys with people who had viewed CSAM, the offenders named 'accidental access, curiosity, or addiction to pornographic material as reasons for their behaviour' (Merdian et al, 2013b:2). Whether these are legitimate and true explanations or 'face-saving' excuses are subject to debate and require further research.

Escalation to livestreaming of CSEA

This section explores the online journey of British men that leads specifically to the livestreaming of CSEA involving children in the Philippines. It is arguable that someone could 'stumble upon' other forms of child sexual abuse material when using the internet for unrelated purposes. However, the nature of livestreaming as generally an interactive, offender-directed crime that often involves the exchange of money, makes it incredibly unlikely that someone could accidentally find themselves watching a livestream of child sexual abuse. Participants discussed how offenders get to the point of actively seeking out and engaging in this criminal activity.

Given that this is a relatively involved and proactive means of accessing child sexual abuse content, some participants suggested that it may be that offenders come to livestreaming after already having engaged with other forms of CSEA:

> *'You don't just jump into seeking out a family in the Philippines to send financial payments to and then coordinate the livestreaming. It's a behaviour that takes a bit of escalation and it's likely that one of the introductions and breaking that barrier is child sexual abuse material.'*

A British participant said that some of the offenders they have worked with used a wide range of online sexual material, which could include 'using livestreaming from other countries as a form of live [legal] pornography, where they can direct anything that's going on, and this is before things might move on to the access of children within that livestreaming'. This suggests that legal livestreaming sites where people can pay for live sexual interaction with an adult could act as a gateway to livestreaming with children. A UK law enforcement officer made the point that 'there are a whole bunch of different 'camming'[20] websites that are dedicated to Filipinos, like Sexy Asian Cams'. They argued that engaging with such sites may be the start of developing a specific interest in content involving Asian women – and potentially girls. Further, sites such as these speak to the racialised nature of how Asian women are sexualised. The widespread availability and popularity of Asian camming sites is indicative of a broader and well-established sex trade in southeast Asia, which has often been fuelled by Western men. A participant made this connection, saying 'the Philippines would have been one of those destinations for sex tourism, and so it follows that it would be where the online abuse moves to as well'.

Links between the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT) and the livestreaming of CSEA

As previously discussed, the Philippines and surrounding countries in Southeast Asia have a well-established and well-known sex trade. For a long time, men from high-income countries have travelled to countries in Southeast Asia to engage with sex workers, and sometimes sexually abusive activity with a child. As discussed in Chapter 3, this may be the result of intentionally seeking out children to abuse, or offenders could be opportunistic, for example, having sex with a child when that is offered to

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[20] Camming is the common term used for pornography sites where viewers can pay to have 1:1 interaction with a performer (or 'cam girl') via video or 'cam'.

them at a brothel. The extent to which those who travel to the Philippines also commit online CSEA and pay for and direct livestreamed abuse – and vice versa – is not discussed in the literature, but this issue did come up with some of my participants who suggested there is a link.

A Britain-based social worker with experience of social work overseas described some of the CSEA offenders they worked with in the Britain who had plans to commit overseas offences: 'there were absolutely some offenders who, their pathway was about becoming a transnational child sex offender'. Someone from an international NGO stated that there is: 'a high percentage of likelihood that most offenders that are identified and convicted of transnational child sexual abuse offences have a history of escalating behaviour through the introduction into child sexual abuse material'. Similarly, a law enforcement professional explained that in his experience it doesn't always 'end' with livestreaming and that he has seen offenders make requests to travel and meet a child in the Philippines:

> *'I've read them plenty of times, where the guy will say 'if I come over this place will she do this?' 'Yes of course she will'. There's a real argument as to whether that's a genuine offer or just a way of getting more money out of that person, but again that continuum could keep going until that person does fly over there, engages in contact abuse.'*

It is possible that for some offenders, making these requests and asking about what else they can do to the child is all part of their fantasising and there is little intent to actual travel. However, it is feasible that, just as offenders may escalate through other types of sexual content, their offending may continue to escalate beyond livestreaming. The nature of livestreaming in the Philippines where there is often a well-established long-term relationship between the offender and a family / families may further help to facilitate travelling to offend as the offender has a contact in the Philippines. The literature supports that there is often an overlap between online and contact offending, with one study finding as many as 55% of CSAM offenders self-reported as having committed a contact offence against a child (Babchishin et al, 2011). A more recent study which surveyed over 1,500 dark web users found that 'nearly half (42%) of the respondents reported that they had sought direct contact with

children through online platforms after viewing CSAM, and 58% described feeling afraid that viewing CSAM might lead to sexual acts with a child or adult' (Insoll et al, 2022:2).

Participants also suggested that a reverse relationship could exist, whereby those who have travelled to the Philippines to abuse children then continue the relationship online once they are home. A participant said this is something they see:

> *'these sex tourists come here, and they go back to the UK. That's when they go online and they already know the adult pimps, they know the traffickers… they spend maybe 1, 2, 3, 4 months but then they go back to the UK and then they're online to follow up with their victims.'* (Filipino participant, NGO)

This suggests that the Philippines' reputation as a sex tourism hot spot has resulted in its reputation for online CSEA too. This relationship also has implications for legislative and law enforcement responses (see chapter 8).

It should be noted however, that participants recognised that this link is not always present, and that there are physical and financial inhibitors that will prevent many online offenders from travelling to the Philippines to engage in contact offending. For example, some participants made the point that it is a big jump to move into contact offending, and that many would not make that step. While the abuse remains online, offenders can tell themselves that they are not directly harming the child – although we know that victims of online-only abuse still experience significant harm (see chapter 1).

The point was also made that the livestreaming of CSEA involving children in the Philippines is more accessible and relatively easy to engage in, compared with travelling overseas. Whereas previously people had to travel to abuse children in the Philippines, 'now, they could just identify and facilitate and arrange for that abuse to take place through any type of video platform' (NGO professional working in Britain), and 'the Internet has opened up this whole possibility of being able to take part in the abuse of a child from your bedroom' (academic working in Britain). For some offenders, rather than livestreaming leading them to travel to the Philippines, it may remove the need for them to do so. Crucially, this should not be used to suggest or

argue that the availability of online abuse is in any way protecting children. Offenders may choose to commit their abuse over the internet, instead of travelling to commit the abuse in-person, which 'enables offenders to disassociate CSEM[21] from actual harm of children' (IJM, 2020: 25). These offenders are nonetheless committing abuse and causing significant harm to the child (see Chapter 1). Just as those who view child sexual abuse images are fuelling the demand for the physical and emotional harm of children, those directing abuse via livestream are – even more directly – responsible for the abuse that occurs to these children.

Problematic offender beliefs and attitudes

When considering the factors that operate at the level of an individual offender to facilitate transnational online child sexual exploitation and abuse in the Philippines, the beliefs and attitudes of those offenders are central. This is a significant area of focus within the existing literature (see chapter 3), with the fields of psychology and criminology making valuable contributions to this. My participants provided rich and varied insights into the diverse beliefs and attitudes of transnational livestreaming offenders, and how offenders articulate these to explain, minimise and justify their offending.

This section explores the key themes from my data relating to offender beliefs and attitudes. This includes how offenders dehumanise their victims and the role of race and 'othering' as part of this; the specific psychological characteristics of offenders, such as antisocial attitudes and a lack of empathy; and the role of permission-giving thoughts, including a belief that they are not causing harm or that they are helping a child and their family.

Attitudes towards victims: dehumanisation, racism, and Othering

As discussed in my literature review, permission-giving thoughts are 'statements that may increase the individual's risk of translating internal motivation into offending behaviour' (Kettleborough and Merdian, 2017). Permission-giving thoughts may be used by an offender to minimise or deny the harm they are causing, or to justify what

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[21] Child sexual exploitation material (synonymous with CSAM)

they are doing. The literature review provides examples of how offenders of online CSEA rely on permission-giving thoughts. This review highlights that existing literature does not explore the role of permission-giving thoughts in the context of transnational online CSEA, and whether offenders might have certain attitudes or use specific permission-giving thoughts to justify targeting children in the Philippines. During my interviews, I asked participants how they think the attitudes and beliefs of offenders can facilitate livestreamed abuse against children in the Philippines, and whether these factors differ from those that facilitate British men abusing children within Britain or other high-income countries.

Many participants talked about the ways in which offenders can separate themselves from the abuse, and how livestreaming against children in the Philippines enables them to do this, potentially to a greater extent than many other forms of CSEA. That offenders perceive online CSEA as less harmful than contact offending is reported in the existing literature on CSEA offending (Winder and Gough, 2010; Rimer, 2019). Although the existing literature does not consider this in relation to livestreaming, some participants suggested this is also a factor here. The key difference is that during the livestreaming of online CSEA, offenders are often personally directing the abuse of those children, meaning it is harder to see the logic that they themselves are not creating the victims or causing the harm. However, it is possible that the abuse happening via a screen helps them to feel disconnected from what they are watching. For example:

> *'the guys that I've caught speaking to people overseas were very dismissive. There was no embarrassment, there was no shame. I think this is the danger… because you're not in the room there's a disconnect. And when it comes to livestreaming, I wonder if they're seeing it as a movie as opposed to a child who is actually being abused.'* (British participant, ex-law enforcement)

In the case of livestreamed CSEA against children in the Philippines, there is not just virtual distance created by the screen, but physical distance too. Some participants discussed how this can help facilitate offending by enabling offenders to 'Other' their victim. In this scenario, Said's concept of Orientalism as a specific form of Othering that occurs towards people in Asia may help to explain some British men's attitudes

towards their Filipino child victims (see the literature review for discussions on 'Othering' and Orientalism). The concept of Othering was referred to by one participant who said, 'I think there's something about the geographical distance that actually enables offenders to 'Other' their victims, so I think victim empathy is decreased'. There is an interesting and unanswered question about the extent to which the forming of an online relationship between an offender and their victim / victim's family may reduce an offender's ability to Other their victim.

By Othering their victims, offenders can justify doing things to these children that they may not consider doing to other children, including British children. This was articulated by a participant in the following way:

> *'it's what boys and men are just told: "this is okay. It's okay to see this culture, this race of people as more sexualised or as more desirous of violence", and then they just see them as sex objects, I think, they don't really see them as people anymore. They're just a means to an end.'* (Filipino participant, NGO)

Similarly, a law enforcement officer said they had seen the following scenario play out countless times, and although this participant was not speaking specifically about offenders who targeted children in other countries, it demonstrates how some offenders differentiate between the children they victimise, and those they know personally:

> *'somebody that's physically abused a child, turns around and is absolutely horrified that you ask them the question 'have you abused your own children?' They think that is unbelievable that you think they'd actually do that to their own. So, I don't think that's any different to people thinking that there's a distinction between travelling to the Philippines and Cambodia for a holiday and abusing children, and never doing it when you get back to the UK.'* (British participant, law enforcement)

The above quotes demonstrate how geographical distance between an offender and their victim, further aided by the abuse occurring via a screen, can help to facilitate this abuse. However, these factors cannot be viewed in isolation. The physical distance also means there is a racial difference between the offender and their victim. As

discussed earlier in this chapter, this can further enable some offenders to justify their abuse, while recognising that for other offenders, racial difference may not be a factor.

Attitudes about the impact of abuse: help or harm

During interviews, numerous participants discussed how offenders will tell themselves a story about their victims and the abuse they are committing to try and justify what they are doing. Some of these permission-giving thoughts are more specific to offending against children in the Philippines and are less likely to apply when / if a British man targets children closer to home.

One of these is the distorted belief that they are helping poor families, enabling them to frame themselves and their behaviour positively. For example, a participant suggested 'there's almost a kind of rescuing knight notion to it. They're getting the money, I'm getting this, it's a contract. Everybody's happy'. Participants from a range of professions suggested this could be a factor for offenders targeting children in the Philippines. This participant was able to provide a specific example:

> *'a London-based offender who we'd arrested for livestreaming abuse… said to us in an interview with a straight face 'if I don't do this how are these children going to eat?' And I mean, clearly that's just a distortion to try and justify his behaviour.'* (British participant, law enforcement)

This idea that they are helping a child, or their family, was suggested to extend beyond just the financial benefits. Viewing these children as needy in all senses means the offender can view themselves as meeting multiple needs. A Britain-based NGO worker and ex-law enforcement officer provided the following insight from their experience:

> *'to say to them, and that type of offender, 'look, what you're doing is wrong', 'no, no, no, it's not wrong. It weren't [sic] my fault. No one loved that child, I'm the one that gave that child some love and affection'. Cognitive distortion.'.*

Participants were clear that at least for most offenders, this 'rescuing knight notion' is not something they really believe to be true, but it is a narrative they tell themselves to make them feel better about their offending. There was also a view that offenders will try and justify their behaviour in any way they can, and that is not specific to those who

target children in the Philippines. For example, a participant remarked 'that they're always convincing themselves that they're doing a good thing, and I wouldn't say it's anything to do with whether it's somebody in the Philippines, I would just say that that is offenders across the board; they're convincing themselves that this is OK'. These findings suggest that while many offenders try and convince themselves that what they are doing is okay, the narratives that livestreaming offenders create or rely upon may be different.

Other livestreaming offenders targeting children in the Philippines may not go as far as saying they are actively helping a child but may try and deny that they are causing harm. This may be through placing the blame on the family and those that are physically abusing the child. For example, it was suggested by a participant that offenders 'perceive the responsibility as lying with the parents. If the parents are happy for this to happen, then actually they shouldn't feel any guilt around that' (speaking as they believe offenders think). Another participant said that offenders try and tell themselves 'the person who's taking the money is the one who's responsible for making this happen'.

Participants also discussed that offenders may convince themselves they're not causing harm through the distorted view that children enjoy sex. This permission-giving thought is reported in existing literature for wider CSEA offending (Sheehan and Sullivan, 2010), and a significant proportion of 'minor attracted persons' hold the belief that there is 'nothing inherently harmful in adult-child sexual activity' (Spriggs et al, 2018: 793). Some participants suggested this also applies in relation to the livestreaming of CSEA of children in the Philippines. One said offenders tell themselves "the children obviously were enjoying what was happening because they were smiling". This narrative may be further strengthened in offenders' minds by racist stereotypes relating to the hyper-sexuality of Southeast Asian children.

Whether offenders genuinely believe the stories they tell themselves is less important than whether these stories are a factor that facilitate livestreaming abuse. Such stories can help offenders overcome the inhibitors that may otherwise stop them from engaging in this abuse. This aligns with the existing literature, which finds that the use of permission-giving thoughts is a way that offenders justify their behaviour (see

literature review). The findings from this research suggest there are additional narratives and stories that offenders can draw on when they are offending or thinking about offending against children in the Philippines.

Antisocial Attitudes of Offenders

To rely, at least in part, upon permission-giving thoughts, suggests that on one level the British men involved in this crime know that what they are doing is wrong and they therefore develop their own counter narrative. However, participants in this research suggested that for some offenders, the question of right and wrong and consideration of harm was not really a factor. For example, a UK participant said how in some cases offenders will say 'I really don't care. They're just bodies. And I have no interest whatsoever in their real-world life, their real-world experiences, as long as I'm entertained'. He went on to add that in online forums he has seen sadistic conversations between offenders in which 'there's a pleasure and delight in [children's] suffering'. These types of offenders were considered the worst and the hardest to work with. This idea of there being more extreme and sadistic offenders among CSEA offenders is also reflected in the literature. For example, one study discusses that some offenders 'may be more likely to endorse violent and/or sadistic thoughts and behaviours' and note higher levels of engagement with deviant pornography and criminal activity among some offender groups (Merdian et al, 2013: 12).

Some participants also discussed the attitude that some offenders hold about the vulnerability of these children as something to be exploited. It could be argued that this is linked to Britain's past as a coloniser, and the Philippine's past as the colonised. For example, a Filipino participant told me that Filipino people are often trusting of foreigners and believe that marrying a foreigner will 'save them'. She added that 'foreigners pick up on that also, especially those in the UK; they know it's easy to just victimise Filipino women and children because they hold high regards for foreigners.' This can make Filipinos an easy target for British offenders, who exploit their position of privilege (which has historic, colonial roots) to gain access to vulnerable children. Some British participants talked about how offenders will always target the most vulnerable, and that is not specific to the livestreaming of CSEA against children in the

Philippines. The Rotherham abuse scandal[22] was mentioned multiple times as an example of offenders identifying vulnerable children and exploiting their lack of protection. Filipino children are known to be vulnerable for various social and economic reasons, but when combined with some of the other factors discussed throughout this research, this vulnerability may be particularly easy for British offenders to exploit.

Beliefs about law enforcement and getting caught

Another theme that was both identified in my literature review and that arose during this research, relates to offenders' attitudes around getting caught by law enforcement. This was raised by participants in the context of an offender's fear of getting caught impacting on the way they operate online and the types of children they target. It was also discussed in relation to offenders who believe they will not get caught and their attitudes about the nature of child sexual abuse and views and beliefs about Filipino law and law enforcement. We know from existing literature on online CSEA that to varying degrees most offenders use techniques to avoid detection by law enforcement. When abuse is committed across borders against children in a vastly different legal and cultural context, offenders may find it easier to evade law enforcement, or to convince themselves that they can.

It is well reported that offenders discuss and share tactics for evading law enforcement online in discussion forums and through the sharing of 'paedophile manuals'. This can include the use of encrypted technologies and proxy servers, online pseudonyms, and private communication channels (Balfe et al, 2015). That the livestreaming of CSEA is relatively easy to hide and difficult for law enforcement to detect was raised numerous times by my participants as a key factor in driving offenders to target children using this technology. This was discussed both as a belief held by offenders, and as a factual point that livestreaming is often harder to detect than, for example, the sharing and storing of child sexual abuse material.

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[22] Widespread child sexual exploitation and abuse that took place in Rotherham, UK between 1997 and 2013. See https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/operation-stovewood-rotherham-child-sexual-abuse-investigation.

Livestreaming of CSEA was regarded by participants as a particularly hidden form of CSEA offending. Unlike other forms of online CSEA, livestreaming of CSEA happens in real-time and there is no evidence on offenders' device that abuse has taken place, unless the livestream is recorded. A participant said this is why offenders may choose to livestream as opposed to other forms of online CSEA, as they 'feel safer being able to do that than [they] would necessarily consuming images [they've] downloaded and storing them on physical equipment'. Participants also highlighted that unless offenders choose to record the livestream there is no evidence that can be reviewed by law enforcement to prove that an offence has been committed. One law enforcement participant talked about the challenges they face with livestreaming as there will be a chat log and a record of a video call, but 'you don't know what happened on that [call] and you're never going to prove what happened'.

Participants said that for some offenders this was a coincidental factor, and they choose to commit offences via livestream for other reasons, but for others there is a deliberate choice to opt for livestreaming because they know they are less likely to get caught: 'I do think there is some tech awareness of some offenders… this exchange is not stored anywhere, it's gone. And I think there is an awareness of that'. In contrast, another participant said that there are offenders who don't really think about the risk of one technology over the other, saying 'I don't think people go into it thinking 'I can get away with it because there's no evidence', because most people don't know what evidence we get from Skype'. He did recognise that there is a bias here because, in his words, 'we only catch the stupid ones'. This speaks to a wider challenge in understanding online offenders as those who are known to law enforcement or interacting with therapeutic services are not necessarily representative of the wider offender community. It is likely for livestreaming offenders there is variation in their level of awareness of evasion techniques and how they perceive their risk of getting caught. The more serious offenders are perhaps the most likely to be part of online forums where they can get tips from other offenders on the use anonymising technologies and techniques.

While my research is focused on the factors within Britain that facilitate this form of abuse, various social, economic, and legal factors within the Philippines are also relevant. British offenders' perceptions of these things may drive them to target the

Philippines. For example, some participants discussed the reputation of the Philippines' sex trade as something that contributes to offenders' beliefs about the Philippines, which were often misguided and at times racist. These can contribute to offenders' beliefs that they will not get caught. A British participant from an NGO talked about the reputation of Southeast Asia, saying 'some of the travelling offenders clearly see it as a fairly easy-going attitude towards sex offending against children in that region' and another participant commented that some offenders believe 'in the Philippines, this is what they do'. Although my participants used examples of how travelling sex offenders viewed the Philippines, this reputation was viewed to spill over to facilitate online abuse. Online offenders who are aware of this reputation may view the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries as obvious and easy targets for online offending. If people can travel to these places and physically abuse children without getting caught, the logic is likely to extend to a view that you can do the same thing online and not get caught.

Participants also discussed how offenders may view the Philippines as a safer country to target because of how they perceive the efforts and abilities of Filipino law enforcement. A participant said, 'I think there is a belief or an awareness that law enforcement and child protection responses in-country are probably not great' with another saying, 'it's a perception that the Philippines won't have as robust a response as the UK'. Offenders' views of Filipino law enforcement capabilities extend to their ability to detect the offender in the first place, and then the likelihood of being able to prosecute an offender who lives in another country. A UK policy official surmised that offenders may feel they are 'less likely to be caught because [Filipino] police officers are unlikely to have the technological means to prosecute or seek to prosecute somebody on the other side of the world'.

Offender ignorance was also raised as a factor that facilitates this form of abuse. Some law enforcement participants were quick to point out that offenders' perceptions of the risk and law enforcement capabilities, both in the Philippines and Britain, were often wrong and that offenders don't have a grasp on how Philippine and UK law enforcement agencies work together to detect and prosecute offenders. There is also offender ignorance relating to the law in the Philippines and the UK. A law enforcement

officer said British offenders do not always realise that they are committing a UK offence when they abuse children in another country:

> *'Many of them, there's just a simple degree of ignorance, they think they're not doing anything wrong, they're unaware of the provisions of Section 72,[23] in terms of prosecution, and they're unaware that they are committing an offence in the UK under UK law.'*

That offenders are concerned about getting caught by law enforcement and utilise technologies and techniques to minimise the risk of detection is both unsurprising and well documented in existing literature on other forms of online CSEA. These findings add to existing knowledge in this area and suggest that livestreaming is itself a type of technology that is perceived to reduce the risk of getting caught. Further, targeting children in the Philippines provides an additional sense of safety because offenders believe that abuse against children is normal in the Philippines and that Filipino law enforcement do not have the same capabilities as UK law enforcement to identify and prosecute them. This arguably adds to an already favourable picture for offenders, given that UK law enforcement have themselves said that current arrest rates are just the tip of the iceberg compared to the scale of offending (Clark, 2017). Further, in 2020/21 'almost two-thirds of cases (65%) were closed because of some form of evidential difficulties' (Karsna, 2022: 26). A Filipino participant was cognisant of the challenges facing Philippine law enforcement and called for greater collaboration and capacity building, led by the UK and other Western nations. This will help to counter the reputation of the Philippines as a destination for child sexual abuse – whether online or offline.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the range of factors that fall within the first level of my socio-ecological model. I have demonstrated that there are numerous individual level factors that likely combine and overlap to facilitate British men sexually abusing children in the Philippines, particularly via livestream. Many of these factors are like

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[23] Section 72 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003: Offences outside the United Kingdom. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/section/72.

those that we know facilitate other forms of online and offline CSEA, such as a sexual interest in children, attitudes towards their victims and beliefs about the nature of abuse. However, this research provides a unique and new contribution to our understanding of the threat, as it suggests there are additional layers and manifestations of these factors in relation to the transnational livestreaming of CSEA. While other CSEA offenders may have specific sexual preferences, some transnational livestreaming offenders may have sexual preferences that relate to the race of the children they target. While other CSEA offenders may tell themselves they are not causing harm because they are only looking at images, some livestreaming offenders may tell themselves that Filipino children are different and do not experience harm in the same way.

This chapter contributes to existing debates about the causes of and pathways to CSEA offending and provides new insights into the factors that can specifically facilitate the transnational livestreaming of CSEA by British men against children in the Philippines. This includes the complex debate surrounding the role of pornography, with many participants believing there to be an intuitive connection between pornography consumption and engaging in online CSEA. While there was some debate about the extent to which pornography played a role, there was a broad consensus that further research looking at how CSEA offenders have interacted with online content over time is desperately needed.

Another significant debate surfaced through this research relates to the role of race and racist attitudes held by offenders. Some participants argued that the race of victims is rarely, if ever, a factor for offenders, believing that availability, vulnerability, and ease of access are the key drivers in most cases. Others were strongly of the view that racial difference between British offenders and their Filipino victims can be a key factor in facilitating this abuse. This may be a result of racist attitudes that enable an offender to dehumanise their victim, justify their abuse because they are helping a 'needy' family, or tell themselves they are doing what is 'normal' in that culture. The issue of race and how and why children of colour are targeted is a hugely under-researched area throughout the CSEA literature. Given that children in Southeast Asia are so often the target of men in high-income countries, it is imperative that we better

understand whether and how race can be a factor that facilitates British men's offending.

Chapter seven: Social and cultural level factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines

Introduction

While it is individuals who engage in sexual abuse, these individuals exist within a society and culture that has shaped them. This chapter looks at the range of factors that fall within the second level of my socio-ecological model – social and cultural factors. These factors constitute an individual's immediate environment, including their community and the social norms within it. The hope is that social and cultural norms operate to deter and prevent an individual from committing a crime, but in some cases, individuals ignore these norms, or worse, norms may be permissive or act to normalise or diminish the harm caused by a crime – in this case child sexual abuse. This could be through the social messages' individuals receive in their childhood, what they see and read in the media, and what is present and accessible online, including in online sub-cultures.

Although research into the factors that operate at a social level to facilitate online CSEA is sparse, most of my participants contributed thoughtful ideas and insights into how British culture and norms – both online and offline – has been historically permissive or dismissive of sexual abuse. Participants also discussed the ongoing role of social and cultural norms in facilitating online livestreamed abuse against children in the Philippines. This is not to say that the mainstream view within British culture is that child sexual abuse is okay. Indeed, this research highlights that there is a strong narrative within Britain that child sexual abuse is an abhorrent and inexcusable crime; but that subtle messages and sub-cultures may operate to undermine the dominant narrative. Further, the way that the media feeds into and perpetuates a view of child sex offenders can also be unhelpful for those seeking help.

I asked my participants what the social and cultural factors are within Britain that can facilitate transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines by British men. In this chapter I discuss the dominant themes that emerged in my data during these

discussions. First, I look at what participants said about British social attitudes about race and the interplay of this with child sexual exploitation and abuse. As some participants discussed Britian's colonial history as a relevant factor in transnational online CSEA, I highlight post-colonial theory as a lens through which these social attitudes can be understood. The chapter then explores the social views held within Britain about children and sex, as well as the role of the internet and wider media in establishing or normalising problematic views about children's sexuality. Finally, I look at the social and cultural factors within the Philippines, including poverty, attitudes towards sex and sexual abuse, and attitudes towards foreign offenders. Crucially, I do not discuss these Filipino factors to highlight or suggest changes that need to be made by or within the Philippines, but rather to understand how social and cultural factors within the Philippines are understood and exploited by British men to facilitate their offending. I do so in consideration of how the perceptions and attitudes within Britain about the Philippines can be understood and addressed.

British attitudes about race and nationalism

Recent events, protests, scandals and shifting social attitudes have highlighted that racism is prevalent in many parts of British society, including for example, higher education institutions (Mohdin, 2021) and the Metropolitan police (Dodd, 2023). This research suggests that racist attitudes within Britain can also be a factor that facilitates transnational online CSEA. In this section, I discuss how racist social attitudes within Britain towards the Philippines and Filipino people operate to facilitate some offenders targeting children in the Philippines. I explore the impact of colonialism and how this continues to shape attitudes within Britain – and the Philippines – and how racism operates at a societal level to enable individual offenders to justify or minimise the harm they are causing to Filipino children.

The timing of my data collection (2020-2021) may have influenced participants' willingness to talk about race and racism as a factor that can facilitate transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines. As discussed in Chapter 2, my data collection coincided with a peak of protests and activities relating to the Black Lives Matter movement, following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. I think the prominent public discourse on race enabled and encouraged participants to engage

in insightful and thoughtful conversations that are desperately needed in this area. In some interviews, I asked participants to think specifically about race and racism, but often participants initiated these discussions, and referenced the BLM movement unprompted. Some participants suggested that the ways that people of colour are treated and viewed is relevant to transnational livestreaming of CSEA against children in the Philippines.

Colonialism and British social attitudes today

In the previous chapter I discussed the role of racist attitudes held by individual offenders, and how permission-giving thoughts relating to their victims can help facilitate offending. While there is significant overlap with the considerations and issues raised in the previous chapter, in this section I discuss how my participants perceived racism within Britain at a social and cultural level, and the impact of this on CSEA offenders.

Some participants highlighted that Britain's history of colonialism continues to shape public consciousness. Britain's formal status as a colonial power ended as recently as 1997 with the return of Hong Kong to the Chinese Administration. This came about after a slow process of other colonised countries fighting for independence prior to, and throughout the 20th Century. However, Britain has continued constitutional links to its 14 Overseas Territories (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 2023) and the British monarch remains Head of the Commonwealth. Britain's colonialism is often regarded positively, with as many as 44% of Britons saying they were proud of Britain's colonial history (Stone, 2016). It has been argued that this pride in Britain's colonial history and nostalgia for the days of the British Empire continues to shape Britain's foreign policy and was a central component in the British public's decision to vote to leave the European Union in 2016. For example, a UK academic in the field of law and race wrote in a blog that 'in the discourse of some of those arguing for a Leave vote was a tendency to romanticise the days of the British Empire, despite widespread amnesia about the details of Britain's imperial history' (El-Enany, 2020).

Issues relating to entitlement, ownership and superiority were reflected in some of the responses provided by my participants. The following discussion can again be explored through Said's theory of Orientalism, as briefly discussed in my literature

review. For example, some participants suggested that the belief in national superiority due to Britain's colonial history can facilitate CSEA offending against children in the Philippines. A participant talked about people in Britain as having an 'over-inflated sense of importance; that we used to be this Empire Country… where we went into countries, and we took the things that we wanted'. A participant from a British NGO who had spent a lot of time in the Philippines said they observed of British people in the Philippines that 'often they behave like a colonial people, they feel important, the masters of the universe'. Participants suggested that by viewing themselves as colonisers, some British people think they have the right to go into the Philippines – whether in person or virtually via the internet – and take what they want from the children they abuse.

Participants spoke about offenders' attitudes of entitlement and linked this with Britain's colonial history. A participant referred to 'a post-colonial ideation' whereby offenders say to themselves 'we're richer than them, it's probably OK'. Another participant talked about this sense of entitlement being particularly pronounced for offenders who pay to engage in CSEA:

> *'that entitlement also has a rather kind of imperialistic and racist undertone as well. And it's kind of to say, because I'm a Western man, and I'm a white man, my need for entertainment, and distraction and fulfilment and excitement is actually greater than a child's need for dignity. And because I have money that I've earned through my hard work, I'm therefore in a position to pay for things that I want.'* (British participant, NGO)

Existing CSEA literature argues that entitlement is an example of an implicit theory held by child sex offenders: 'offenders with distortions of entitlement rely on special pleadings for their particular offenses. They believe that their actions are justifiable due to something intrinsic, and because of their inherent superiority, their targets are not truly victims' (Steel et al, 2020:2). This research suggests that attitudes within Britain about our colonial history and a related sense of inflated importance may be a factor that contributes to a distortion of entitlement. This may help some offenders justify their abuse against children in the Philippines. Entitlement enables offenders to view their victims as inherently inferior; when the child is a different race, this sense of

entitlement can have an additional racist layer to it – the coloniser versus the colonised.

During interviews, there was significant discussion and disagreement among participants about the extent to which race played a role in the livestreaming of CSEA, with some participants talking in depth about the impact of victims' race and racial stereotyping. A British participant commented that 'attitudes towards south Asian women and children generally are definitely misogynistic and derogatory, and they're seen as items rather than people'. A British policy professional said they believed racism is rife across society and spoke about *a hierarchy and value system that is placed on different groups, with 'a good middle-class white, blond, blue-eyed girl versus, working class kind of messy versus Asian versus black versus foreign.'* One law enforcement officer working in Britain simply and poignantly remarked 'it is just straight up racism really. It's viewed as less serious. [Offenders] try and tell themselves that it's culturally accepted and it's a social norm in these countries.'

Colonialism and Filipino social attitudes today

Colonialism has not only shaped British attitudes about Britain, but also British attitudes about other countries, with perceptions and stereotypes applied to Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines. Southeast Asia has a prominent reputation for its large sex trade and with this, an associated sexualisation of local people, as discussed in chapter two. This is important context when considering how offenders from high-income countries may regard Filipino victims and the abuse they commit against them.

The racist and misogynistic reputation of Asian women as exotic and highly sexualised has its roots in colonialism (see chapter 2). The findings in this research suggest that this problematic reputation also feeds into the mindset of British men who are engaging in the livestreaming of online CSEA of Filipino children to this day. One participant questioned whether this could be a factor for some offenders, saying they may feel that abusing a child close to home 'is not as exotic as a foreign child, if that's what you're into'. Another participant said that 'there's a certain amount of fetishization of Asian women and Asian girls', which he believed could contribute to a desire to abuse against children in the Philippines.

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A point made repeatedly by various participants was about the reputation of the Philippines as a place known for easy access to sex – where someone wants to pay for sex with an adult sex worker or sexually abuse a child. This reputation, as discussed above, is at least in part a result of the Philippines' colonial history and was seen by participants as one of the key reasons why people target children in the Philippines over and above children in other low-income countries. For example, a participant said 'it's almost a cliche that people offend in the Philippines', with other participants talking about conversations on online offender forums that perpetuate the reputation of the Philippines as a good place to target children. This makes the reputation hard to break, with a British policy professional putting it like this: 'it's a circle, that they have a reputation, so [abuse] happens. It continues to happen, so they have the reputation'.

The findings in this section point to the role of 'Othering' in helping offenders to distance themselves from their victims, and that such Othering may be based on views and attitudes held at a social level. Black feminist's use of 'Othering' to demonstrate how women of colour experience Othering based on multiple characteristics (see chapter 3) is of particularly relevance when considering the ways that Asian women and girls are viewed and treated within some parts of British society. This is a form of intersectionality, whereby Asian women and girls experience double discrimination because of being both female and Asian.

British social and cultural attitudes about sex, relationships, and abuse

The way that sex, sexuality, and relationships are discussed – or not discussed – within Britain was frequently raised by my participants as a key factor to consider when understanding the social and cultural factors at play that help facilitate child sexual abuse, with some drawing links to how this relates to transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines specifically.

Pornography and new sexual norms

Chapter six provides an in-depth discussion of the role of pornography in facilitating transnational online CSEA at an individual level, but the attitudes towards pornography that operate at a wider social level was also raised by participants of this research as

a facilitative factor. Britain was viewed by some participants as a pornography-permissive culture, where consuming online pornography is common and normalised, particularly among men. This is supported by a recent study involving over 4,000 adult participants, which found that 36% of British men watch pornography at least once a week (Kirk, 2022). An interviewee from a British NGO who works with offenders remarked that 'the cultural view is 'well this is something that happens', it's not a frowned upon activity to use the internet for a sexual purpose'.

The type of pornographic content that is widely available and normalised was also raised as shaping problematic social views around sex. For example, a Filipino participant commented that 'the violence towards women, the aggression in sexuality has become a commodity, and it's sort of, I think, normalising what sex and what videos or displays of sexuality are appropriate or are okay or normal'. One recent study looking at content on the popular online site Pornhub, found that sexually demeaning acts, such as ejaculating on your partners face were present in one quarter to one third of the heterosexual videos they analysed, and over 12% depicted visible aggression that didn't include consent (Seida and Shor, 2021). This is particularly concerning given that some online pornography depicts sex with young people, such as the popular pornography category 'teen'.[24] While clearly violence and aggression in legal adult pornography is different from child sexual abuse material, some participants pointed to the popularity and pervasiveness of hardcore pornography, arguing that social norms around sex and sexuality are being shaped by this form of media.

It is important to differentiate between legal pornography with consenting adults and child sexual abuse material. It is widely accepted in policy and practice that the term 'pornography' should only apply in relation to 'adults engaging in consensual sexual acts distributed (often legally) to the general public for their sexual pleasure' (Ecpat, 2016). Applying the word 'pornography' in relation to children can 'contribute to diminishing the gravity of, trivialising, or even legitimising what is actually sexual

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[24] 'Teen' was one of the most searched-for categories of pornography on Pornhub in 2018 and at least the three years prior (Pornhub Insights, 2018). This is legal content as the performers are 18+, but they often appear or act much younger.

abuse' (*ibid*). I am therefore careful not to conflate the two and this research does not seek to contribute to or engage with the wider debate surrounding legal pornography, except in relation to how and whether it may facilitate CSEA offending. While participants were careful to state that a permissive culture towards pornography does not equate to a permissive culture towards child sexual abuse, some were of the view that the normalisation of pornography within Britain can facilitate child sexual abuse because pornography can be a kind of gateway to other sexual content.

That participants were often quick to raise the influence of pornography as both an individual level factor (see chapter 6), and as something that operates to create and skew social attitudes, demonstrates the level of concern held by many about the impact pornography is having, particularly given what we know about the number of people who view it (Kirk, 2022), including children (Martellozzo et al, 2016). However, while this research has highlighted pornography and the types of content within it as a potential factor with participants frequently raising this as an issue of concern, the debate surrounding pornography and its role in CSEA offending requires further analysis and is outside the scope of the current research.

The role of the media

As well as raising concerns about the role of pornography in creating societal views that could contribute to problematic social norms around sex, the influence of broader media on social attitudes and values relating to sex were also raised during my research. This was primarily discussed in relation to how both mainstream and social media portrays childhood and sexualises children. There is some evidence of this phenomenon, including research into the use of child models, which found that 'conventional advertising but also editorials of fashion media are using eroticizing images of children' (Llovet et al, 2016: 158). The Council of Europe has raised similar concerns, stating in a report that '[m]ass media, marketing campaigns, television programmes and everyday products regularly "over-sexualise" children, particularly girls, by conveying images which portray women, men and in some cases even children, as sexual objects' (Council of Europe, 2016). One particularly controversial and high-profile example was the sale of padded bikinis to 7-year-old girls (Taylor, 2010). Concerns about how children are depicted and the nature of what is marketed

to them led to the UK's Advertising Standards Agency introducing 'new rules prohibiting the sexualisation of under-18s in advertising' in 2018 (ASA, 2017).

Similar concerns were raised by participants of this research, with one participant concerned about 'the sexualising of children in advertisements, the television and the media in general'. Another similarly remarked the following when asked about societal level factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA:

> *'I think media representation, and social media and just even the sorts of things they stock in shops for certain age groups… So that kind of marketing stuff around sexualising children.'*

There is not clear evidence to support a link between sexualised images of children in the media and people engaging in online sexual exploitation of children. However, it has been argued that using sex to market products to children not only shapes children's own identity and understandings of sex but can also 'create an impression of social norms through which young childhood sexuality is regarded as acceptable' (Gunter, 2014: 15). Frequent exposure to sexualised images of children may therefore influence how some adults regard children as sexually available.

Social media can also contribute to this, with an explosion of sexualised content of children, often created and shared by children themselves on online platforms (Suárez-Álvarez et al, 2023). Social media sites, such as TikTok, were raised during this research as they allow and arguably encourage young people to post sexualised content of themselves to attract 'likes' and 'follows'. For example, a participant said:

> *'…music videos, YouTube, TikTok, kids creating their own videos and being very sexual when they're doing that. And to be successful, or to be considered successful, is very much around what you look like and how sexual you are.'*
> (British participant, academia)

Research has shown how social media encourages online users to seek a release of dopamine[25] by sharing content that will give them the most positive attention (Hayes,

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[25] Dopamine is commonly referred to as the 'feel good hormone' and is 'notably involved in helping us feel pleasure as part of the brain's reward system (Watson, 2021)

2018). This can encourage young people to create and share sexual content, either because they see that this type of content is popular when shared by others or because of the comments they receive while making it. The availability of such content online may affirm to offenders and those with a sexual interest in children that their sexual desires are normal and somewhat accepted within society.

While the media was discussed as potentially encouraging and normalising treating children as sexual objects, numerous participants also discussed the unhelpful ways that the media – particularly the tabloid press – addresses and demonises those who sexually abuse children. On the one hand, this can be positive, demonstrating how British culture at large is not permissive of child sexual abuse, with messaging about the risk of losing family, friends and employment known to act as a deterrent for some people with a sexual interest in children (Walsh et al, 2023). However, some participants also viewed very strong language as deterring offenders from seeking help to manage their sexual interests and online behaviours and preventing necessary public debate about how to prevent child sexual abuse. For example, a participant made the following points:

> *'I think it's very difficult to talk about child sexual abuse in the public forum, because it's obviously a subject that is so emotional for so many people, that the instinct is often repulsion. That's not helpful from a policy perspective, it's not helping children, really, if that's our goal. Because obviously, that kind of ostracisation only drives the issue more underground, and it prevents individuals from seeking out help. The way that the media reports on these issues is horrendous. It is extremely sensationalised.'* (British participant, NGO)

The need for a public conversation about sexual offending was frequently raised by participants of this research, who argued that the media may be hindering that through the way they treat those who have engaged with sexually abusive content of children, or who admit they have an interest in doing so. Law enforcement commonly raise that we cannot arrest our way out of child sexual abuse,[26] which raises questions about

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[26] For example, see Jim Gamble's submission to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse - https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/internet/part-c-indecent-images-children/c2-detection-images.html (paragraph 62.2).

how we prevent this abuse from happening in the first place. An inability to access support – whether due to the availability of support or fear of the repercussions of seeking help – was frequently raised as a factor that means some people do go on to act on their sexual interests and abuse a child. One participant spoke at length of the importance of offenders, or those with a sexual interest in children, being able to access help:

> *'In Germany, they've got the Dunkelfeld Project, which allows people when they have inappropriate thoughts or ideas about looking at children online, they can go with absolute confidentiality and get help and this country refuses to have that confidentiality ethic. On one level I understand it as a child protection issue, but on another level it's naive because it keeps people out. It keeps people underground, and if a person gets unacceptable ideas, where do they go?... They need to have help. A safe place to go.'*

Looking at how the media can shape social attitudes in a way that may facilitate sexual offending against children in the Philippines specifically, some participants suggested that the media does not report on sexual offending against children in other countries in the same way or with the same regularity as they do with sexual offending against British children. For example, when I asked a participant whether they thought that there is a different perception of offenders who target children in the Philippines and those who target children in Britain they responded as follows:

> *'I think that if you scale up and look at the media in particular, you see [that when] these offences happened at home it's reported in the media, I think more, than if this person offended outside of the UK, because it's harder hitting. The fact that this could be happening in the street next to you, the idea that a house over there having somebody that's sexually abusing children is absolutely horrific. The idea that in a house over there is a guy online to a girl six and a half thousand miles away who is being abused, feels less horrific. And I think that's why we don't hear about stuff happening in the Philippines in the media,*

as much as we do the Rotherhams[27] of this world.' (British participant, law enforcement)

There are examples of international CSEA offending by British offenders reaching mainstream news outlets, including high-profile cases involving celebrities (Adams, 2023). While I have been unable to find evidence or research supporting this claim, if the above participant is correct that the media are less likely to report international offending, this has numerous potential implications. For offenders, they may interpret this as meaning that targeting children overseas is less serious, less socially frowned upon and possibly even less likely to result in conviction; for the wider public it suggests that this form of abuse is rarer than the reality, therefore creating less public outrage and justifying government and law enforcement not moving this issue up their agendas. Exploring the extent and nature of the media coverage of transnational online CSEA is out of the scope of this research, but the initial findings from this research demonstrates a need for further exploration of the role of the media in facilitating and normalising CSEA, including the livestreaming of CSEA against children in the Philippines.

Online sub-cultures and the normalisation of abuse

In all the above instances, any messaging that individuals receive that suggests that CSEA is acceptable are very much implicit and counter to the dominant social narrative of CSEA as a horrific crime. However, there are spaces online where offenders are explicitly promoting and normalising the abuse of children, and actively encouraging others to engage in this content and activity. This can take various forms, but several participants in this research recognised that offenders rarely act wholly alone and are often part of online offender networks. These networks can override the wider social messaging that frames CSEA as a crime, or as one participant put it: 'outside the internet the messages about [not] livestreaming sexual abuse of children

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[27] The participant was referring to the Rotherham sexual abuse scandal, where there was widespread child sexual exploitation and abuse that took place in Rotherham, UK between 1997 and 2013. See https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/operation-stovewood-rotherham-child-sexual-abuse-investigation.

are very, very clear and very, very loud, but on the internet it's not.' Another participant described offender communities and their impact as follows:

> *'they quickly develop an online community where they support each other, where they justify their actions and where they feel that they're safe to do what they do… I think these kinds of communities have kind of shifted what we think about culture and norms, and it's a way of creating a community that instigates, supports and that gives advantages to individuals to act out their desires.'* (British participant, academia)

This participant went on to talk about CSEA offenders they have spoken with who felt emboldened to abuse children and did not experience guilt following this abuse because of the support they received from the online communities they were part of. This supports some existing evidence, as discussed in the literature review, about the role of online offender communities in providing tolerance, and even encouragement, of CSEA offending, within which 'fears of stigmatisation and apprehension can be alleviated' (Cockbain et al, 2014:158).

One British participant from an NGO that works with CSEA offenders spoke about the internet as a space where everyone can find whatever they want and connect with people who share their interests. While this can enable people to form positive connections, it can also be misused to 'ingrain further distortions about the behaviour that somebody wants to engage in', continuing that people seek out messages and communities that reinforce what they want to do, telling people 'this is not too bad, everybody else is doing it'.

The internet was viewed by many participants as a permissive, disinhibiting space, where anything goes. When considering how this relates to transnational livestreaming of CSEA in the Philippines, one participant said that online communities may promote the view, for example, that 'they're helping somebody out by giving them money'. Another talked about 'online spaces where details are shared in relation to where abuse can be, where images can be accessed and where stuff can be livestreamed' and recalled cases where offenders passed around information about livestreaming in the Philippines. For some offenders, online communities may be their primary social space, meaning the social and cultural norms within these online offender forums may

become more prominent and influential than the wider social and cultural norms within Britain.

Conclusion

My participants recognised that the dominant public narrative relating to CSEA, in the media, and elsewhere, is extremely negative and that sexual interaction with children is rightly viewed as an abhorrent crime. However, the messages that are sometimes implicitly present in certain parts of the media can sexualise children or childhood and may act to undermine the dominant public narrative and thereby facilitate treating children as sexual objects. This can include more subtle messages, such as magazine covers of young girls dressed and posing suggestively, or the types of sexualised content that young people are encouraged to share on social media, or more explicit messages within some genres of pornography where sex with young girls is fetishised, such as schoolgirl or teen pornography. None of these things can be said to singularly facilitate CSEA, but they may act as an additional factor to increase interest in sexual activity with a child and decrease inhibitions for some offenders.

Many of the messages that men receive within British culture, including through mainstream and social media, is that sex is a commodity, that any content they want to view is available to them, and in some circumstances, that children are sexual objects. This potentially creates a vast grey area in the minds of some men about what is and is not permissible. If they do step over the line into illegal activity, they are then completely ostracised. This is not to suggest that CSEA should ever be seen as anything less than a horrific crime, but rather that more needs to be done to ensure consistency in the messaging that people receive – through pornography, traditional media, and social media – about sex and the sexuality of children. It also highlights the importance of ensuring men can discuss any concerns they may have about their sexual interests and receive support.

Social and cultural factors within the Philippines

This section explores the social and cultural factors within the Philippines, and how British men's awareness of these can be a factor in their offending. My research participants raised how various elements of the Philippines' reputation is exploited by

British offenders and make the Philippines a more attractive place for them to target their offending. This includes the Philippines' reputation as a poor country; its association with travelling child sex offending and, linked to this, its reputation as being sexually permissive; and Filipino attitudes towards and preferences for white men. I discuss each in turn, highlighting how offenders' awareness of these elements of the Philippines' reputation enables offenders to justify their behaviour or override other inhibitors to offending.

The reputation of the Philippines: Poverty

It is often stated within the grey literature and media coverage that there are three key factors that make the Philippines a hotspot for online CSEA: that English is widely spoken, increasingly widespread access to high-speed internet, and poverty[28] - the focus of this section.

The Philippines' reputation as a poor country with vulnerable children was viewed by many participants as a key – and by some as the primary – factor that leads offenders to target Filipino children. That the Philippines has a high level of poverty is a reputation that is grounded, with over 18% of the population living below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2023). While an exploration of the causes and nature of this poverty are outside the scope of this research, that poverty and the desperation of the poorest Filipino families is known about and intentionally exploited by some offenders is a notable finding within this research.

Participants in this research talked about the difficult choices that poor families are required to make. One participant said that online abuse means that parents can 'get the money that they need without having to actually get rid of their children or send them abroad'. Another said that some will calculate that 'if you've got five siblings that you're trying to feed, it's better that you abuse the child… rather than send all five out to work really hard in difficult circumstances.' These findings demonstrate how widespread poverty in the Philippines drives desperate families to seek online

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[28] See for example: Kelly (2018); IJM (2020).

opportunities to bring in money, for example, to feed their children and pay for their schooling.

Some participants viewed poverty as a primary factor in offending because it leads to children being made easily accessible to offenders; or as one participant put it: 'it is a targeting of children that are most easily bought'. Poverty results in Filipino children being accessible to offenders in multiple ways. Poverty means children are accessible for a low price due to a favourable exchange rate and wider economic disparities. This is reflected in a report from IJM, finding that 'even the smallest exchanges were equivalent to days, if not weeks, of pay at the Philippine minimum wage' (IJM, 2020: 56). Poverty also means that children are accessible quickly, as offenders do not need to engage in a long process of grooming the child, but instead can access what they want through a quick financial transaction.

That there are high levels of poverty in the Philippines is a fact which is replicated in many countries, but in the Philippines, this is compounded by the country's wider reputation. This was articulated by a UK policy official who said the Philippines has 'some really grinding poverty and young children and really no other way out. So those are the kinds of things that I would expect would make the rumour mill'. Another commented that for offenders it's 'about finding vulnerable children… if they perceive that [Filipino] children are more vulnerable and higher need, that's going to be a better place to go'. This reflects what we know from the existing literature about the intentional targeting of vulnerable children. For example, research on offenders who seek to groom children online found that offenders target and analyse children's vulnerabilities, 'such as the need for affection and attention, the existence of depressive states, or early traumatization' (Santisteban et al, 2018: 204).

As discussed in chapter 6, some offenders tell themselves that they are helping by giving money to a poor family. This can be about an individual's attitude and their own attempts to use permission-giving thoughts to justify their crimes, but it's possible that this is also tied to post-colonial societal attitudes of British superiority, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The following quote from an NGO professional working in the Philippines highlights this idea of Western men viewing themselves as the heroes in the story going in to save poor families:

> *'I guess the difference in currency, allows them to feel like, "oh, if I'm sending 30 or 40 pounds to someone in the Philippines, this is going to help them put food on the table, buy things for their kids that they otherwise couldn't buy". And so, there's this sense where they feel like they're actually doing them a favour, they're helping these poor people on the other side of the world, who would be exploiting their children anyway, I'm actually giving them money.'*

This is an example of the white saviour complex, which is 'an ideology that a White person acts from a position of superiority to rescue a BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, or person of color – community or person' (Murphy, 2023). This ideology is regarded as 'a fundamental underpinning of Western imperialism' (*ibid*). This belief among some offenders that they are helping Filipino families can therefore be understood through the lens of post-colonialism as a continuation and realisation of the historic British attitude of superiority.

Poverty in the Philippines is undoubtedly a key driver for the Filipino families and individuals that sexually abuse children online for paying offenders in countries such as Britain. IJM's research into online sexual exploitation in the Philippines found that in 83% of cases there was a financial element (IJM, 2020: 56). While the reasons for poverty in the Philippines are complex, historical, and varied, that British men intentionally exploit this poverty is apparent. It speaks of a sense of entitlement and may be linked to wider social attitudes about how Britain and some British people view our place in the world.

The reputation of the Philippines: sexual attitudes

As earlier discussed, the Philippines and the wider Southeast Asian region has a long-established reputation as a place for sex tourism, which is linked in part to the country's colonial history and Western military presence (see chapter 2). Participants in this research discussed how the country's association with the adult sex trade is associated with its reputation as being sexually permissive more generally, including in relation to sexual abuse involving children, both offline and online.

It must be noted that there is a clear and important distinction between the legal adult sex trade, and the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. I recognise that adults

can and do consent to engage with and work in the legal sex trade, and this research does not seek to examine the nature, benefits, or harms of consensual adult sex work. However, while it is important that adult sex work and CSEA are not conflated, there were various discussions throughout this research where participants drew parallels between the two, with some of the view that the existence of the former has facilitated the development and popularity of the latter. As discussed in my literature review, some CSEA offenders are opportunists, with findings showing that some people engage in CSEA because this is presented as an option when they are seeking sexual services from an adult (Napier et al, 2021). Therefore, while they are distinct issues, in practice it appears that there is a link, where offenders can quickly move from legal to illegal sexual activity, both offline and online.

The history of the Philippines in relation to its sex trade was often raised as a key factor that can be interpreted by offenders as meaning that CSEA is accepted and normal in the Philippines. This can be utilised as a permission-giving thought, as discussed in chapters 3 and 6. A professional who works in an NGO based in the Philippines said that many offenders' views are that 'in the Philippines, this is what they do. You know, younger girls are getting into the sex industry, it's a way to make money, and it's seen as acceptable'.

The Philippines' reputation as a popular place for sex tourism and travelling child sex offenders was regarded by some participants to have been the pre-cursor to the country's reputation as a place to go for online CSEA too:

> *'the Philippines would have been one of those destinations for sex tourism, and so it follows that it would be where the online abuse moves to as well. Also, with the kind of the crackdown on Britain, Western people traveling to Philippines, making it more risky for them to do so, it then also follows that it would move online. So, I guess there's some of those historic links as to why it would be UK to the Philippines.'* (British participant)

As previously discussed, this aligns with a report from IJM, which states that the Philippines has become a hotspot for the livestreaming of CSEA because of 'a historic commercial sex industry and underground reputation as a sex trafficking source country and destination for traveling sex offenders' (IJM, 2020:17).

Online offender forums were also discussed by participants as playing a role in perpetuating this reputation of the Philippines. Online forums can be used to advertise the ease of access and cultural attitudes within the Philippines that can make the Philippines an attractive place for British offenders to target. These online forums, which often operate on the dark web, allow individuals with a sexual interest in children to share CSAM, give other offenders tips about how to evade detection and where to access illegal content, and are utilised by offenders to discuss their sexually abusive desires. Offenders may use these forums to direct one another to the Philippines as a good place to target for transnational livestreaming of online CSEA. The role of online networking by offenders was raised by multiple participants. The following quotes demonstrate how online communities can be used to encourage other offenders to target the Philippines and perpetuate the country's reputation as an easy target for offenders:

> *'It's almost like this is being taught, it's kind of a learned behaviour that maybe even if you hadn't considered thinking about children and victims in these [low-income] countries, you know you're learning from people who are like minded and saying, "try this and have a look at this" and so it's kind of a cultural thing within the CSA offending world'* (British participant, academia)

> *'we're certainly aware of offenders who network with other offenders in online spaces where details are shared in relation to where abuse can be... So, we knew of cases where people are passing around information about livestreaming in in the Philippines'* (British participant, NGO)

Some participants talked about how the social attitudes within the Philippines enable the country to remain a safe place for CSEA offenders. Importantly, this came from participants who are from and/or work within the Philippines. They spoke candidly about how sex and sexual abuse is viewed and treated within their country, with one Filipino participant saying that 'the attitude of the [Filipino] community at large tolerates this behaviour. There is existing tolerance to sexual abuse, witnesses are afraid to speak, the public don't want to get in trouble'. Another Filipino participant from an NGO that works with victims spoke about multi-generational cycles of abuse that are hard to break and which operate to normalise abuse within some Filipino families: 'We have

had several cases in which the pimps that we charge were also victims when they were younger, when they were still children. So, they have been sexualised at a very young age'. These 'pimps' differ from other CSA offenders as their role is to facilitate and carry out CSA offences under the direction of paying offenders. That many of them experienced abuse in childhood affirms findings in existing literature about other CSA offenders: 'while most individuals who have experienced CSA do not abuse others, perpetrators of CSA are more likely than other adults to have experienced multiple forms of abuse including… sexual abuse' (Brown, 2020:5).

This association of the Philippines with sex work and an ability to easily access children for sexual abuse may contribute to a feeling among offenders and within offender communities that CSEA is not taken seriously or that they will not be pursued by law enforcement for perpetrating CSEA. For example, a UK policy official commented that 'it seems to be well established that certain countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, are hotspots… [which] makes it an appealing option for these offenders, and I think that probably does play into the whole 'I will be able to get away with that' type mentality.' As discussed in chapter 6, believing they will not get caught can be a key factor for offenders in their willingness to engage in CSEA and the approach they take to doing so.

That offenders are less likely to get caught in the Philippines was also raised by some participants as a matter relating to the capacity and priorities of the criminal justice and law enforcement systems within the Philippines, which are at least in part the result of the economic challenges within the Philippines. A participant suggested that 'the criminal justice infrastructure isn't there in the same way that it is [in Britain]'. Similarly, a Filipino participant commented that from his experience 'government services are not really responsive to the needs of the people. If there are victims, they cannot get the government support they need to bring charges against their abusers'. Being less likely to get caught was also raised by participants as a perception held by offenders about the Philippines and their permissive attitudes towards CSEA. For example, an academic working in Britain said, 'the perception is that [Filipino] law enforcement isn't going to be as particularly concerned about this issue as it would be in the UK'. The reputation of the Philippines as a place where CSEA happens is (mis)interpreted as meaning the Philippines is a place where CSEA is permitted.

While I have not found evidence of this in existing literature, it was suggested by participants that in the Philippines, sex is viewed as a very normal part of life that children are exposed to from a young age. A British participant who had worked and lived in the Philippines for many years talked about the lack of privacy that they witnessed, afforded by the living conditions of many urban families, meaning that 'if the parents are having sex, [the children] see it and they hear it'. They said that for some children in the poorest communities, sex is also viewed as a means of bettering yourself and providing financial security, and some children learn 'from a very early age that often the only way they can improve their lives is through sex or through finding a foreigner who becomes a sugar daddy'. Existing literature states that this attitude is also held by some parents, who 'may be aware of their children's involvement in OSEC but choose not to act on the matter due to a need for the income' (Roche et al, 2023: 7).

The reputation of the white man in the Philippines

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are attitudes of racial superiority present within some parts of British society, which can be attributed, at least in part, to Britain's colonial history. Some participants in this research, particularly those from the Philippines, talked about racialised attitudes from within the Filipino context, specifically towards white Western men. While this research explores factors that facilitate all British men committing transnational online CSEA, the following discussion focuses primarily on white British men. This is because the whiteness of offenders was specifically raised by some of my participants, who saw this as being a factor that facilitates offending by this sub-section of British offenders.

The way that white people are perceived within the Philippines can be understood through the lens of post-colonialism, whereby white people are held up on a pedestal and viewed as superior. This phenomenon is given various names, including 'internalised racism' and 'auto-racism', with literature describing Filipino's 'colonial mentality – a tendency to negatively situate themselves in relation to 'white' people' (Bulloch, 2013: 223). This is problematic for various reasons, but not least because the elevated social status given to white men can be exploited by offenders to gain access to children.

Some participants directly linked this elevation of white people to the Philippines' history as a colonised nation. A participant spoke eloquently and at length about the impact of colonialism on how white people are perceived within his country:

> *'the fact is that the Philippines is a colony of European nations for hundreds of years, so there is a culture of permissiveness here in the Philippines, a culture where Filipinos put foreigners, especially Caucasians, on a very high level of respect and whatever they do is accepted without question.'* (Filipino participant, NGO)

Similarly, another participant talked about how they see Filipino people looking up to foreigners, which they also considered to be linked with the Philippines' history of being colonised by Western nations. He goes on to explain how this is relevant to online CSEA offending by foreign men:

> *'…from a Filipino point of view, we historically have been colonised by the Spaniards and the Americans. So, there's this degree of preference also, or looking up to foreigners… Now how it plays in the issue of OSEC, I think that deserves to be seen. So, at the very least, there are foreigners who would really prefer children and then there's the opportunity for these families, local Filipino families, or parents. Eventually these children can be rescued, quote unquote, from poverty if a foreigner would marry [that child].'* (Filipino participant, NGO, social worker)

The way that white men (including white British men) are viewed as superior within parts of Philippine culture and society was seen by my participants as giving these offenders power to get what they want from these children. Families are quick to grant white people access to their children in the hope that this will give them and their children a better life. Whiteness is correlated with wealth, making these men particularly appealing for poorer, more vulnerable families. For example, one Filipino participant said, 'there's a lot of cases in the Philippines where parents of Filipino girls would permit that their children would go and live and be exploited by British nationals, all because of this issue of power and because British nationals have money'. Another participant similarly shared their observation that 'the children here and the people in

general, they feel they are subservient, you know, to the Caucasian, the foreigners, who are more rich, more powerful, more dominant, and highly respected'.

It was raised that whiteness itself makes someone more attractive and sought after, with a Filipino participant commenting that all white people are assumed to be American, and another saying, 'every white man, even if you're 90 years old is beautiful because you have white skin'. However, a Filipino participant interestingly said that British men are particularly admired within the Philippines because of the reputation and stereotypes of Britain:

> *'People think that those in Britain are really rich, because you know, you have a queen, you have a different type of government and usually when you watch movies, even the way the British speak, they are so classy and elegant, and people think that the culture there and the way of life there is different from the US and that makes them very trusting to the British. …usually, they would not appear as the typical predators, they would appear as mild mannered …so the children would think that this person can be trusted because they're very cultured.'* (Filipino participant, psychologist)

As white people may be viewed by some within the Philippines as superior, it is likely that this influences the attitudes of white British and other white offenders in how they operate within the Philippines and towards the Filipino people that they interact with online. It is as though being treated as superior means these white men start acting as though they are. This idea was captured by one Filipino participant who, when talking about the way that some Filipino people may view themselves as inferior, said this means Filipinos 'are easily exploited by the so-called dominant attitude of British men…I would say that would be part of this kind of feeling of entitlement by the British men, entitlement to do this and these people even want it.' Another participant spoke about Filipinos' desire to marry white men and said, 'I think that foreigners pick up on that also, especially those in the UK that they know it's easy to just victimise Filipino women and children because they hold high regards for foreigners.'

It is not the purpose of this research to explore why it is that, as suggested by many of the Filipino participants in this research, some Filipino people may regard themselves as inferior to white people. However, this is an important and relevant

factor in explaining why British men may choose to target Filipino children (and families). That they are often held up on a pedestal, trusted and assumed to be rich by some people within the Philippines makes it easy for these men to gain access to children and reduces the risk of these families reporting their crimes.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the second level of my socio-ecological model, setting out the social and cultural factors within Britain that are helping to facilitate transnational online CSEA. While many of the factors within this chapter overlap with those discussed in chapter 5, I have sought to demonstrate how the attitudes held by individual offenders can also operate at a social and cultural level within Britain. These attitudes may be reinforced through messaging in mainstream media, pornography, within social groups, and perhaps most explicitly, within online forums, especially those that exist to enable CSEA offenders to network and share ideas.

This chapter begun with an assessment of the role of racism within British society as a factor that can facilitate online CSEA by British men against children in the Philippines. Research participants often spoke about Britain's colonial history as continuing to shape attitudes within Britain today. When applied to CSEA offenders, the ongoing narrative relating to Britain as a great colonial power can translate into attitudes of entitlement over their foreign victims. This is a complex and challenging issues to explore, especially as a white British researcher. While there is an increased awareness of racism within Britain, much more work is needed to fully understand how racism operates within Britain and how this can be addressed. In relation to CSEA offending, the work to understand the impact of race and racism has hardly begun, with very little existing research into the relevance of race and the extent to which this is a factor for offenders. I was surprised by the willingness and keenness of many of the participants of this research to talk about race, given how sparsely this issue is addressed within both academic and grey literature.

I then explored how attitudes within Britain towards sex may contribute to an environment in which offenders can develop the view that children are sexual beings. This could be through advertising, but participants in this research were more

commonly concerned about the role of social media and online pornography in normalising and encouraging a sexualisation of children. There were also concerns among some participants about the way that the media demonises CSEA offenders. This concern does not mean that participants believed CSEA should be regarded as less serious or harmful, but rather that the tone the media takes can make it harder for those with a sexual interest in children to access support. This is certainly a difficult line to tread, given the importance of maintaining a clear and cohesive narrative that CSEA is never acceptable and that it causes significant harm to victims. However, it is vital to get this right if we are to more effectively prevent children from becoming victims of online CSEA in the first place.

Finally, I explored the reputation of the Philippines within Britain. I explored different stereotypes about the Philippines and how perceptions of white men (Filipino's 'colonial mentality') can facilitate offending. I discuss the reputation of the Philippines as a relevant factor in CSEA offending. I do so not to highlight failings within the Philippines that need to be addressed, but to consider how this reputation within Britain influences British men who may regard these social and cultural differences (and challenges) as something to be exploited.

Despite a strong focus on individual level factors within existing literature, this research demonstrates the need to also consider the role of social and cultural attitudes within British society. As my socio-ecological model seeks to demonstrate, the entire environment of an offender needs to be considered when assessing how to understand and prevent their offending. The factors within the second level of this model shape and influence individual offenders and operate to remove some of the inhibitors that potential offenders may otherwise have to overcome when offending. I believe that racist attitudes are particularly pertinent when considering the societal level factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA – as opposed to wider CSEA offending. Racist attitudes are likely at play for many of those who commit transnational online CSEA, but they can also operate to result in the public, media and policy makers placing less attention and importance on CSEA when the victims are overseas.

Chapter eight: Structural level factors that facilitate online CSEA of children in the Philippines

Introduction

While individuals are formed and shaped by the societies in which they exist, societies are shaped, at least in part, by the structures and institutions that organise them. As set out in chapter four, the third level of my socio-ecological model is the structural level, which includes government policy and legislation, law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and the wider child protection system. I also explore the role of technology companies, exploring their pervasive and wide-spread influence on society and the ways in which the services and platforms they create shape and impact our lives.

During this research, I asked participants what they think the structural factors are within Britain that help to facilitate online CSEA by British men against children in the Philippines. In this chapter, I break down this analysis into three sections: government policy and legislation; law enforcement and criminal justice; and technology companies. The participants' breadth of professional backgrounds enabled various perspectives to surface. Unsurprisingly, those with policy backgrounds provided analysis of government policy and priorities, and those with law enforcement backgrounds both critiqued and praised the work of UK law enforcement in addressing this crime. However, irrespective of profession, the dominant structural factor for most participants related to the lack of UK legislative requirements on technology companies (at the time of conducting this research), the importance of any such legislation to be effectively enforced, and the need for these companies to do more to protect their users.

In addition, this chapter explores the structural factors within the Philippines that can help to facilitate transnational online CSEA by British men against Filipino children. While this research is concerned with the factors within Britain that facilitate this abuse and Britain's responsibility to address these factors, it is nevertheless important to understand the challenges faced within the Philippines identified by this research. This helps to provide a more complete picture of the complexity of this transnational form

of CSEA. I highlight how many of the challenges within the Philippines are also known about and exploited by British offenders. It is also clear that as an international crime, it requires an international response.

Policy and legislation in the UK

Since the fieldwork for this research was conducted, the UK government has now passed the Online Safety Act 2023 (see chapter 2). The Act introduces a range of new duties on online services to protect their users from harm, including online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The data collection for this research coincided with the publication of the Online Harms White Paper – a precursor to the Online Safety Act – and the significant debate and lobbying that accompanied it.

It is therefore somewhat unsurprising that the primary focus of discussions relating to the role of government legislation was about the need for more regulation on technology companies. This was viewed as a primary means of reducing offending opportunities and keeping children safe. There were also insightful discussions about the extent to which racism may be a factor in preventing transnational CSEA being a higher priority for policy makers, alongside recognition that in many respects, the UK has an effective and robust legislative approach to tackling CSEA.

A call for technology regulation

A strong theme that emerged was concern and often anger about the lack of UK regulation on technology companies, and how this creates a permissive and accessible environment for offenders. This included concern about the extent of freedom that online services possess when deciding how to design and run their platforms, and how safety is rarely a top priority. This was discussed regarding 'safety by design', which is a well-known harm-prevention principle that 'puts user safety and rights at the centre of the design and development of online products and services… rather than retrofitting safeguards after an issue has occurred' (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). A UK-based policy official had the view that companies 'should have had safety by design from the very beginning, so that if you couldn't protect children, you just couldn't compete' with safer services. They added that because this has not been the case, we 'have to talk about what kind of laws we can put in to protect people'. This

was echoed by a participant who highlighted their concern that platforms can decide to implement certain designs that are often known to put children at risk:

> *'In the UK, there is nothing to stop a platform being designed really in any kind of way. It's in the gift of platform providers to have children's profiles public by default. It's in the gift of platform providers to allow users in the UK a very high degree of anonymity in terms of their presence on social media platforms, it's in the gift of platform providers to monitor private messaging to any extent that they want, either not at all, or to a high degree. And it's largely in the gift of platform providers to kind of keep a lot of data to themselves that may or may not be helpful.'* (British participant, NGO)

Various participants talked about the culture within the technology sector, believing many companies will not prioritise children's safety until they are legally required to do so. A participant talked about the early ethos of the internet, saying 'the internet grew up on this idea that it's unregulated'. Many participants shared the view that the current voluntary approach to tackling online harms, such as the Voluntary Principles[29] (see chapter 2), were not enough. For example, an NGO worker, reflecting on the spike in CSEA reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, concluded that online services have 'shown that they need to be made to do more'.

When assessing the current regulatory requirements, or lack thereof, participants drew parallels with other sectors, suggesting a similar approach should be taken to that of other sectors. A participant reflected 'imagine if there were voluntary principles for tobacco companies that said, "you can't sell your product to minors, you can't market your product to minors, please, you'll voluntarily agree to do that". Nobody would think that that was a good idea.' Another participant talked about the safety standards that are required in product development in other sectors, saying that just as manufacturers of products like Hoovers are held responsible if someone is hurt using it, a similar approach may be needed when online services fail to ensure their products are safe.

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[29] 'Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' (2020) – these Principles were developed in partnership between the 5 Eyes countries and industry. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/voluntary-principles-to-counter-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse

This idea that online services are responsible or should be held responsible for harm experienced on their platforms is a much-debated topic within the US, UK and elsewhere. It relates to platform liability, and whether online services should be treated as third party hosts of content or held responsible as publishers of that content (De Streel et al, 2018). There are of course concerns about the cost to services of implementing solutions to make their services safe, as reflected in the emphasis on proportionality embedded within the Online Safety Act. Cost to business needs to be framed and understood within the context of the cost of harm that these services cause to their users, particularly children.

Legislative priorities and the role of racism

As well as the need for a whole new legislative framework, concerns relating to the prioritisation of policy makers was also raised during this research. While tackling CSEA is seen as a top priority, some participants suggested that this does not extend to tackling online CSEA where the victims are overseas. This relates to previous discussions about race and racism (see chapters 6 and 7) and can similarly be understood and explored through the lens of post-colonialism. As discussed in my literature review, post-colonial theories explore the historic nature of colonial histories, and how this continues to impact countries' perceptions of themselves and others. For the purposes of this chapter, post-colonial theory provides a lens through which to explore how Britain and the Philippines' colonial histories have shaped and continue to impact governments, policy makers and the institutions they run.

A British participant observed that in his experience with policy makers, he 'never heard anyone talk about overseas as a priority issue… We don't see [overseas victims] as our victims that we've got any role in supporting, safeguarding or even thinking about'. Other participants shared this view, with some directly linking this to racist attitudes within Britain. When talking about offenders applying a racialised value system and hierarchy to their victims, a participant went on to say that a similar value system is applied by some policy makers. They argued that the outrage, including from government ministers, expressed when white girls are abused by British Asian men

(for example, the grooming gangs in Rotherham[30]) is not matched when white men abuse Asian girls. While this may be the result of attitudes within government, a law enforcement officer also talked about policy makers having to 'play to the crowd' (i.e. their electorate) adding:

> *'I strongly suspect that the idea of protecting children in a far-flung country, that is not ours, goes down much less well with your average Brexit voting individual than the idea of protecting children in the UK.'*

The development of the Online Safety Act and numerous statements from the government emphasise that tackling online CSEA is a key priority for the UK government. This includes the government's Tackling Child Sexual Abuse 2021 strategy, which includes 'working internationally to prevent child sexual abuse and tackling transnational child sex offending'. Despite these efforts, the sentiments shared by many of my participants about transnational CSEA not being a priority must still be considered. It is telling that professionals working in this sector have the impression that tackling transnational CSEA offending and protecting foreign victims from British abusers is not regularly spoken about or named as a priority. This is perhaps epitomised by the often-quoted objective of the Online Safety Act and Conservative manifesto commitment to 'make the UK the safest place in the world to be online' (GOV.UK, 2023). This statement is accompanied with little, if any, recognition that the internet is often unsafe for children in other parts of the world because of British offenders. Through a post-colonial lens, this suggests a continued prioritisation of the needs and safety of British people, above that of the 'Other'. In the least, this Britain-centric approach to online safety suggests an unwillingness on the part of the British government to explicitly position Britain as having a responsibility for the safety of people in other parts of the world.

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[30] Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham - https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/279/independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham

There was certainly optimism among participants that the Online Safety Act 2023 will help to tackle and prevent online CSEA. There was also an understanding that existing wider legislation within the UK is somewhat effective in creating a prohibitive environment for CSEA. For example, a law enforcement professional commented that, while online CSEA is still a problem, 'we have very robust safeguarding laws and procedures and protocols in the UK that have made the UK a very hostile environment for this type of offending'. However, he went on to say that this is one of the reasons why offenders do not target children in Britain, and instead target Filipino children. This suggests that an unintended consequence of Britain's robust legislative framework is to create a demand for transnational CSEA, as there is a perception that offending in other countries will be easier. This also highlights that British laws – and the enforcement of them – are perhaps not doing enough to prohibit and deter transnational CSEA. Tackling this transnational issue is of course not the sole responsibility of Britain, and nor can effective solutions be developed and implemented only at the national level. However, it was suggested that some elements of the British legislative framework and enforcement of these laws could be strengthened.

Participants had concerns about legislative gaps in the UK that need to be addressed if there is to be a more comprehensive and effective response to tackling the specific threat of transnational CSEA, including against children in the Philippines. One of the key issues, which interestingly came exclusively from Filipino participants or those whose work in this area has been while they were based in the Philippines, was around the need to restrict offenders' ability to travel. A participant asked, in relation to known CSEA offenders, 'how do they get a visa? Are they being monitored? If [they] have a criminal record in the UK, will they stop [them] from travelling to Asian countries? Probably not.' Another expressed a strong view that 'any convicted paedophile, convicted online or convicted for sexually abusing in the UK, should never be allowed to travel to developing countries.'

This was discussed in the context of the link between online and contact offenders, with awareness that those who have abused children online may travel to the Philippines, and vice versa. For example, one participant said that in many cases,

'before exploiting children online they already came to the Philippines. Some of them have been to the Philippines several times.' This is supported by IJM research,[31] which found that '39% of cases (17 cases) involved customers who were known to have travelled to the Philippines at some point in their lives, and 9% of cases (4 cases) involved customers with a known history of contact abuse of children in the Philippines' (IJM, 2020:52). While this was discussed in relation to Britain needing to do more to stop known CSEA offenders from travelling to the Philippines (and other low-income countries), there was also recognition that the Philippines has a role to play. For example, one Filipino participant criticised their country's safeguarding response, and said 'I think one other reflection is in my country also, we just let everyone in.'

Given what we know about the link between travelling to the Philippines to commit contact child sexual abuse, and going on to perpetrate online CSEA, both British and Filipino participants suggested that more needed to be done to prevent and restrict offenders' international travel. The current ease of movement between Britain and the Philippines, even for those with a history of offending, helps to facilitate online CSEA as they can travel to the Philippines to form connections and build trust. These relationships and the social and economic status of offenders can then be exploited online when they return home. The existing legislative and law enforcement processes for restricting offenders' travel is discussed in chapter two.

There were also concerns about the lack of clarity within UK law about livestreaming offences. While UK legislation can be used to prosecute a UK national for an overseas CSEA offence,[32] a participant from UK law enforcement expressed concern about a lack of clarity in the law and observed that 'there is no specific livestreaming offence.[33]

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[31] This IJM research is based on OSEC (online sexual exploitation of children) reports about Filipino victims that were made to the US cyber tipline, run by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

[32] UK Legislation that can be used to prosecute an overseas offence includes: The Sexual Offences Act 2003, Section 72 'Offences outside the United Kingdom' which states it is an offence for a UK national to commit an act that 'constitutes an offence under the law in that country' and where the act would constitute a relevant offence within the UK, including the offences relating to indecent photographs of children (Protection of Children Act, 1978, Section 1); and the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, under which it is 'an offence to conspire to commit, or to incite the commission of certain sexual acts abroad against children' (CPS, 2022).

[33] To note: Section 51 of the Sexual Offences Act was amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to add the act of livestreaming in the definition of 'sexual exploitation'.

There is no specific offence to say that abusing somebody abroad is the same as here'. He went on to discuss the challenge of getting policy makers to prioritise this because 'an MP [member of parliament] is concerned as to what is happening on their patch, and it's harder to understand that it's happening on your patch if it's a guy on a laptop.'

While UK legislation is often effective and comprehensive, with further optimism accompanying the new Online Safety Act (2023), participants highlighted key areas where further attention is needed. This includes a more focused look at transnational CSEA offending specifically, with some participants expressing a need for greater government prioritisation of this issue, and a need for greater clarity about the applicability and enforcement of existing offences.

UK law enforcement and the criminal justice system

This section highlights the various ways that transnational online CSEA presents a complex challenge for law makers, law enforcement and the criminal justice system. A key factor of this complexity is the global nature of the threat, which necessitates a global response. Whereas law enforcement has boundaries and borders, the internet does not. In my research, it was argued by some participants that the current localised approach to policing is facilitating offending. Such offenders may feel empowered and emboldened in the knowledge that law enforcement has a harder time identifying them when their crimes are perpetrated across multiple countries. However, there was also the view that, although there is always more to be done, UK law enforcement is a world leader in this area.

UK law enforcement – shortcomings and progress

Law enforcement participants identified specific aspects of how UK policing works that, in their experience, makes it harder for them to prioritise and investigate transnational crimes. For example, a participant said that as a police officer, they ask 'where's the boundary, where does my jurisdiction end?' going on to highlight the complexity of a case where 'we've got an offender in the UK, a victim in the Philippines, another offender in the Philippines as well. It's an awfully difficult mess to deal with'. They contrasted this with national cases where the locations of victims and perpetrators are

known and local. Similarly, another law enforcement participant criticised UK law enforcement both at a local and national level, as being overly focused on local issues. He gave the example that if 'a murder happens two miles outside the M25 the Met will go 'well that's Surrey's problem', and said this problem extends to the National Crime Agency, who 'are here to protect our people'. A social worker who worked closely with law enforcement said '[the police] are trying to protect children in this country. That's their kind of job'. This is not necessarily to suggest that individual officers do not care about harm to children outside their area or country, but rather that the emphasis on dealing with your 'patch' may not encourage or help facilitate investigations of overseas offending. If these problems exist domestically, they are only exacerbated by transnational, online crime.

A participant used the language of colonialism to highlight the disparity between how British offences against foreign children are responded to, in contrast to what they perceived would be the response if foreign offenders were abusing British children:

> *'If Filipinos were paying to have British kids live streamed, you bet your life there would be a massive freaking operation about that, because we're not having them fellas coming over here and molesting our kids. Why we allowed to go over there and molest their kids? That is imperialism.'* (British participant, law enforcement)

As well as concerns, participants also highlighted areas of good practice within UK law enforcement. There have been numerous cases reported in the news that demonstrate the UK's work to investigate transnational CSEA,[34] and some participants provided examples where joined up work between the Philippines and the UK was having an impact. Some participants named the Philippines Internet Crimes Against Children Centre (PICACC) as an example of good practice, where the UK's NCA works closely with Philippine law enforcement and others to tackle online transnational CSEA. A Filipino participant from an NGO also mentioned the work of UK police liaisons who are based in the Philippines specifically to work on these cases, although

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[34] For example, in 2023 Gary Campbell was jailed for 12 years for directing the online abuse of Filipino children, following a police raid on his home after discovering he had sent payments to a Filipino woman who had recently been arrested for livestreaming CSEA (BBC, 2024).

added that 'in terms of resourcing, it's certainly much smaller, compared to protecting UK children'. More generally, a participant provided the following praise for the NCA's progress in this area:

> *'A lot of the work that they do is to do with countries like the Philippines. So, what I feel is that in the last, probably five years, we've come up a massively long way in terms of law enforcement's understanding and commitment to child sexual abuse and exploitation and I think we're now starting to appreciate that actually, we're not an isolated country.'* (British participant, academia)

As well as some praise for UK law enforcement's international work, there was also recognition among some participants that the efforts of UK law enforcement – as well as wider safeguarding structures – have made the UK a relatively difficult place for CSEA offenders to operate. For example, a participant said:

> *'If you want to find a child who you could direct live sexual abuse on in the UK, it would take you weeks, if not months, of searching, because we've actually done a fairly good job of supressing that. In the Philippines that's not the case.'* (British participant, law enforcement)

Challenges with transnational investigations

Despite certain structures that help limit CSEA in the UK, there are also numerous practical challenges for law enforcement and prosecutors that are inherent in responding to transnational offending. A UK law enforcement officer highlighted that because many of these cases also involve Filipino offenders who organise the exploitation, 'it becomes even harder, because you've really got to have the Philippines involved in trying to find the solution.' This speaks to the need for UK and Filipino law enforcement to be joined up, which presents numerous challenges due to language, cultural and resource differences.

Another practical challenge relates to evidence gathering when the victims are in another country, with a participant from an NGO making the logical assumption that 'it's probably easier to get a victim impact statement for a kid in the UK, or for them to appear in court' compared with cases where the victim is in the Philippines.

Interestingly, multiple Filipino participants thought the UK had a role to play in better supporting the victims of this abuse to give evidence, seeing that as an important means of bringing more offenders to justice. There are multiple complex reasons why victims do not or cannot report this abuse and/or are unwilling to provide statements to be used in court. When combined with a lack of digital evidence from the offender side because 'livestreaming evidence pretty much ends at the point that you cease to livestream', as discussed in chapter 6, these cases are particularly difficult for UK law enforcement officers to investigate.

Furthermore, law enforcement officers do not always know how to investigate transnational CSEA cases. A law enforcement participant said that sometimes Officers receive reports of transnational CSEA 'but they don't know necessarily how to deal with it', adding that 'it's a big step between [name of person] makes payments to the Philippines, to going to a magistrate to get a search warrant to go and search their house'. He suggested there is a need for 'knowledge and training in how to develop those kinds of cases.'

Another challenge that was raised as specific, or heightened, in transnational CSEA cases, relates to prosecuting and charging for this crime. For example, participants questioned whether existing sentencing was effectively deterring offenders. A participant raised specific concerns about the use of suspended sentences, and the message this gives to offenders and potential offenders about the seriousness of online CSEA:

> *'If you are charged with imagery offences it tends to be a three-year suspended sentence. If you get a three-year suspended sentence you don't tend to be a high-risk offender on the public protection unit's database. So, you're not going to get monthly checks to make sure you're not offending. Your time on the register won't be very long. So, what's your deterrent to not reoffend and what's your deterrent to not offend in the first place when it's going to be a suspended sentence?'* (British participant, law enforcement)

A participant from an international NGO raised concerns specifically about the sentencing of British offenders who have abused children in the Philippines, saying they often get shorter sentences than those who have abused against children in

Britain. This echoes findings from an IJM study that looked at 15 cases of UK offending against children in the Philippines. Despite maximum prison sentences of 10-14 years, they found that 'UK offenders who directed and paid for livestreamed child sexual abuse of Filipino children will serve on average only two years, four months in prison' (IJM, 2020b:9). They found that these sentences 'are substantially lower than sentences for victimizing UK children' (*ibid*). Through a post-colonial lens, this can be seen as a form of Othering, with a different value being placed on the safety of children depending on their nationality, and offences against Filipino children viewed as less serious.

A UK academic also raised concerns in relation to sentencing and spoke of inconsistent sentencing for comparable offences. She highlighted the potential grey area for prosecutors with livestreamed offending suggesting that 'if it's considered that directing the abuse of a child in the Philippines is an online offence, then the sentencing guidelines are going to be very different to if you were actually physically abusing that child'. She called for an overhaul of outdated UK legislation, which she believes does not reflect the current nature of a lot of online CSEA.

In chapter 6, I discuss how some offenders believe they will not get caught, particularly when they abuse children outside the UK, for example because they believe they are anonymous online. Yet the above quotes and research from IJM suggest that even those who are caught are not always given a fair and effective sentence. However, participants highlighted that the scale of online CSEA means that identification and arrest of all offenders is unlikely. One ex-law enforcement officer simply said, 'we can't put everyone in jail because it won't happen, the number of people looking at images is incredibly high', as they recalled the substantial list of usernames they could see that were looking at indecent imagery on any given day. Someone from an NGO talked about the challenge for law enforcement in addressing the scale, as they are forced to focus only on a minority of cases despite knowing there are many more who are engaging in online CSEA.

The above findings demonstrate that there are substantial challenges for law enforcement in investigating and sentencing transnational online CSEA. However, some participants argued for stronger sentences, while recognising that arresting

offenders is not and cannot be the sole solution to such a vast and complex crime. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, a multiplicity of solutions are needed, including a greater focus on preventing more of this abuse from occurring in the first place.

Structural factors within the Philippines

Another theme to arise in the data relates to the structural factors within the Philippines, and how these can be factors that facilitate British men committing online CSEA offences against children in the Philippines. This includes resource and cultural challenges for their law enforcement agencies, and their wider criminal justice and child protection systems. This was not an area that I asked about during interviews, as my research is focused on the factors within Britain. However, participants both within the Philippines and Britain often spoke of structural issues within the Philippines as important factors that need to be understood and addressed. This highlights the importance of developing and implementing international solutions. However, I am cautious when considering or concluding what the Philippines should be doing to address this problem as that is both outside the scope of this research and is not something I feel able to assess given my position as a British researcher. However, I include a brief section to reflect what participants said, particularly where this was discussed in the context of British men intentionally exploiting these structural factors. Such insights highlight the role for those working within Britain to tackle some of the attitudes and perceptions about the Philippines and Filipino people, potentially held by British offenders.

Law enforcement in the Philippines

There was a perception among some of the participants in this research that there are often shortcomings within Filipino law enforcement agencies that make it harder for offenders to be brought to justice. A UK academic who works closely with UK law enforcement spoke of an NCA officer they had worked with whose experience was that 'working with law enforcement in [Southeast Asian] countries is so difficult because they have such a different perception around what a child has a right to'. While law enforcement around the world struggle to stay on top of the threat, a Filipino participant from an NGO suggested this was particularly the case in the Philippines:

'law enforcement, particularly in the Philippines, has remained weak due to government's inability to catch up with the advanced technology that internet provides, and predators use'. This participant added that Filipino law enforcement tends to rely on information from law enforcement in other countries.

The issue of corruption within Philippine law enforcement was also discussed. A participant who had done some undercover work in the Philippines, believed some officers were 'highly corrupt and dangerous', suggesting they sometimes gave perpetrators tip offs that the police were looking for them.[35] A participant talked about British offenders knowing how to exploit the corruption in the Philippines, so they do not get charged. He said of British nationals:

> *'when they abuse children here, they know they can get away with it. That's why the others are emboldened to come here and to exploit children, because corruption is systemic, it's very rampant. From bribing the victims, bribing the prosecutors, to even bribing the judge.'* (Filipino participant, NGO)

In addition, a UK academic questioned whether within online offender forums, people are sharing information about the Philippines, including 'around their criminal justice responses, or their child protection laws, that there's maybe something that they found in there that presents a loophole'. A different UK academic similarly pointed to the reputation of Philippine law enforcement, suggesting 'the perception is that their law enforcement isn't going to be as particularly concerned about this issue as it would be in the UK'.

Legislation in the Philippines

Some of the Filipino participants were also critical of both the legislation within the Philippines, and the enforcement of it. This included a need for legislation that places requirements on technology companies to tackle this crime. One participant said that NGOs like the one they work for have been actively lobbying for this but recognised

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[35] This participant worked for an NGO and was working undercover for a documentary. This claim cannot be substantiated.

the need for a global approach given the challenges for technology companies if 'they have to tailor fit their policies to work with Philippine legislation'.

There was also a desire to see clearer and stronger legislation 'to ensure that the full scope of OSEC is catered, and not just child pornography or the material, but rather livestreaming is also covered'. Multiple participants discussed the 'Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009' (RA 9775) and concerns that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were not complying with the requirements this Act places on them.[36] In relation to a requirement in the Act to install software to detect 'child pornography', one Filipino participant simply said, 'they never did it'. Another talked about the work of NGOs in the Philippines to push for greater compliance with the requirements in the Act and asked, 'what is the enforcement regime to back that up?'

A Filipino participant also raised concerns about the legal age of consent in the Philippines, and how this may influence offenders. She said the 'age of consent here is 12 years old, I think some foreigners know that.' As discussed in chapter 2, the age of sexual consent in the Philippines has been increased to 16 years old[37] since conducting these interviews. However, there remains a question about whether the previously low age of consent was known by offenders and whether this helped to establish the Philippines as a safe and easy target for child sexual abuse. Given its infancy, how this new law is enforced, and its impact are yet to be seen.

Structural factors relating to technology companies

As discussed in chapter 4, my socio-ecological framework considers the role of technology and online services as a cross-cutting level that intersects with all aspects of an individual's environment. Technology intersects with the structural level because online services form a key part of an individual's wider environment. Arguably and in some respects, technology's role in shaping our societies and cultures is greater than

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[36] Republic Act (RA) No. 9775, Section 9 lists requirements on ISPs, including: 'All ISPs shall install available technology, program or software to ensure that access to or transmittal of any form of child pornography will be blocked or filtered.'

[37] Republic Act (RA) No. 11648, Section 1 'increased the age for determining statutory rape to 16 years old to provide more protection for young people against sexual exploitation and abuse' (Parrocha, 2022).

many of the more traditional institutions, such as our government and criminal justice systems. In this section I discuss how the choices that technology companies make – or fail to make – when designing and running their platforms influence the lives of their users and can help to facilitate transnational online CSEA by British men against children in the Philippines.

Online privacy and anonymity

As highlighted in my literature review, the internet provides offenders with an accessible, affordable, and anonymity-protecting space (Griffin-Shelley, 2014). In the case of transnational online CSEA offending, digital infrastructure is vital in providing a connection between the supply (victims) and the demand (offenders), who would otherwise have to travel long distances. While child sexual exploitation and abuse pre-dates the internet, participants in this research discussed the role of technology in removing the barriers to offending and enabling easy access to victims, and a quick and convenient means of paying for their abuse.

The ability to easily hide your identity online is both a hallmark of the internet but also a key enabler of CSEA. One participant commented that 'the ability to use the internet to hide and mask your activity is just all too easy', and another similarly saying that unlike travelling to sexually abuse children, many offenders 'believe there's a degree of anonymity online'. The ability to operate anonymously online is at least in part the decision of technology services to design their platforms in this way. While some platforms make a deliberate choice to keep their platforms open, making them more accessible to law enforcement, there was significant concern among participants about decisions by some platforms to introduce privacy enhancing features that make it easier for offenders to operate without being identified. Recent shifts towards end-to-end encryption on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram demonstrate that services are prioritising the privacy of their users, with offenders knowing they are less likely to be reported:

> 'on WhatsApp then by definition that would be routinely encrypted… and of course from a security, if you're doing nothing wrong, perspective, that makes it all very nice, but if you're seeking to do something that's illegal… then it does afford you a degree of protection because it's known to you that encryption by

definition makes it more difficult for law enforcement to interdict that' (British participant, NGO, ex-law enforcement).

There were additional anonymity concerns relating to online money transfer services, with Western Union and Remitly among those named by participants. Such services are of relevance to transnational online CSEA, where financial motivation has been found to be a factor in as many as 83% of cases (IJM, 2020). Participants raised concerns about how easy it is for offenders to use these services to pay Filipinos for online CSEA content, and the difficulty in identifying when these payments are suspicious:

> *'There are all these international money transfer agencies that individuals in the UK can use to send money really easily to the Philippines. And because generally speaking, the amounts for OSEC are small, they're just flying under the radar. And so, I think generally speaking the infrastructure is there to facilitate UK offenders in engaging in this crime, and at the same time, the detection is not there'* (Filipino participant, NGO).

This was seen as a particular challenge within the Philippines because of the popularity of such services for legitimate transfers from Filipinos working overseas who send money home. Participants were concerned that some money transfer services were failing to engage with law enforcement or were being developed to make it impossible to trace individuals. Others recognised that some of these money transfer services have started to engage more with law enforcement, but there remain challenges for investigators. One law enforcement officer commented that while 'money service bureaus are now far more engaged in trying to help us… most people don't really understand [SARs,[38] or how] they then go from getting told 'this person is sending money to the Philippines' to knowing how to get through the point of enforcement'.

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[38] Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) 'alert law enforcement to potential instances of money laundering or terrorist financing. SARs are made by financial institutions and other professionals such as solicitors, accountants and estate agents and are a vital source of intelligence not only on economic crime but on a wide range of criminal activity. They provide information and intelligence from the private sector that would otherwise not be visible to law enforcement.' (NCA, unknown)

Participants also raised concerns about platforms' design choices, which can put users at risk and make it easier for people to commit CSEA offences. This includes the way that algorithms are used by platforms to shape a user's experience, determine what a user views, and make it easy for users to expand their network and communicate with those they do not know. A participant had specific concerns about recommender algorithms and how they operate to facilitate transnational online CSEA:

> *'the role of the tech providers really starts with their algorithms and the way that they build networks and recommend people to one another… And so, you get recommended to become friends with people within that network. So essentially, what that means is, if an offender in the UK connects with a facilitator or trafficker in the Philippines, he is likely to get recommended by an algorithm to also become friends with another trafficker or facilitator in the Philippines. So, it's kind of like sharing your network, because Facebook knows, "oh, you like this person, you're probably going to like this person too."*
> (Filipino participant, NGO)

Another participant raised concerns about the ease with which users can comment on the posts and content of child users, which demonstrates a prioritisation of engagement with a service over the safety of their users. There was a strong sense from participants that platforms must do more, with one commenting 'there is a responsibility on [platforms] to do more in terms of making it less easy [for offenders] to operate'. A law enforcement participant similarly said platforms have 'got to help us tackle the underlying problems' and voiced his concern about the spiralling number of reports being made to the US's reporting body, NCMEC. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is a strong sense of urgency for technology regulation and some optimism about the Online Safety Act. There was also tangible frustration and anger that many online services are not placing greater priority on the safety of their child users when designing their services.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the third and final 'level' of my socio-ecological model, which is about the structures and institutions within a society or culture that organise and shape that society. I have highlighted and discussed the various structural level factors that participants in this research discussed as operating to help facilitate transnational online CSEA by British men against children in the Philippines.

This has included a consideration of the UK's legislation and enforcement of it, with a particular need for regulation to require online services to take a more proactive approach in tackling this crime – with many participants expressing optimism about the Online Safety Bill (now Online Safety Act 2023). I have highlighted examples from participants of proactive, joined up work between the UK and the Philippines, such as the NCA's liaison officers based in the Philippines and their involvement with the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center (PICACC). However, participants, particularly those working in law enforcement, also raised areas where more could be done to protect children in other countries. This includes a need for law enforcement training on transnational online CSEA, exploring the impact and shortcomings of the current focus on protecting British citizens, and addressing the range of difficulties that come with working on international cases.

A significant finding from this research is that within some institutions, CSEA against British children is taken more seriously or is more highly prioritised, than when the abuse is committed against overseas children – even if the offenders are British. This has been discussed in relation to the priorities of policy makers and politicians; a lack of clarity within UK legislation to ensure it is understood that abusing children overseas is as serious as abusing children within Britain; and concerns about the leniency of sentences for overseas CSEA offending and the message this gives to offenders. I have highlighted that this disparity in how national and international cases are prioritised and dealt with can be viewed through a post-colonial lens. Participants pointed to examples where children in the Philippines have experienced Othering, as their abuse is viewed as less serious (e.g. less severe sentences) or receives less law enforcement resourcing.

I provided a brief consideration of the structural factors within the Philippines. Although not the focus of this research, these findings provide useful insights that are also important to consider when developing solutions to this crime within Britain. For example, the resourcing of Philippine law enforcement and corruption within it create challenges for UK law enforcement when working with them on transnational investigations. There is also the possibility that these structural issues are known about by British offenders and impact the attitudes held by offenders of the Philippines, as discussed in chapter 6.

Finally, I briefly explored the structural factors relating to technology companies. As discussed in chapter 4, technology is a cross-cutting level that I have considered within all three analysis chapters. Technology sits within the structural level due to its broad influence in organising and shaping how our society operates. Specifically, this chapter touched on how technology companies enable offenders to access and abuse children in the Philippines because of services' decisions about the design and operation of their platforms. There was a strong sense from participants that these services should have been doing more from the beginning, and that failure to do so has necessitated regulation. The ability of the UK government to effectively hold technology companies to account is yet to be seen through the enforcement of the Online Safety Act.

The hope is that these findings further our understanding of how the whole environment in which an offender operates can influence their perceptions of this type of abuse and their willingness to engage with it. While many participants recognised the good work being done across many UK institutions, it is also apparent that these same institutions could and must do more.

Chapter nine: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This research set out to answer the following questions:

1. *What are the factors within Britain that facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men, from the perception of a range of professionals working in this field?*
2. *What are the implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice?*

Through adapting and applying an extended socio-ecological model to include the role of technology in online CSEA, this research provides unique insights into and exploration of the range of factors that professionals perceive as operating within an offender's whole environment (individual, social and structural levels) to facilitate transnational online CSEA of children in the Philippines by British men. This research has surfaced a multiplicity of factors that participants suggest exist and overlap to enable, encourage, and disinhibit those seeking to sexually abuse children online, including factors that are not found within the existing CSEA literature. The findings from this research have enabled the development of evidence-based recommendations for research, policy, and practice (see below).

I began this research by firmly situating my topic within existing literature on three areas of CSEA offending: transnational online CSEA, online CSEA that is not location specific, and sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism. My comprehensive approach to literature searching enabled me to develop a strong and broad understanding of the CSEA literature and to identify gaps in the existing knowledge. This literature review highlights what we do and do not know about CSA offending, both online and offline. It is unique in its focus, explicitly considering the extent to which the existing academic and grey literature relating to multiple forms of CSEA offending addresses and explores the issue of transnational online CSEA.

A particularly significant finding from this literature review was identifying the lack of consideration about the role of victims' location – and the factors related to this, such

as race – in CSEA offending. A second important finding was the disproportionate focus given to individual offenders' beliefs, experiences, and attitudes, with very little consideration of offenders' wider environments. I hypothesised that many of the themes found within the broader CSEA literature would apply to transnational online CSEA as well, but until now, this has not been thoroughly explored.

A primary contribution of this research is the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model. As discussed in chapter 4, this builds on other similar models but is unique in its explicit attention given to the role of the internet and technologies within each level of an offender's environment. Applying this model to all aspects of this research has enabled a thorough exploration of the breadth of factors within transnational CSEA offenders' whole environment. This model represents a unique way of understanding transnational online CSEA offending and could also be used and adapted to enable an exploration of other phenomena where the internet has a cross-cutting role. For example, when looking to understand those engaging in terrorist content and activity online or when looking at offending of other types of CSEA.

The facilitating factors that surfaced in this research relating to individual level factors (chapter 6) have significant overlap with existing knowledge on CSEA offenders more widely. This is perhaps unsurprising given that it is individual level factors that are most frequently explored within the existing literature. However, this research has uniquely demonstrated how some of the individual level factors found within existing literature apply in relation to transnational online CSEA. While I hypothesised in my literature review that this was likely, participants of this research confirmed that many of the same factors that apply for CSEA offenders more widely, also apply for transnational offenders. This includes offenders' sexual preferences, belief they will not get caught, and the potential impact of pornography consumption.

A key factor that arose in this research and is not present in any depth within existing literature relates to the role that race and racism can play for some offenders when their victims are in another country. This was particularly discussed by participants in relation to offenders' permission-giving thoughts, which enable offenders to justify their behaviour. For transnational online CSEA offending these permission-giving thoughts can be explicitly racist in tone. Post-colonial theory enabled an exploration of how

individuals' perceptions of themselves and their victims may have been shaped by colonialist narratives about white/Western superiority. The findings in chapter 6 relating to the role of racism represent a significant and new contribution to our understanding of transnational online CSEA offending. Further, this highlights the need to understand and address racist attitudes of individuals within Britain, and for this to be considered as part of the treatment and management of CSEA offenders.

Perhaps the most significant and readily discussed individual level factor for my participants related to the role of pornography in facilitating a journey towards CSEA offending. There was no consensus on the extent to which pornography consumption leads to online CSEA offending, but participants did agree there is a strong need for further research to understand the role that pornography plays in CSEA offending. Based on the literature and data from my participants, I hypothesise that pornography is likely to play a role, as some offenders seek more extreme content over time to satisfy their needs. To explore my hypothesis further, more research is needed to understand the extent to which pornography is a factor. What this research highlights is the need for any such research to explicitly consider whether certain types/genres of pornography are particularly problematic, including how different races are portrayed and sexualised within pornography.

Many of the findings from this research relating to social and cultural factors (chapter 7) that facilitate transnational online CSEA represent new contributions to knowledge. This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of consideration of offenders' wider environment within the existing literature. There are several significant findings relating to social and cultural factors that provide new insights into transnational CSEA offending and deserve and require further exploration in future research. The first relates to the role of race and racism within Britain at a social and cultural level. Some participants argued that there is an ongoing cultural view within (parts of) British society that Britain is superior, and therefore entitled and powerful. This is seen to influence some offenders into believing they have a right to sexually abuse children in the Philippines (and other nations that may be looked down upon by those holding such attitudes of superiority). We know from existing literature that offenders are known to de-humanise and distance themselves from their victims (Rimer, 2019). This research adds to this by highlighting that racial differences between offenders and

their victims provide an additional means through which offenders can dehumanise their victims. Dehumanising victims from other countries stems from racist ideas about the inherent value of different races.

Another key finding relating to social and cultural factors concerns the way that CSEA is talked about and viewed within Britain. Many participants recognised that the dominant narrative within Britain is that CSEA is a heinous crime and that most of the public, media, politicians, and law enforcement want to see it eradicated. That said, participants provided examples to demonstrate where this dominant discourse may be being undermined or weakened. For example, some pornography, the mainstream media, and social media were all discussed as playing a role in sexualising children and childhood. While it is a significant leap to go from viewing sexually suggestive content of children to seeking out sexually abusive content of children, it may be that such media content could operate to affirm that offenders' (or potential offenders') sexual desires are normal, natural, and somewhat acceptable within British culture. In the case of online offender communities, such messaging is explicit and actively tells offenders that their behaviours and feelings are acceptable. While offender forums are discussed within the existing literature as playing an important role in normalising CSEA offending, this research contributes a unique exploration of the role of wider social messaging as a factor that can facilitate – or fail to disinhibit – CSEA offending.

In apparent opposition to this, is the way that CSEA offenders are demonised in parts of the media, with implications for offenders' and potential offenders' ability or willingness to access support. Participants stressed the value of access to such support, with many believing that this must form a key part of the solution to CSEA given the scale of the problem. Some participants pointed to Germany's 'Dunkelfeld Prevention Project' (Beier et al, 2015) as an example of good practice that Britain should look to replicate. These findings should act as a wake-up call for Britain if we are serious about preventing abuse from occurring in the first place. The seriousness of CSEA offending, the consequences of this, and the harm it causes to children must be clearly and consistently communicated across all parts of British society. This must be done in a way that simultaneously encourages those concerned about their feelings and behaviours towards children to reach out for support – and that support must be available when they need it.

Another important finding from this research relates to the way that social and cultural factors within the Philippines are exploited by CSEA offenders. For example, this research argues that the Philippines' longstanding reputation as a sex tourism destination has translated to a perception among some British offenders that the Philippines is an easy place to commit child sex offences without getting caught – including online. Some participants also believed that the reputation of the Philippines as a poor country makes it both more likely that children are vulnerable, and more appealing to offenders, who know there are children whose vulnerability they can exploit. It is also clear that more should be done within Britain to address the attitudes of some British men who believe that they have a right to pay for sexual abuse of a poor child in another country. While poverty is an issue in the Philippines, the way that this poverty is exploited by British men is a British problem.

The consideration of structural level factors in the facilitation of transnational CSEA is itself a unique contribution to knowledge. While many of those working on the front line of this crime are acutely aware of structural challenges, there is a dearth of consideration of this within existing literature. My participants' breadth of professional backgrounds provided varied insights based on their own experiences of the different structures and institutions involved in preventing and responding to transnational online CSEA – government and legislation, law enforcement, and technology companies. Participants were quick to defend Britain's actions, with many of those working in law enforcement highlighting areas where the UK is doing more than many other countries. They provided examples of good practice, such as the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Centre (PICACC), but also flagged areas of concern and where further action and different approaches are needed.

Participants recognised the inherent challenges in tackling a complex international crime, but many argued that changes could be made to facilitate a more effective response. This includes greater prioritisation of and resource for tackling transnational CSEA, improved clarity within the law, and stronger and more consistent sentencing for offenders. These points relate, in part, to the discussions throughout this thesis about race and racism. Some participants raised that the lack of focus and prioritisation of transnational CSEA within British institutions could be rooted in racism,

seen through the prioritisation of British children's safety over that of Filipino children, even where Filipino children's safety is being threatened by British men.

There was a cautious optimism among participants about the role of the Online Safety Act (then Bill) in creating a safer online environment for children, and in forcing technology services to do more to tackle and detect online CSEA. However, this was accompanied by a strong sense that there is still a lot of work to do, and that effective enforcement of the new regime is vital. There is also the need for as much global collaboration as possible, as various jurisdictions grapple with the challenges of regulating global technology services. Arguably one of the key technology-related concerns relates to the increased availability of end-to-end encrypted platforms. This privacy enhancing technology provides benefits to users' security and privacy, but significantly undermines existing efforts to detect online CSEA. This research argues that technology services themselves should play a role in developing the solutions needed to maintain the current level of protection and they should not be able to simply opt for privacy at the expense of children's safety. The effectiveness of the UK's Online Safety Act in addressing the impact of this technological design on children's safety is yet to be seen. This will be a key test for the new regime and its regulator, Ofcom.

As anticipated and hoped when I began this research, I have surfaced a range of factors within Britain that contribute to and help facilitate transnational online CSEA offending against children in the Philippines. Offenders are not a homogenous group, and so the factors that lead to – or fail to prevent – their offending are varied and vast. The range of factors surfaced in this research are those that my research participants perceived as facilitating transnational online CSEA, providing important and foundational insights into this form of abuse. The range of perspectives and backgrounds and differing levels of expertise among my participants meant they provided different types of insight. As discussed below in my recommendations, these findings should be supplemented with further research on this topic to understand the perspectives of offenders directly.

This is the first study that has specifically explored the reasons that offenders target children in another country, as opposed to understanding the motivations and reasons for CSEA offending in general. This thesis brings together all the factors I have

identified through this research, with my Technology Conscious Socio-ecological model providing a unique way of exploring, understanding, and grouping these factors. My hope has always been that this research contributes to the existing global efforts to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and ideally encourages a greater focus on prevention so that children – in any country, of any background or skin colour – do not experience the significant harm caused by CSEA in the first place.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed based on the findings from this research. Many of these were recommendations made directly by my research participants. Others I have developed in response to identified gaps that remain in our knowledge of this area or following my own assessment and analysis of the concerns and perspectives raised throughout this research.

Recommendations for government policy and legislation

1. **UK Government review of existing CSEA offences within legislation and whether they are fit for purpose in 2024**

I recommend that the UK government should conduct a review into the existing child sexual abuse offences within UK legislation, to assess whether they are fit for purpose in 2024. The main offences used to prosecute online CSEA cases date back to 1978 (Protection of Children Act) and 2003 (Sexual Offences Act). There is no specific offence that relates to transnational CSEA that is livestreamed, and other emerging threats, such as AI-generated CSAM, may create a need for new or revised offences. The review should assess whether a new offence explicitly designed to address transnational online CSEA could support prosecutors with effectively charging transnational CSEA offenders. A secondary benefit of such an offence could be the clear message that it sends to offenders that children outside of the UK are of equal value and equally deserving of protection, as children within our borders, and that they will be charged and sentenced to reflect that. This review should include a review of the sentencing guidelines, to consider whether transnational online CSEA offences are being appropriately sentenced to reflect the nature and severity of the harm.

2. Greater funding for and promotion of support services for offenders / potential offenders of online CSEA

The provision of anonymous therapeutic support for CSEA offenders and those thinking about offending was raised in this research as an important means of preventing online CSEA. While it is optically challenging for a government to state that they are investing in support for child sex abusers, and such support should never come at the expense of victim and survivor services, services for offenders could, over time, lead to less child sexual abuse being committed in the first place.

There are some resources for offenders / potential offenders within Britain, including the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.[39] This charity does receive some government funding (Home Office and Ministry of Justice) but have reported that they cannot meet the current demand for support from those worried about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children, with as many as 21% of their call they receive going unanswered (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2022). It is the best outcome for everyone if abuse can be prevented from occurring in the first place, and those wanting help not to offend should be able to receive this freely and easily. This will likely require greater investment from the UK government, who could provide more funding to organisations like the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, to not only provide support but also to make the public aware of the support that is available. There is also an important role for the media, who could use reporting on CSEA cases as an opportunity to highlight support services that are available to those concerned about their online behaviour towards children.

Recommendations for law enforcement

3. A review of the use of powers to restrict the travel of CSEA offenders

As discussed in Chapter 2, existing processes are in place under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to enable the restriction of travel of known sex offenders. However, this process is rarely used, with only 11 Sexual Harm Prevention Orders with travel

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[39] The Lucy Faithfull Foundation are a UK charity that provides support to those concerned about their online behaviour and their families. They operate the StopItNow anonymous helpline.

restrictions issued in 2017/18 (IICSA, 2020). This means that known offenders may be freely travelling to countries with the intent of committing child sexual abuse offences.

I recommend there should be a review into the application and issuing of these notices to assess whether changes are necessary to improve the system. The review should consider whether training is necessary, both for law enforcement officers about the process for applying for travel restrictions, and for judges to support them to accurately identify when a known offender poses a risk to children overseas. Further, I agree with the IICSA recommendation that the National Crime Agency should develop and maintain a 'list of countries where children are considered to be at high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation from overseas offenders' (IICSA, 2020). Given the numerous risk factors within the Philippines, I would expect that the Philippines would be included in this list.

Recommendations for technology companies

4. Technology companies should invest in the development of encryption-compatible child safety solutions

As end-to-end encryption (E2EE) is rolled out onto more platforms, including Meta-owned Messenger and Instagram Direct,[40] there are significant implications for children's safety. As discussed in this thesis, E2EE will enhance users' privacy and security, but simultaneously prevent existing CSAM detection methods (namely CSAM hash matching technologies) from being deployed as they currently are, on platforms' servers.

While both governments and regulators need to take a strong stance in defence of children's safety, technology companies themselves must be the ones to develop technological solutions that are compatible with their services, which retain users' privacy without undermining the protection of children. This should include significant investment into the development of technological solutions, which may include device

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[40] Meta announced they were commencing the roll-out of E2EE across their services, starting with Messenger, in December 2023. https://about.fb.com/news/2023/12/default-end-to-end-encryption-on-messenger/.

side solutions that detect CSAM before the content enters the E2EE environment, and other technical solutions proposed by UK cybersecurity experts, Levy and Robinson (2022).

5. **Investment in solutions to identify the livestreaming of CSEA, including technical solutions and a commitment to greater collaboration across relevant industries**

As discussed throughout this thesis, the livestreaming of CSEA presents a particular challenge for technology companies and law enforcement due to the live nature of the content. Live video calls are usually encrypted, and the content of the video is not stored or shared, leaving no evidence of what occurred within the call. As artificial intelligence continues to develop and improve, technology companies should be harnessing this to develop solutions for detecting child sexual abuse in real time. There are examples of this already, such as the real-time nudity detection solution being developed by safety tech company, SafeToNet. Further investment and research are necessary to support the development of such tools.

In recognition of the clear challenges in identifying where this abuse is happening in real time, online services should also work together to share information about suspicious behaviours. Transnational online CSEA offending often involves multiple online services: those that are used by offenders to identify their victims (e.g. social media services, adult services websites), communicate with their victims (e.g. social media, messaging services, video calling apps), and to pay their victims for the abuse they have directed (e.g. Western Union). Signal sharing of suspicious activity between these services could help facilitate the compiling of actionable evidence and the identification of offenders and victims. The Lantern Project (Technology Coalition, 2023) provides an example of signal sharing between online services. Something specific for the transnational livestreaming of CSEA, that includes the range of online services often utilised by offenders, is needed to help identify where this harm is taking place.

6. Conduct robust research on the role of pornography in online CSEA offending

The existing research about the nature and impact of online pornography is scarce. Further, I could not find any specific research that looks at the possible escalation of pornography consumption towards more extreme and illegal content over time. Many participants speculated that pornography was a key driver that led people towards CSEA content, with some providing anecdotal evidence of offenders they had worked with who had blamed pornography addiction for leading them towards online CSEA. Robust research is needed to test this. For the purposes of specifically assessing the impact of pornography on transnational online CSEA offending, pornography research that considers the genres of pornography and how this may create, and shape offender preferences would also be of interest. For example, whether consumption of Asian pornography is associated with an interest in CSEA against children from Asian countries. Whether racialised pornography contributes to problematic stereotypes about the sexualisation of women of colour should also be explored.

Such research could involve anonymous interviews with online CSEA offenders, asking them about their pre-offending pornography consumption. It could also be based on forensic analyses of offenders' devices, to assess how offenders' online behaviours and the types of content they consumed changed over time. Should this research find a link between legal pornography and online CSEA offending, this would make a valuable contribution to our understanding of offenders' behaviours and a possible means of preventing offending. It would also support the call for greater restrictions on children's access to online pornography.

7. Further research on the factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA offending, with CSEA offenders as participants

While this research has sought to understand the factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA offending from the perspective of professionals working with offenders and victims, further research could supplement these findings. I propose that a similar research project is needed with transnational online CSEA offenders as the research

participants. Their own explanations of what facilitated their offending and disinhibited them would provide different and insightful perspectives into this complex area of offending.

8. **Further research that applies the Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model to understand and explore online CSEA offending**

The Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model developed for and applied through this research could be applied to explore transnational online CSEA offending involving victims and offenders from other countries. While this thesis focuses on British offenders and victims in the Philippines, many of these findings could also be relevant when considering offending perpetrated by and against people in other countries. Indeed, participants in this research commented that many of the factors we discussed were not specific to British offenders and Filipino victims.

This SEM could also be used to explore and understand offending of other aspects of the online CSEA threat. While this thesis has focussed on transnational online CSA, which typically involves offenders paying other adults to view and direct real-time abuse, the TC-SEM could also be used to explore online grooming whereby offenders directly engage with children to coerce and manipulate them into engaging in sexual activity.

The Technology Conscious Socio-ecological Model could also be used to explore offenders of other harms that have an online aspect. For example, it could be used to understand the factors that operate across the environment of those involved in the sharing and creation of terrorist content online, or individuals involved in other forms of online CSEA, such as the grooming of children. In both these examples, the internet plays a critical, cross-cutting role that should be considered when seeking to understand the factors that lead to this offending.

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Appendix 1: Literature search

Academic Literature Search

- Search dates: 28/08/2020 and 30/08/2022.
- Location: University of Bedfordshire, 'Discover'. This University search functionality is based on the EBSCOhost interface and enables searches of most of the University's electronic resources and the library catalogue.
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria:
  - Publication date:
    - Searches 1-4: 2010- September 2022
    - Search 5: 2000- September 2022
  - Language: English
  - Type: Peer reviewed

Table 1: Academic literature searches

Question	Search no.	Search Terms	Total results	Relevant results
What do we know about transnational online CSEA offending and the factors that facilitate it?	1	'international' OR 'cross-border') AND ('Internet' OR 'Technology' OR 'Online') AND (ABSRACT: 'Grooming' OR 'child sexual abuse' OR 'child sexual exploitation' OR 'child porn')	26	5
	2	('Philippines' or 'Southeast Asia') AND ('Internet' OR 'Technology' OR 'Online') AND (ABSTRACT: 'grooming' OR 'child sexual abuse' OR 'child sexual exploitation' OR 'child porn')	23	5

What do we know about the factors that facilitate online CSEA offending?	3	Abstract only: ('Internet' OR 'Technology' OR 'Online') AND ('Offen*' OR 'Offender behaviour' OR 'offender characteristics' OR 'offender motivations') AND ('Grooming' OR 'child sexual abuse' OR 'child sexual exploitation' OR 'Cybersex' OR 'child porn' OR 'indecent image')	768	40
	4	('Internet' OR 'Technology' OR 'Online') AND ('Offen*') AND ('Environment' or 'Society' or 'Culture') AND (ABSTRACT: 'Grooming' OR 'child sexual abuse' OR 'child sexual exploitation' OR 'child porn' OR 'indecent image')	641	2 (most other results were duplicates of search 3)
What do we know about the factors that facilitate SECTT offences?	5	('Travelling child sex' OR 'Child Sex Tourism) AND ('Offen*)	69	13
TOTAL			1,527	65

Table 2: Grey literature searches

Organisation
National Crime Agency
Ecpat International
Global Kids online
International Justice Mission
Internet Watch Foundation
International Centre (University of Bedfordshire)
Lucy Faithfull Foundation
NSPCC library
Plan International
Terres de Hommes
Unicef

For UK participants

Opening questions

1. Can you tell me about your role within [organisation name]?

2. How long have you worked here?

3. Do you have experience relating to cross-border online CSEA offences where the victim was in the Philippines?

Primary question: Facilitating factors in Britain

4. What do you think are the factors within Britain that help to facilitate people here committing transnational online CSEA offences against children in the Philippines?
5. Are there any factors specific to live-streamed child sexual exploitation?
6. Follow up (if necessary / not each covered): How do you think these factors operate at different levels within society:
   a. factors relating to **individuals** (Nudge: experiences, attitudes, beliefs, habits)
   b. **social and cultural norms as factors** within Britain (Nudge: culture, media)
   c. **companies and technology providers**
   d. **Government policy and legislation** plays a role in facilitate people in Britain targeting children in the Philippines.
7. Do you think the factors you've mentioned apply in relation to British offenders targeting children in other low-income countries, or are they unique to offending against children in the Philippines?
8. Are these factors different from those that facilitate British offenders targeting children within Britain and other high-income countries? (Nudge: is ethnicity/location of the child relevant?)
9. Do you think the perception of online sexual offending against children in the Philippines differs from the perception of online sexual offending against children within Britain and other high-income countries? (For offenders, law enforcement, policy makers)

Britain's role in preventing transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines

10. What are the biggest challenges when it comes to addressing the factors that facilitate people in Britain from targeting children in the Philippines?
11. Are you aware of any work within Britain to address the factors that facilitate people here committing transnational online CSEA offences against children in the Philippines? Is this effective and how could it be improved?

12. What else do you think could be done in Britain to address the factors that facilitate transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines? (By tech companies, Government, other)
13. Are you aware of examples of good practice in preventing and tackling transnational online CSEA offending in other countries that you think Britain / the UK could learn from?

COVID

14. Do you think the COVID outbreak and related lock-down measures have impacted on offending of transnational online CSEA against children in the Philippines, and if so, how?
15. In light of these impacts and beyond what we have already discussed, what should be Britain's response to preventing OSEC against children in the Philippines?

Closing questions

16. Is there anything I haven't thought to ask you about today that you think it would be helpful for me know for my study?
17. Do you have any questions for me?
18. Do you have any recommendations for other professionals who you think I should speak with?

For Filipino participants

Opening questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role within X organisation?
2. How long have you worked here?
3. Do you have experience relating to online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) offences where the offender has been in Britain?

Primary question: Facilitating factors in Britain

4. What do you think are the factors at play within Britain that help to facilitate people there committing OSEC offences against children in the Philippines?
5. Are there any factors specific to live-streamed abuse?
6. Follow up question (if necessary): How do you think these factors operate at different levels within Britain:
    a. Do you think that social and cultural factors within Britain might facilitate people there committing OSEC offences against children in the Philippines? (Nudge: cultural beliefs, media)
    b. Do you think that factors relating to an individual might facilitate them targeting children in the Philippines? (Nudge: experiences, personal attitudes, habits)
    c. Do you think companies and technology providers play a role in facilitating people in Britain targeting children in the Philippines?

d. Do you think that Government policy and legislation plays a role in facilitate people in Britain targeting children in the Philippines?
7. Do you think any of the factors you've mentioned are unique to Britain or are they applicable to other high-income countries too?
8. Do you think the perception of online sexual offending against children in the Philippines differs from the perception of online sexual offending against children within Britain and other high-income countries?

- For the offenders themselves
- For law enforcement
- For policy makers

Britain's role in preventing OSEC against children in the Philippines

9. What are the biggest challenges your organisation has in tackling OSEC offending?

- Are there specific challenges relating to offenders from Britain?
- Are there specific challenges relating to livestreaming?
- How does this overlap with other forms of offending against Filipino children?

10. Do you think Britain / the UK has a role to play in addressing some of these challenges?
11. What actions would you like to see Britain taking to help tackle OSEC against Filipino children?

- What could businesses and technology companies do?
- What could the UK government do?
- What could international organisations do?
- Anything else?

12. Is there anything that Britain / the UK (and / or international bodies) is currently doing to help tackle COSEC in the Philippines that you think is effective?
13. Are you aware of examples of good practice in preventing and tackling OSEC offending in other countries that you think Britain could learn from?

COVID

14. Do you think the COVID outbreak and related lock-down measures have impacted on offending of OSEC against children in the Philippines, and if so, how?
15. In light of these impacts and beyond what we have already discussed, what should be Britain's response to preventing OSEC against children in the Philippines?

Closing questions

16. Is there anything I haven't thought to ask you about today that you think it would be helpful for me know for my study?
17. Do you have any questions for me?
18. Who else do you think I should speak with?

Research Participant Consent Form for participants in Britain

Researcher Contact details	Supervisors contact details	
Abbie Gillgan	Lisa Bostock	Helen Beckett
Abbie.gillgan@study.beds.ac.uk	Lisa.bostock@beds.ac.uk	Helen.beckett@beds.ac.uk
+44 7414 534 843		

Title of project: **Understanding the factors within Britain that facilitate online child sexual exploitation against children in the Philippines.**

Introduction:

This Doctoral study draws on the experiences and expertise of professionals in the Philippines and Britain to understand the factors within Britain that facilitate online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) against children in the Philippines. I am interviewing experts from a range of professions who work with the victims and/or perpetrators of this form of abuse. You have been approached for participation because of your relevant professional experience.

About participation:

You are invited to participate in a one-to-one interview and can take time to consider your participation. If you consent, you will be asked a series of questions about your experience as a professional, and what you think the causes of OSEC are, and what you think can be Britain can do to help prevent it. The purpose of this research is set out in the information sheet you have been provided. If anything is unclear this can be explained, and you will be able to ask questions at any time.

The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Statements of consent (put an 'X' in the box if you agree with the statement)

I have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information ☐
Sheet. Any questions that I have about the research have been answered
satisfactorily

I have received a copy of the IASR privacy notice ☐

I understand that I will not be named but that my profession and location, e.g. ☐
'Social worker in the Philippines', may be used alongside any direct quotes as
part of this research, including the thesis, published articles or presentations

I understand that if there is anything that I say that I don't want attributed to my ☐
role, organisational affiliation and/or location, that I will alert the researcher to this
at the interview

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research before, during or up to four weeks following the interview, in which case my information and all data will be removed ☐

I understand that my responses will only be used for the purposes of this research, which may include published articles and presentations ☐

I give my consent for the anonymised data to be retained for up to five years following the completion of the Doctorate for further analysis, including conferences and academic articles. (If consent is not given, all anonymised data will be deleted upon completion of the Doctorate) ☐

I understand that my information may be shared with the researcher's supervisors for the purposes of analysis and that an anonymised copy of the interview data will be shared with the University's Research Graduate School on submission of my doctoral thesis to demonstrate the originality of research findings ☐

I understand that if any child protection or professional misconduct issues arise about an identifiable individual, this will be raised with the researcher's supervisors and reported to the appropriate service if necessary ☐

I understand that if the researcher has any concerns about me or my practice, they may raise this with my employer ☐

I agree to having the interview recorded by (tick all that you consent to):

Written notes ☐
Audio recording ☐

If necessary and practical, I consent to the interview being conducted via video call (e.g. Skype) ☐

I understand that my information will be stored securely on the University of Bedfordshire's secure cloud service (One Drive) and a secure device after completion of the thesis ☐

I consent to my personal data (e.g. email address) being retained so that I can receive a summary of the research findings ☐

I have read the information above and provided in the Participant Information Sheet, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant (print): _____
Signature of Participant: _____
Date: _____

Research title: Understanding the factors within Britain that facilitate online child sexual exploitation against children in the Philippines

You have been invited to take part in this research because of your relevant professional experience and expertise. Please read this information sheet and consider if you would like to take part. I am happy to answer any questions.

1. About my research

Professionals working with children around the world are increasingly aware of the role of the internet in giving children opportunities and exposing them to harm. This research explores the challenge of online child protection with an international focus, recognizing that the internet does not respect national boundaries. I am interested to understand what more Britain can do to protect Filipino children online, as British people are among those known to target Filipino children for online sexual exploitation. I am seeking to surface the factors that facilitate the perpetration of online child sexual exploitation by people in Britain against children in the Philippines, with a particular interest in live-streamed abuse.

I am interested in the perspectives of professionals working to prevent online child sexual exploitation in Britain and the Philippines. Participants will be asked what they think the factors are that facilitate this form of cross-border online abuse, based on their expertise and professional experience. I will be conducting interviews with professionals from law enforcement, the charity sector, academia, policy making and health and social care.

This research is being undertaken in support of a Professional Doctorate. I intend to use the findings from this research to develop recommendations for further research, to make policy recommendations and to advance the conversation about the role and importance of preventative measures that target offenders and their environment.

2. About me

I am conducting this research as part of my Professional Doctorate at the University of Bedfordshire. I have been working in child protection policy for over five years within the charity and public sector. I have a longstanding interest in issues relating to abuse, exploitation and violence against women and girls, and my academic and professional career has focused on the online aspects of these issues.

I currently work for the UK's Home Office. However, this is independent research and is in no way affiliated with the UK Government. Research findings will not necessarily inform policy development within the Home Office.

3. About the interview

If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked a series of questions that relate to your professional experiences and expertise relating to online child

sexual exploitation. I will not ask you to speak about any personal experiences of abuse. When referring to specific cases, I request that you do not use the real names of any victims, perpetrators, or their families (even if these are already public) to help protect their anonymity. Where you do, I will redact (remove) these names from the interview transcript and will anonymise them if your answer is used in any of my work. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

The answers you provide will be used to inform my Doctoral thesis and any materials that I produce alongside this, such as presentations and articles. I will not name participants, but may use direct quotes in my thesis, published articles and presentations. I anticipate providing job role and location alongside the quote e.g. 'social worker from the Philippines'. If there is anything you want to say that you do not want attributed to your role, please alert me to this at the interview or state this on the consent form and I will not include any identifying information.

Where possible, interviews will take place within a private meeting room within your organisation's offices. If this is not practical or possible, we will discuss and agree an alternative convenient and private location. The interviews will be conducted in English, so participants are required to be proficient in spoken and written English. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have prior to, during and after the interview. My contact details are below.

4. Consent, confidentiality and withdrawal from the study

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and will have no bearings on your employment. If you are willing to take part, you will need to sign and return a consent form prior to the interview. This includes giving your consent for the means of recording the interview (i.e. audio recording or written notes only) and to the interview taking place via video chat, if necessary and practical.

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time before, during, and for up to four weeks following the interview. This can include requesting that none of your answers are used in my research, or to request that certain answers or statements are deleted. During the interview, you can request not to answer any or all questions that I ask, or you can ask me to repeat or rephrase questions if the meaning is not clear. You do not have to give a reason why.

Anything you tell me during the interview will be anonymised (as explained in Section 3) and confidential information will be kept confidential. However, if any information you share relates to abuse against a child or vulnerable adult or if you refer to professional practices that raise safeguarding concerns, I will discuss this with my academic supervisors, and we will decide whether a referral to the appropriate services is considered necessary. If there is an immediate safeguarding concern, I will follow statutory obligations. Where available, please provide me with a copy of your organisation's safeguarding policy so I can ensure compliance with this.

5. Data security and storage

I will handle all data in compliance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Personal information (such as contact details) will be securely stored in a password protected database. These will be stored separately to research materials e.g. interview transcripts. Consent forms, interview transcripts (written and audio files) and notes will be stored on the University of Bedfordshire's One Drive (cloud service). They may be temporarily stored on my personal laptop if I am unable to immediately access the online Drive. They will be password protected. Hard copies will be kept securely until they can be scanned to be uploaded onto the secure cloud service, and then shredded. If you consent, I will retain all anonymised interview data in electronic form for up to five years following the completion of my thesis for the purpose of further analysis (e.g. for journal articles). This anonymised data may be shared with my supervisors to support analysis.

To ensure research integrity, an anonymised copy of the interview data (i.e. transcripts) will be shared with the University's Research Graduate School on submission of my doctoral thesis. This is to demonstrate the originality of research findings.

6. Risks and benefits

Interviews and our preceding communications will be conducted to minimize risk to you, your organisation and myself. As set out in section 5, your data will be handled securely, and you will be anonymised. Interviews will be conducted in a safe and private premises (ideally your organisation's office building) and in the knowledge of your organisation. An information sheet has also been provided to your organisation explaining what participation entails and making clear that their employees participation must be voluntary and that interviews should take place during working hours if possible.

If you choose to participate in this research, you and your organisation will benefit by receiving a summary of the findings and a copy of my full thesis upon request. Where possible and if requested, I will also give a presentation of the findings to participating organisations. You will also benefit through the knowledge that your insight and experience is being used to help inform research and the development of research and policy recommendations that relate to your professional work and will hopefully help to fill a research gap that will better enable us to effectively protect children.

7. Dissemination of research findings

I will share a summary of my research findings with my participants and their respective organisations. My full thesis and any other publications I may produce will be shared with participants upon request. If of interest, following completion of my Doctorate and where practically possible, I will present my findings to participating organisations.

If you wish to receive a copy of the summary/thesis, you will be asked for consent to

contact you for this purpose.

8. Complaints procedure

If you have concerns or complaints about my conduct before, during or after the interview, you can contact my Doctoral supervisor, Dr Lisa Bostock by email at: Lisa.bostock@beds.ac.uk

9. Support

The study should not expose you to levels of stress that would exceed that experienced within your normal work. However, if anything raised during the interview impacts you emotionally, please discuss this with your manager, or a trusted colleague. The following websites also provide some advice and information:

UK Support (in English)
- NHS advice on managing stress - https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/
- Mind mental health charity:
    o https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/
    o https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/

Philippines / international
- Mental health services in the Philippines at #mentalhealthph - http://mentalhealthph.org/Services
- Find global mental health support mhaWHEREness - https://mentalhealthawhereness.com/

10. Next steps

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this research further, you can contact me using the details below. If you wish to participate in this research, please complete and sign the accompanying consent form and return this to the email address below. I will then contact you to agree a date, time, and location for the interview.

Abbie Gillgan
abbie.gillgan@study.beds.ac.uk
+44 7414 534843

Consent form and information sheet for participants in the Philippines (based on requirements from the Philippine National Ethics Committee

Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form for Philippine professionals that are participating in this project

Name of Principle Investigator: Abbie Gillgan

Name of Organization: University of Bedfordshire

Name of Project:

Understanding the beliefs of individuals and the social and structural factors within Britain that facilitate online child sexual exploitation against children in the Philippines

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION
This Doctoral study is being conducted through the University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom. It draws on the experiences and expertise of professionals in the Philippines and Britain to understand the factors within Britain that facilitate online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) against children in the Philippines. I am interviewing experts from a range of professions who work with the victims and/or perpetrators of this form of abuse. This is an invitation to participate in this research and you can take time to consider whether you would like to. Please contact me if you have any questions or do not understand any of elements of this research.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
Professionals working with children around the world are increasingly aware of the role of the internet in giving children opportunities and exposing them to harm. This research explores the challenge of online child protection with an international focus, recognising that the internet does not respect national boundaries. I am interested in understanding what more Britain can do to protect Filipino children online, as British people are among those known to target Filipino children for online sexual exploitation. I am seeking to surface the factors that facilitate the perpetration of online child sexual exploitation by people in Britain against children in the Philippines, with a particular interest in live-streamed abuse.

I am interested in the perspectives of professionals working to prevent online child sexual exploitation in Britain and the Philippines. Participants will be asked what they think the factors are that facilitate this form of cross-border online abuse, based on their expertise and professional experience. I will be conducting interviews with professionals from law enforcement, the charity sector, academia, policy making and health and social care.

This research is being undertaken in support of a Professional Doctorate. I intend to use the findings from this research to develop recommendations for further research, to make policy recommendations and to advance the conversation about the role and importance of preventative measures that target offenders and their environment.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER
I am conducting this research as part of my Professional Doctorate at the University of Bedfordshire. I have been working in child protection policy for over five years

within the charity and public sector. I have a longstanding interest in issues relating to abuse, exploitation and violence against women and girls, and my academic and professional career has focused on the online aspects of these issues.

I currently work for the UK's Home Office. However, this is independent research and is in no way affiliated with the UK Government. Research findings will not necessarily inform policy development within the Home Office.

TYPE OF RESEARCH INTERVENTION
You are being invited to take part in a one-to-one 60-minute interview. Due to COVID restrictions this will likely take place via an online video call.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION
You have been approached for participation in this research because of your relevant professional experience in online child sexual exploitation.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and will have no bearings on your employment or employment-related evaluations. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time before, during, and for up to four weeks following the interview. This can include requesting that none of your answers are used in my research, or to request that certain answers or statements are deleted. During the interview, you can request not to answer any or all questions that I ask, or you can ask me to repeat or rephrase questions if the meaning is not clear. You do not have to give a reason why.

PROCEDURES
For this research study I am conducting approximately 30 (15 from each country) one-to-one interviews with professionals in Britain and the Philippines who have professional experience in dealing with and responding to online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). The data collected from these interviews will be analysed for my Doctoral thesis, which will include recommendations for policy and further research. You have been invited to take part as one of the Philippine research participants.

About the interview

The interview will consist of approximately 15 questions. You will first be asked to give some information about your professional experience in this area. I will then ask you to draw on your professional experience to consider what you think the factors are that facilitate and enable British offenders committing OSEC offences against children in the Philippines. You will also be asked what the key challenges are in tackling this issue and what more you think could be done to help prevent these offences from occurring. I will not ask you to speak about any personal experiences of abuse. When referring to specific cases, I request that you do not use the real names of any victims, perpetrators, or their families (even if these are already public) to help protect their anonymity. Where you do, I will redact (remove) these names from the interview transcript and will anonymise them if your answer is used in any of my work.

Due to COVID restrictions, it is likely that interviews will take place via an online video call (Skype, Zoom or an alternative platform of your choosing). It is possible that interviews will take place in person if I (principal researcher) am able to travel to the Philippines in the coming months. For your convenience, I will travel to your place or work and will request that we have access to a private room. If this is not practical or possible, we will discuss and agree an alternative convenient and private location.

The only people present will be me (researcher) and you, unless you would like someone else to attend with you. I will audio record the interview, with your consent, using a password protected Dictaphone (audio recorder). The interviews will be conducted in English, so participants are required to be proficient in spoken and written English. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have prior to, during and after the interview. My contact details are below.

Handling of personal information and anonymity

Personal information (such as contact details) will be securely stored in a password protected database. These will be stored separately to research materials e.g. interview transcripts. Consent forms, interview transcripts (written and audio files) and notes will be stored on the University of Bedfordshire's One Drive (cloud service). They may be temporarily stored on my personal laptop if I am unable to immediately access the online Drive. They will be password protected. Hard copies will be kept securely until they can be scanned to be uploaded onto the secure cloud service, and then shredded. If you consent, I will retain all anonymised interview data in electronic form for up to five years following the completion of my thesis for the purpose of further analysis (e.g. for journal articles). This anonymised data may be shared with my supervisors to support analysis.

To ensure research integrity, an anonymised copy of the interview data (i.e. transcripts) will be shared with the University's Research Graduate School on submission of my doctoral thesis. This is to demonstrate the originality of research findings.

The answers you provide will be used to inform my Doctoral thesis and any materials that I produce alongside this, such as presentations and articles. I will not name participants, but may use direct quotes in my thesis, published articles and presentations. I anticipate providing job role and location alongside the quote e.g. 'social worker from the Philippines'. If there is anything you want to say that you do not want attributed to your role, please alert me to this at the interview or state this on the consent form and I will not include any identifying information.

DURATION
The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I may contact you after the interview, for example if you have offered to introduce me to someone. I will also contact you when the research is completed to share my findings and thesis with you.

RISKS

Interviews and our preceding communications will be conducted in a way to minimise risk to you, your organisation and myself. As set out above, your data will be handled securely, and you will be anonymised. Interviews will be conducted online or in a safe and private premises (ideally your organisation's office building) and in the knowledge of your organisation. An information sheet can be provided to your organisation explaining what participation entails and making clear that their employees' participation must be voluntary and that interviews should take place during working hours if possible.

Given the sensitive nature of this research topic, if interviews are conducted online, I will ensure I am in a private room with no one listening or watching the interview. I will ask that you do likewise. If you do not feel comfortable or able to answer any of the questions that I ask, you can let me know and I will move on to the next question.

If you have any concerns, you can contact me at any time using the details below.

BENEFITS
If you choose to participate in this research, you and your organisation will benefit by receiving a summary of the findings and a copy of my full thesis upon request. Where possible and if requested, I will also give a presentation of the findings to participating organisations. You will also benefit through the knowledge that your insight and experience is being used to help inform research and the development of research and policy recommendations that relate to your professional work and will hopefully help to fill a research gap that will better enable us to effectively protect children.

REIMBURSEMENTS
Participants will not be compensated for participating in this research, beyond reimbursements for expenses incurred as a result of their participation, for example, if you are required to travel for the interview. However, a summary of my research and my thesis will be provided (as above).

If interviews are conducted in person, I will provide refreshments and snacks. In these circumstances, please let me know if you have any dietary requirements.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Anything you tell me during the interview will be anonymised, with identifying information removed when transcribing interviews and your name will not be included in any published or public documents relating to this research. Confidential information will be kept confidential. However, if any information you share relates to abuse against a child or vulnerable adult or if you refer to professional practices that raise safeguarding concerns, I will discuss this with my academic supervisors, and we will decide whether a referral to the appropriate services is considered necessary. If there is an immediate safeguarding concern, I will follow statutory obligations. Where available, please provide me with a copy of your organisation's safeguarding policy so I can ensure compliance with this.

SHARING THE RESULTS

The deadline for completion of my PhD is March 2023. Upon completion, I will share a summary of my research findings with my participants and their respective organisations. My full thesis and any other publications I may produce will be shared with participants upon request. If you wish to receive a copy of the summary/thesis, you will be asked for consent to contact you for this purpose.

If of interest, following completion of my Doctorate and where practically possible, I will present my findings to participating organisations. My findings may also be presented at conferences and used in published articles.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and will have no bearings on your employment. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time before, during, and for up to four weeks following the interview. This can include requesting that none of your answers are used in my research, or to request that certain answers or statements are deleted. Upon request, and for up to four weeks following the interview, I will share the audio recording of the interview with you so that can request sections that you would like to be removed. During the interview, you can request not to answer any or all questions that I ask, or you can ask me to repeat or rephrase questions if the meaning is not clear. You do not have to give a reason why.

NEXT STEPS
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this research further, you can contact me using the details below. If you wish to participate in this research, please complete and sign the accompanying consent form and return this to the email address below. I will then contact you to agree a date, time, and location for the interview.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
If you have concerns or complaints about my conduct before, during or after the interview, you can contact my Doctoral supervisor, Dr Lisa Bostock by email at: Lisa.bostock@beds.ac.uk

You can also contact the National Ethics Committee with any queries or complaints related to the study (below).

WHO TO CONTACT
Provide the name and contact information of someone who is involved, informed and accessible - a local person who can actually be contacted. State also the name (and contact details) of the local REC that has approved the proposal.

Researcher:
Abbie Gillgan
Abbie.gillgan@study.beds.ac.uk
+44 7414 534 843

Researcher's academic supervisor:
Lisa.bostock@beds.ac.uk

National Ethics Committee:
Filipinas F. Natividad, PhD Chair, National Ethics Committee
Telephone Numbers: (02) 8837-7537 loc. 403 E-mail Address:
nationalethicscommittee.ph@gmail.com

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

This section must be written in the first person. It should include a few brief statements about the research and be followed by a statement similar to the one in bold below. If the participant is illiterate but gives oral consent, a witness must sign. A researcher or the person going over the informed consent must sign each consent. *This section is mandatory*

Statements of consent (put an 'X' in the box if you agree with the statement)

I have read and understood the information above and that provided in the Participant Information Sheet. Any questions that I have about the research have been answered satisfactorily ☐

I have received a copy of the IASR privacy notice ☐

I understand that I will not be named but that my profession and location, e.g. 'Social worker in the Philippines', may be used alongside any direct quotes as part of this research, including the thesis, published articles or presentations ☐

I understand that if there is anything that I say that I don't want attributed to my role, organisational affiliation and/or location, that I will alert the researcher to this at the interview ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research before, during or up to four weeks following the interview, in which case my information and all data will be removed ☐

I understand that my responses will only be used for the purposes of this research, which may include published articles and presentations ☐

I give my consent for the anonymised data to be retained for up to five years following the completion of the Doctorate for further analysis, including conferences and academic articles. (If consent is not given, all anonymised data will be deleted upon completion of the Doctorate) ☐

I understand that my information may be shared with the researcher's supervisors for the purposes of analysis and that an anonymised copy of the interview data will be shared with the University's Research Graduate School on submission of my doctoral thesis to demonstrate the originality of research findings ☐

I understand that if any child protection or professional misconduct issues arise about an identifiable individual, this will be raised with the researcher's supervisors and reported to the appropriate service if necessary ☐

I understand that if the researcher has any concerns about me or my practice, they may raise this with my employer ☐

I agree to having the interview recorded by (tick all that you consent to):

Written notes ☐
Audio recording ☐

If necessary and practical, I consent to the interview being conducted via video call (e.g. Skype) ☐

I understand that my information will be stored securely on the University of Bedfordshire's secure cloud service (One Drive) and a secure device after completion of the thesis ☐

I consent to my personal data (e.g. email address) being retained so that I can receive a summary of the research findings ☐

I have read the information above and provided in the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Approval from the Philippine National Ethics Committee

NATIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE
Philippine Council for Health Research and Development
Department of Science and Technology

19 March 2021

MS. ABBIE GILLGAN
Researcher
University of Bedfordshire (UK)

Study Title: Understanding the factors within Britain that facilitate online child
sexual exploitation against children in the Philippines
NEC Code: 2021-001-Gillgan-OSEAC
Subject: Ethical Review

Dear *Ms. Gillgan:*

This is to acknowledge receipt of the following documents received on 11 January 2021:

1. Request letter (dated 15 May 2020)
2. Endorsement letter (dated 02 December 2020)
3. NEC Form 3 (signed on 15 May 2020)
4. Full proposal (version 05 June 2020)
5. Technical Review Approval (received 11 January 2021)
6. Consent Form, English (version 11 January 2021)
7. CV of Researcher

The National Ethics Committee (NEC) conducted an expedited review of the above study documents and noted that the proponent has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations and concerns of the committee.

Ethical Clearance for the implementation of this study is effective
from 19 March 2021 to 18 March 2022.

If the study has not been completed within the effectivity of the clearance, you are required to apply for renewal of ethical clearance one month before its expiry.

As part of its monitoring function, the NEC requires submission of a midterm Progress Report. Amendments to the protocol, informed consent form or questionnaires need to be submitted to the NEC for approval, while other concerns like protocol deviations shall be communicated to the NEC for information and guidance.

c/o PCHRD, DOST Complex,   Tel No. (63-2) 8-837-75-37
General Santos Ave., Bicutan, Taguig City
Philippines

University of Bedfordshire

FAO Abbie Gillgan

26th February 2020

Dear Abbie

Re: IASR_06/19
Project Title: Protection beyond borders: Professionals' understandings of the factors that facilitate online child sexual exploitation

The Ethics Committee of the Institute of Applied Social Research has considered your application and are happy to inform you that the proposed research project has been approved. You have done a thorough job considering the reviewers' comments, suggestions and feedback.

Please note that if it becomes necessary to make any substantive change to the research design, including sampling or data collection methods, this will require further review. Please complete Form 4: "Change of research design that require ethical approval".

Some research will also be subject to ethical scrutiny by other specialist ethics panels. This includes research that involves NHS organisations in England; participants aged over 16 years that lack capacity to consent as defined under the Mental Capacity Act 2005; prisons, youth offending or probation services; and research involving four or more local authorities. Local authorities and other organisations may also have their own research governance arrangements where approval will be required before data collection commences.

In all cases, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of proof of all necessary authorisations <u>before</u> any fieldwork commences. Once received, please send proof of approval to Hemlata.Naranbhai@beds.ac.uk.

I hope the above is clear. Please get in touch if you require further clarification.

We wish you very best wishes with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Debra Allnock
Deputy IASR Staff and PGR Ethics Co-ordinator