

Preventing child sexual offending online through effective digital media

RESEARCH UPDATE – JUNE 2020

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The aim of this project was to establish an evidence base for understanding and creating images and advertisements that will be effective in 'nudging' potential offenders away from online child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) and toward seeking therapeutic intervention. The key findings from the main 2019 study are reported in 'Designing Effective Digital Advertisements to Prevent Online Consumption of Child Sexual Exploitation Material', an article currently under peer review with *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. The copy of the published article will be provided to InternetNZ as soon as possible, and the following abstract provides a summary:

The necessity of developing effective and innovative primary prevention strategies is a pressing objective in stemming the harm caused by the production and consumption of child sexual exploitation material (CSEM). Digital media interventions—including search engine advertisements—hold promise as prevention tools to deflect potential users away from CSEM and redirect them to therapeutic services. This study aimed to establish an evidence base for effective advertising in this context by creating mock-up helpline advertisements and testing them in focus groups and interviews with staff and clients of New Zealand's major treatment service providers for harmful sexual behavior. Prior to testing these advertisements in situ (on online platforms), this paper reports on a foundational creative and qualitative investigation of effective advertisements—what imagery, text, and design features are most likely to succeed in diverting people away from seeking CSEM and encouraging them to reach out to a helpline? The findings of this study offer deeper understanding of the mindset, emotions, and barriers to reaching out that are experienced by onset CSEM users, as well as suitability of certain imagery and text for advertising in this context, and thereby contribute to strengthening primary prevention efforts in combatting CSEM consumption.

Follow-up research in the Feb-June 2020 period (since the final report was submitted) has continued to build on several outcomes of the main project:

- Developing and testing evidence-based principles for effective online prevention advertising
- Strengthening a cross-disciplinary network of experts sharing knowledge and building collaborations to tackle CSEM consumption online
- Working to reduce consumption of CSEM online (in New Zealand and beyond)

1. News media representations of people who create and/or consume CSEM online

I have commenced a study investigating news media representations of people who create and/or consume CSEM online or commit otherwise digitally-mediated child sexual abuse. With the understanding that media reporting is influential in shaping public perceptions of social issues, news articles published in New Zealand over the last 2.5 years are being analysed qualitatively within a critical discourse studies framework, in combination with a quantitative content analysis. The research aims to identify ways in which the media – for example, by perpetuating stigma or poor understandings of the issue – might be undermining efforts to prevent child sexual abuse, and will ultimately consider how the findings can be utilised to inform future prevention initiatives. A research assistant has been employed to support data collection and analysis. The journal article will be submitted within the next few months.

2. Stand Strong, Walk Tall: Prehabilitation for a Better Future – new collaboration

I have also joined a research team with psychology academics from Canterbury, Auckland and Waikato universities on a new intervention programme to prevent child sexual abuse, leading the digital media

side. In Phase One, a 'prehabilitation' therapeutic service for people in the community who experience sexual interest in children was designed (funded by MSD). I have come on board in the lead up to Phase Two, in which the programme will be piloted in Christchurch and Auckland (prior to a planned national rollout). Building on what I learnt through my InternetNZ-funded project, I am developing the publicity campaign and will undertake further research on effective digital media in a prevention context through an applied study. Initial logo designs have been created, and mock-up advertisements are in development, which will be pre-tested in a study with university psychology students before the advertising campaign is finalised and launched, and follow-up research on its effectiveness is completed. The programme is also being concurrently piloted in Norway and I have connected with counterparts there regarding their promotional materials and a potential joint study.

3. Opportunities to apply research findings to practical interventions and new studies

Within the past six months, the initial research has led to other opportunities to apply my research findings to practical interventions in CSEM consumption and build a research network:

- The Department of Internal Affairs' Digital Safety group asked me to provide advice on the redesign of the landing page for the digital child exploitation filter, and I drew on the research insights to suggest improvements.
- I was invited to provide my expert input on primary prevention initiatives being developed with the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, including giving feedback on a video script and providing general advice on message tone and language in targeted interventions with nascent CSEM users.
- I am collaborating with Colm Gannon (Pathfinder Labs) on developing a trial of prevention advertising on peer-to-peer networks to intervene in the consumption and sharing of CSEM. My initial study explored the use of advertisements on search engine results, and this follow-up study explores other strategies to reach the target audience and reduce CSEM consumption.
- I became a member of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse (ANZATSA), a useful professional association to continue building my local network across disciplines in the field of sexual violence prevention for future collaboration opportunities.

4. Invited presentation at the 2020 ATSA conference

Finally, I was invited to present on my research in a symposium on New Zealand innovations at the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) 39th Annual Research and Treatment Conference: '*Blending Voices. Strengthening Lives.*' The conference, originally to be held in Texas, is now an online conference, and I will present from Christchurch alongside other experts in the field from New Zealand in October 2020.

I would like to again express my gratitude to InternetNZ for funding this research, as this InternetNZ-funded project has laid an important foundation for developing effective digital media interventions in sexual offending against children online, and has opened up exciting new research avenues and collaborations in this area.

Expenditure of remaining funding (Ref: IR000312018/19)

RA Contract (data collection and analysis)	3,458.18
Design Studio work	604.00
Research Text: <i>Free to be Children</i>	22.48
Mbrshp Aust & NZ Treatment of Sexual Ab	78.25
AoIR travel 2019	222.87
Total allocated expenditure	4,385.78

Declared to InternetNZ for cfwd	4,395.29
Expend estimate @ 24/6/2020	4,385.78
Balance remaining (estimate)	9.51