Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Developing a typology of child sexual abuse offending

A rapid review of methods used in empirical studies

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This report is intended to be read alongside the report *A New Typology of Child Sexual Abuse Offending*, available at: **www.csacentre.org.uk/our-research/perpetration/**. Findings from the rapid review described here informed the development of the typology set out in that report.

Acknowledgements

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We thank the research team at the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) at the University of Middlesex for reviewing this report, and acknowledge their work on developing the resulting typology of CSA offending. Our thanks go also to the members of our Development and Review Panel, who reviewed and commented on this rapid review and the development of the new typology.

About the authors

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About the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) wants children to be able to live free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse. Our aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.

We are a multi-disciplinary team, funded by the Home Office and hosted by Barnardo's, working closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector. However, we are independent and will challenge any barriers, assumptions, taboos and ways of working that prevent us from increasing our understanding and improving our approach to child sexual abuse.

To tackle child sexual abuse we must understand its causes, scope, scale and impact. We know a lot about child sexual abuse and have made progress in dealing with it, but there are still many gaps in our knowledge and understanding which limit how effectively the issue is tackled.

Contents

Executive summary

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) recognises that, for children to live a life free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse, a better understanding of its perpetration is required. However, definitions of different types of child sexual abuse (CSA), and the language used to describe those who commit such abuse, are inconsistent. This presents challenges to both policy and practice.

In 2018, we commissioned the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) at Middlesex University to develop and test a draft typology of CSA offending, which was then developed further by our own research team. This has now been published under the title *A New Typology of Child Sexual Abuse Offending*, and is available at **www.csacentre.org.uk/our-research/perpetration/**.

In order to learn from previously published typologies related to CSA offending, we first conducted a rapid review of the empirical studies describing these typologies and how they were developed. Systematic search methods were used to identify 39 journal articles from the UK and overseas, each detailing a typology that related to CSA, for review.

The rapid review focused on *methodology*, and did not attempt to analyse the *content* of the typologies; in particular, it sought to identify common limitations of earlier studies and typologies, and how these might be addressed. The findings from the rapid review, outlined here, informed the work by CATS and the CSA Centre to develop the new typology.

Key findings

The reviewed studies could be categorised into three groups, depending on their focus: on the characteristics of offenders, on patterns of offending, or on the context/characteristics of the offence. Three-fifths of the studies belonged to the first of these groups.

The studies most commonly focused on convicted offenders. One-sixth of studies sought to differentiate the characteristics or behavioural patterns of sexual offenders from those of other groups – non-offenders and/or those who commit other types of offence.

Almost two-fifths of the studies did not say that they had been conducted with a specific practical application in mind. Of the remainder, most identified the treatment of offenders – alongside the assessment or management of offenders, or the prevention of abuse – as a key activity that the typology might support.

Almost all the studies used secondary analysis of administrative data (e.g. police files) to develop their typology. One-third of studies collected primary data, typically analysing it alongside administrative data.

The most commonly accessed data sources were offender case files and offender clinical files.

More than four-fifths of the studies included acknowledgements that their typologies had limitations. Commonly identified limitations included:

- sample selection bias, as a result of studying only *convicted* offenders
- small sample sizes, which were felt to make the findings less representative and generalisable
- the use of administrative data, which was not collected for the purpose of the research and was incomplete in many cases
- reliance on individuals' accounts of offending in studies collecting primary data, since such accounts are vulnerable to cognitive distortions or social desirability bias.

Implications for the development of a new typology of CSA offending

The emphasis on the individual perpetrator, seen in most of the 39 studies reviewed, has been criticised in the wider literature on the grounds that many perpetrators will commit varied offences over time, and a great deal of their offending behaviour may be hidden. In recent years, more work has been done to understand the offending committed, rather than the person who committed it, and this was the approach adopted by the CSA Centre and CATS in the development of their new typology.

Selection bias is an issue in any study in this field, because the data analysed will inevitably relate to *known* offences or offenders. The CSA Centre/CATS study sought to reduce this bias by analysing police case files alongside data from a variety of sources outside the criminal justice system. Additionally, to increase the validity of the data contained in police case files, analysis of these files made use of information such as statements by victims and offenders alongside the notes made by police officers.

Where data from criminal justice agencies is used to develop a typology, a further source of selection bias is the potential for those agencies to pay particular attention to certain types of crime. The CSA Centre/CATS study sought access to police files relating to 'atypical' cases, and involved the National Crime Agency – which investigates cases of CSA different from those typically encountered by police forces – and other agencies in reviewing the draft typology, in an effort to build a broad and holistic understanding of CSA by ensuring inclusion of all types of offences.

The reviewed studies' reliance on administrative data sources (offender case files and clinical files) highlighted the issue that data captured in these sources is often incomplete. To overcome this limitation, the CSA Centre/CATS study applied strict inclusion criteria based on data completeness.

Conclusion

It is important to be aware of the numerous challenges and limitations – some of them unavoidable – that can arise when undertaking research into offending. In taking steps to address these issues, the CSA Centre and CATS have sought to improve the validity of their study's findings and increase confidence in the new typology of CSA offending that they have developed.

> It is important to be aware of the challenges and limitations – some unavoidable – that can arise when undertaking research into offending

1. Introduction

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) recognises that, for children to live a life free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse, a better understanding of its perpetration is required.

At present, definitions of different types of child sexual abuse (CSA), and the language used to describe those who commit such abuse, are inconsistent. The CSA Centre's initial scoping studies on perpetration highlighted the challenges that this presents in both policy and practice (CSA Centre, 2018). A shared understanding of the ways in which CSA takes place, and a clear direction for future knowledge development in this area, cannot be nurtured without clear and consistently used definitions.

In 2018, the CSA Centre commissioned the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) at Middlesex University to develop and test a draft typology of CSA offending, which was then developed further by the CSA Centre's own research team. The resulting typology (CSA Centre/CATS, 2020) aims to address gaps in knowledge on the nature and contexts of CSA offending.

The rapid review described in this report was conducted to feed into the design of the CSA Centre/CATS study.

1.1 Research aims and objectives

The rapid review sought to determine and present methodological lessons to be learned from previous typology development in the field of CSA perpetration. Its objectives were to:

1. identify the range of typologies available that consider sexual offending against children
2. describe these typologies' focus and intended purpose
3. examine the strengths and limitations of the typologies and the studies through which they were developed
4. draw out the implications of these factors on future research.

The rapid review focused on methodology, and did not attempt to analyse the content of the typologies (although information on that content is given in Appendices A and B).

1.2 This report

While typologies of offending are recognised as providing useful opportunities for knowledge development (e.g. Proeve et al, 2016), they do not come without their limitations or criticisms (Brennan, 1987). Chapter 2 provides an overview of how typologies related to CSA perpetration have evolved, presents concerns raised about the use of typologies, and explains why the new typology focuses on types of CSA *offending* rather than types of CSA *offender*.

Chapter 3 outlines how the empirical studies to be reviewed were selected, and Chapter 4 summarises some key characteristics of the focus and method of those studies.

Chapter 5 describes the limitations commonly associated with typology development in this field, and explains how the CSA Centre/CATS study sought to address these limitations in developing the new typology. It should be noted that the limitations of the typologies – as identified by us or by the studies' authors themselves – are common ones, and are often unavoidable within methodological, funding and time constraints. They have been detailed in this report not to criticise the studies reviewed, but to highlight opportunities for strengthening future typology development.

2. CSA typologies: origins, uses and contentions

The development and application of CSA typologies is a relatively new focus of research, with specific growth in knowledge in this field developing in the 1990s and gaining momentum in the 2000s. This section of the report describes the journey of CSA typology development and provides an overview of how typologies are used in research, policy and practice; finally, it summarises the key contentions regarding the development and application of typologies.

2.1 Increasing recognition of CSA as distinct from other sexual offending

Individuals who commit sexual offences are a heterogeneous group whose characteristics, motivations and patterns of offending can differ greatly (Chung et al, 2006; Robertiello and Terry, 2007; Proeve et al, 2016; Simons, 2015). The only generalisations that can be asserted are that known perpetrators of sexual abuse are almost always male and most likely are known to their victims (Chung et al, 2006). This heterogeneity presents difficulties when determining effective prevention, disruption or treatment methods and when to apply them, because of differing understandings of the person or situation at hand. Typologies have been applied to sexual offending in an attempt to address these issues.

A typology is a way of classifying items (e.g. individuals, situations or environments) by their 'general type'. Through the grouping of items by their similarities, and recognition of their differences, they can be studied and understood in more detail. Over the past 50 years, attempts have been made to classify sexual offenders – and, more recently, CSA offenders in particular – into distinct types, both theoretically (based on knowledge of the research literature) and empirically (from knowledge developed through studies); see Simons (2015) for a review. Initially, however, little distinction was made between CSA offenders and individuals who commit sexual offences against adults. Early work by academics such as Knight and Prentky (Knight et al, 1989; Knight and Prentky, 1990; Prentky et al, 1989) began to differentiate between these groups, but presented those who committed CSA as a homogenous sub-type of wider sexual offenders (Robertiello and Terry, 2007).

In the 1990s, it was increasingly recognised that CSA offenders differ in their motivations and methods from those who commit sexual offences against adults. Early categorisations derived from this recognition focused primarily on distinguishing those who perpetrate abuse by their level of 'paedophilic interest' in or physical contact with the victim (Hunter et al, 2003).

In the last two decades, a more nuanced approach has been taken in the way that individuals who offend against children are perceived and studied, with their heterogeneity reflected in the typologies developed during this time. Typologies have expanded in scope to focus on, for example:

- the ways in which technology facilitates CSA (Webster et al, 2014; DeMarco et al, 2018)
- female-perpetrated CSA (e.g. Vandiver and Kercher, 2004; Sandler and Freeman, 2007; Gannon et al, 2008; Gannon et al, 2010)
- peer-on-peer CSA (Worling, 2001; Hunter et al, 2003; Oxnam and Vess, 2008)
- transnational CSA (Alexy et al, 2005; Cooper et al, 2017).

> Initially, typologies made little distinction between CSA offenders and individuals who commit sexual offences against adults

2.2 Development of CSA typologies for use in practice

Most commonly, typologies related to CSA have focused on individual factors related specifically to those who commit the abuse; they have considered those individuals' demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age and race), psychosocial characteristics (e.g. medical history, personality traits and family history), or motivations for offending and choice of victim (Liang and Hu, 2017).

This focus on the individual can be considered to reflect the way in which professionals seek to identify and address CSA in practice. Typologies of CSA offenders have been developed to help criminal justice and social work practitioners make decisions regarding sentencing, risk assessment and treatment, or to enable predictions to be made about offenders and their future actions (e.g. whether they are likely to reoffend, how and against whom). Examples include typologies used to determine sentencing during prosecution (Quayle, 2008), and to assess risk of recidivism when managing offenders (Kemshall, 2001; McNaughton Nicholls and Webster, 2014). The use of typologies can support those who develop and implement policy to understand why an initiative may or may not work with certain sections of the population, and who should be the target(s) of interventions.

Typologies focused on sex offending behaviours and the offence itself are less common, but work in this area has grown since the late 2000s (Liang and Hu, 2017). Similarly, multifactor theories have been developed – see the work of Finkelhor (1984), Hall and Hirschman (1992) and Ward and Siegert (2002) as examples – in an attempt to reduce the limitation of focusing on only one factor (i.e. demographic characteristics) at a time. This work has previously informed early probation-led CSA treatment programmes.

It should be noted that typology development appears to follow 'trends' in relation to high-profile cases or scenarios of abuse. This is evidenced by the development of typologies in response to the recognition of abuse in the Catholic Church, the role of 'grooming' in CSA, and networks as facilitators of abuse; see Hanson (2015), O'Connell (2003) and Elliott (2017) as examples.

2.3 Concerns regarding typologies

While their development has become more nuanced, the value of typologies based on classifying sexual offenders has been criticised.

Firstly, it has been argued that patterns of sexual offending, including CSA, are too complex and varied to be grouped into distinct categories (Kelly, 1988). Studies have identified that many individuals who commit sexual offences against children may commit different types of abuse at different times, and that a great deal of their offending behaviour may be hidden, reducing confidence in the categorisation of offenders due to a lack of knowledge of their activities (Simons, 2015).

Furthermore, typologies of those who commit CSA have been criticised for being built on knowledge related to *known* offenders, who are seen as only a subset of the offending population given that studies find that most sexual offences go unreported (Percy and Mayhew, 1997; Chung et al, 2006). This reduces academics' and practitioners' ability to apply their findings confidently to all those who commit sexual offences against children.

Alongside this, research on perpetration, and especially classification, has been criticised for focusing on psychological and individualistic framing (Kelly, 1998; Clark and Quadara, 2010; Scully, 1990; Chung et al, 2006). Some studies have attempted to move beyond psychological framing by knitting together factors; for example, an 'Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending' was developed by Ward and Beech (2006), who saw it as a response to earlier theories that "focus on the surface level of symptomology and fail to take into account the fact that human beings are biological or embodied creatures". However, Chung et al (2006) felt that Ward and Beech's theory still focused on "individualistic explanations of sexual offending" and – while acknowledging the social and cultural environment – did not go far enough to incorporate social and structural determinants.

Given that the majority of perpetrator research has been focused on individuals, this appears to call for a widening of the focus and scope of perpetrator research, as argued by Chung et al (2010), to look at *perpetration* – the offence and the context around it – and determine whether trends or patterns emerge.

3. Method

This review was conducted as a rapid review; systematic search methods were utilised, and the evidence returned was assessed for applicability against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The rapid nature of this review is emphasised, as the search strategy was applied to a limited database and documents were screened for empirical studies only; it does not, therefore, present a comprehensive list of all typologies developed in this field.

3.1 Search strategy

A search strategy was developed based on the research objectives (see section 1.1). A set of Boolean terms were generated using like terms:

"(offend* OR abus* OR paedophile OR pedophile OR hebephile OR groom* OR exploit*) AND (sex* OR rape) AND (model* OR typolog* OR framework* OR category* OR classif*) AND (child*)".

Two database searches, of material published in the English language since January 1990, were conducted between March and August 2018. In the first, staff at the NSPCC Library searched their databases, which include international journals and grey literature. The second search was conducted on EBSCO Information Services' *SocINDEX with Full Text* and *Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection* databases; this search was narrowed to academic and peer-reviewed papers, and the terms were searched for in the title and abstract only.

The literature search conducted by NSPCC produced 194 results while the EBSCO search produced 639 results.

Following initial screening of the titles and abstracts, 81 articles were selected for full-text screening because they:

- had a specific (but not necessarily exclusive) focus on those who commit sexual offences against children
- presented a distinct typology
- included a clear methodology; qualitative and quantitative studies, literature reviews and meta-analysis were eligible for inclusion in the review.

Of these 81 articles, 42 were excluded at the full-text screening stage, for reasons such as duplication, not presenting a distinct typology, being conceptual only, involving abuse of adults only or not focusing on sexual abuse.

Details of each of the 39 studies included within in this review can be found in Appendices A and B.

3.2 Analysis

Framework analysis was conducted, because of its transparency and the scope it offered for collaboration between multiple researchers. A framework was developed for the researchers to extract from each of the studies reviewed:

- the focus of the typology (whether it is about types of offenders, patterns of offending, motivations, etc)
- the approach taken (deductive or inductive) in developing the typology
- the aims and objectives of the study (specifically whether they mention treatment, prevention, etc)
- the population being considered (female/male sex offenders, adolescents/adult sex offenders)
- the methodology applied
- the presented strengths of the study
- the presented limitations of the study.

4. Findings: characteristics of the studies reviewed

This chapter sets out the findings from our analysis of the typologies presented in the literature, and how they were developed, starting with the overall focus of the typologies and what they aimed to achieve.

The nature of the typologies that result from any research study will depend on the data available and accessed by the researchers. It is therefore also important to consider the methodological approaches taken to develop the typologies, the data sources utilised and the populations studied.

Some of the reviewed studies included descriptions of their strengths or limitations. These are outlined in the final section of this chapter, and learning from studies' limitations is the focus of Chapter 5.

4.1 Focus and scope

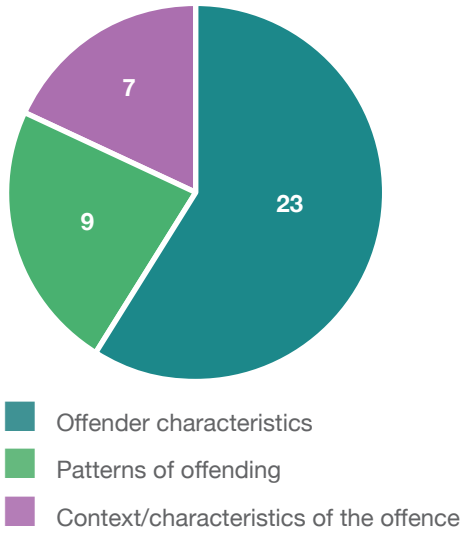
We were able to group the typologies under three distinct themes in relation to their focus (see Figure 1):

- **Offender characteristics.** These typologies primarily categorise individuals based on their motivations, characteristics or traits (e.g. personality disorders, mental health issues or sexually deviant thought processes), and the implications for their propensity to offend or method of offending. They are often geared toward understanding the risk an offender poses and developing treatment programmes.
- **Patterns of offending.** These typologies seek to understand offenders by the ways in which they behave, before or during offending. They look primarily at the manner in which individuals offend, and the potentially impacting psychological, emotional or societal factors.
- **Context/characteristics of the offence.** Typically, these typologies try to build a more complex picture of offences and offending in general. They look primarily at categorising the offences that have occurred, specifically considering the contexts or characteristics of the offence itself, rather than the individual(s) who committed the offence.

The scope of the typologies featured within the review were varied; they ranged from broad accounts of criminal activity (and sexual offending in particular) through to offending by particular populations (e.g. females) or particular contexts (e.g. online). Details of the typologies' scope can be found in Appendix A.

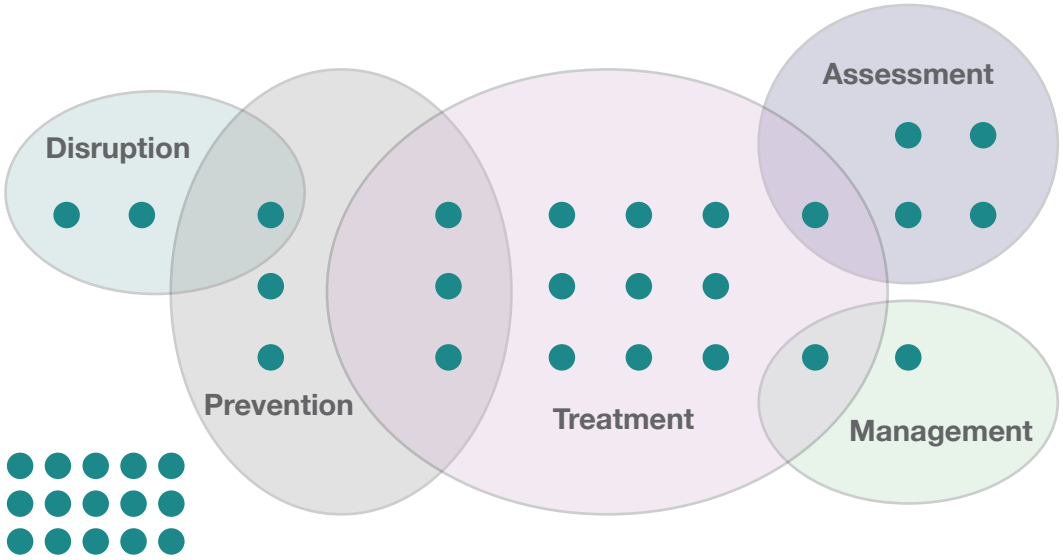
One-sixth of the studies (n=7) sought to differentiate the characteristics or behavioural patterns of sexual offenders from those of other groups – non-offenders and/or those who commit other types of offence. The remaining 32 studies had no such 'comparison groups', and sought solely to differentiate between different types of sexual offender or offending.

Figure 1. Focus of typologies



n=39.

Figure 2. Suggested application of typologies



n=39.

4.2 Categorisations applied

The number of categories within each typology ranged from two to eight.

The manner in which individuals and offences were categorised was diverse, reflecting the multi-disciplinary nature of research and knowledge development in this field. For example, offenders were categorised in relation to their levels of motivation (Tener et al, 2015), the manner in which they offended (e.g. whether it was planned or not) (Gannon et al, 2008) and the level of risk they posed in relation to reoffending (Ennis et al, 2016).

A full table of categorisations and their basis can be found in Appendix C.

4.3 Purpose of the typology

As described in Chapter 2, one reason for the development of typologies has been to support more detailed understanding of particular phenomena and to help practitioners make decisions about the individuals they work with.

As Figure 2 shows, almost two-fifths (n=15) of the studies reviewed did not say they had been conducted with a specific practical application in mind. The remainder identified treatment (n=14), prevention (n=6), assessment (n=5), disruption (n=3) and management (n=2) as the key activities that their typologies might support.

4.4 Methodological approach

Typologies can be developed in two ways: by drawing conclusions from the data in order to develop a suite of categories (inductive), or by developing categories first and then using the data to test these (deductive).

Just over half of the studies reviewed (n=22) were deductive in nature, either testing conceptual typologies empirically or attempting to validate existing typologies that had been developed empirically. The other 17 studies were inductive in nature, building theories and patterns from the data.

> Just over half of the studies were deductive in nature; the remainder were inductive, building theories and patterns from the data

4.5 Data sources

Fourteen unique types of data source were identified in the studies reviewed, with 55 different sources used in total (see Table 1). The most popular types of data source were offender case files (featuring in almost half the studies), offender clinical files and interviews with those involved (as offenders, victims or practitioners).

Figure 3 shows that more than two-thirds (n=27) of the studies were based solely on secondary analysis of existing administrative data (such as case files and clinical files held by police forces, probation services or prison services). Fewer than one-third (n=12) of studies involved primary data analysis (i.e. of data collected directly from respondents and specifically for that study); most of these employed secondary data analysis of administrative data too.

4.6 Population studied

As Figure 4 indicates, the 39 studies were conducted in nine different countries. More than two-thirds (n=28) of them, however, were conducted in the USA and/or the UK.

Figure 5 illustrates the gender(s) of the offender populations considered in the studies reviewed. One-sixth of the studies (n=6) focused exclusively on female offenders. Of the remainder, a few (n=4) included offenders of both genders in their sample, but in each case the number of females was very small.

In more than half (n=22) of the studies reviewed, children were the victims of all the crimes committed by the sample of sexual offenders; more than one third (n=15) of the studies considered sexual offenders who had victimised both adults and children; and the remaining two studies did not make it clear whether the sexual offenders' abuse was perpetrated exclusively against children (see Figure 6).

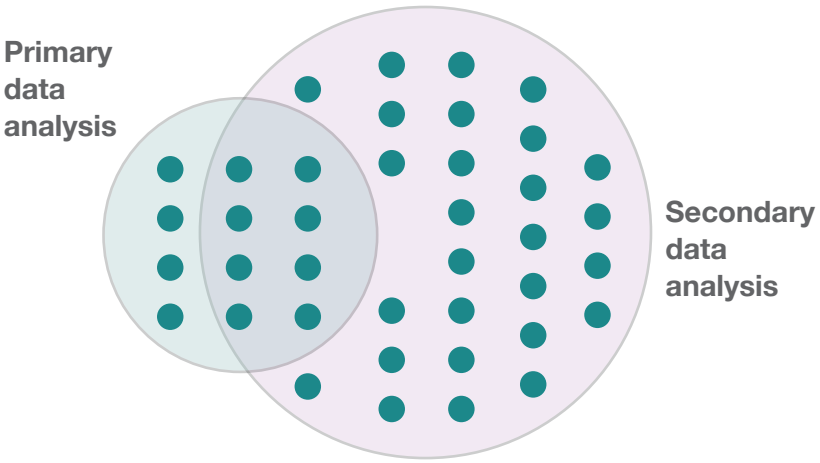
Few of the studies considered the potential differences between those who offend against girls and those who offend against boys; with only three studies focused exclusively on victims of one gender (see Figure 7). Note that one-third of studies (n=14) did not specify the gender(s) of the victims. No studies sought to distinguish offending against transgender or intersex victims.

Table 1. Data sources utilised

Data source	No. of studies
Offender case files	19
Offender clinical files	11
Offender questionnaire	4
Interviews with practitioners	4
Interviews with offenders	3
Researcher-administered offender battery tests	3
Transcripts or records of online activity	3
Existing offender battery tests	2
Phallometric measurement	1
PET (positron emission tomography) scanning	1
Practitioner questionnaire	1
Minutes of practitioner meetings	1
Interviews with victims	1
Newspaper reports	1
Total	**55**

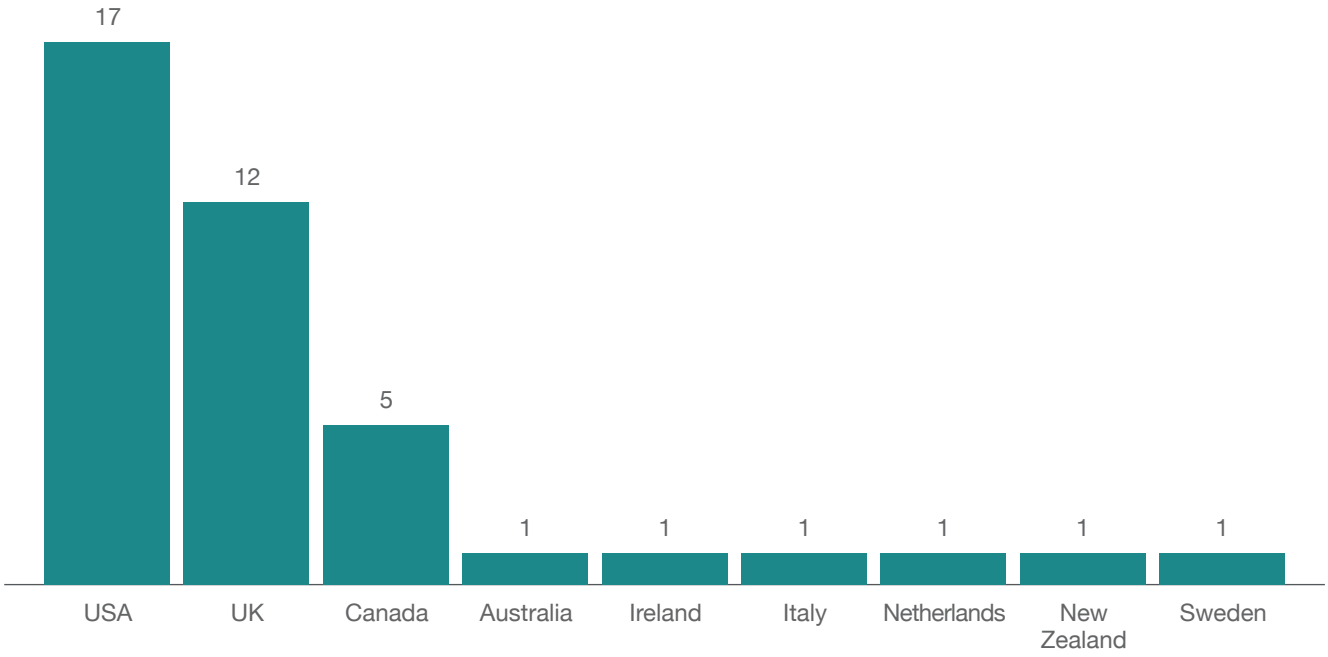
n=39.
Note: Individual studies could each utilise more than one data source.

Figure 3. Analysis applied within the studies



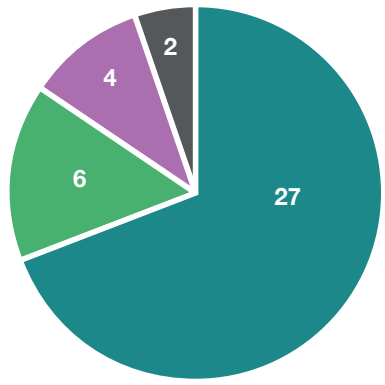
n=39.

Figure 4. Country/ies in which studies were conducted



n=39. Note: One study was conducted using data from the USA and the UK, so is included in both categories.

Figure 5. Gender of sexual offenders studied



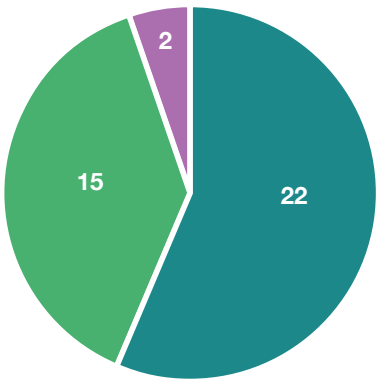
Male only*
Female only
Male and female
Unknown**

n=39.

* Five of these studies also included male non-sexual offenders in their samples, and four included male non-offenders (or, at least, individuals not known to be offenders).

** One study covered users of peer-to-peer networks, about whom no demographic data was available; another was based on interviews with survivors of CSA, covering the nature of the abuse but not the characteristics of the perpetrator.

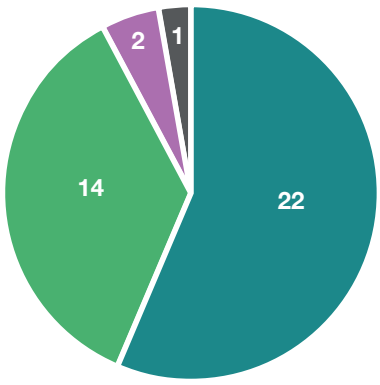
Figure 6. Age of victims



Children only
Children and adults
Not specified

n=39.

Figure 7. Gender of victims



Female
Male
Mixed
Not specified

n=39.

4.7 Sample size

Two studies – a deductive study of language used in messages sent on peer-to-peer networks by viewers of images of CSA (Brennan and Hammond, 2017), and an inductive study using the case files of a large population of juvenile offenders in Arizona (Christiansen and Vincent, 2013) – employed samples of more than 30,000 individuals' records.

Two other deductive studies involved sample sizes of more than 4,000 individuals' records: the psychiatric records of young male offenders in the Netherlands (Van Wijk et al, 2007), and responses to a survey of Catholic dioceses in the USA (Terry and Ackerman, 2008). Excluding the four studies listed above, the mean sample size was 203 individuals, with samples ranging in size from 14 to 1,121.

Unsurprisingly, studies involving primary data collection used smaller samples (with a mean size of 127 and a maximum of 354) than those featuring only secondary analysis of administrative data.

Table 2. Strengths identified by the authors of the studies

Strength	No.
New knowledge development	18
Consistency with previous findings	14
Large sample size	2
Representative sample	2
Independent rating of the variables	1
Validation of own findings	1
Implications for practice	1
Wide range of practitioner input	1
Total	**40**

n=32. Note: Authors of some studies identified multiple strengths.

4.8 Strengths and limitations of the studies, as stated by their authors

In 32 of the 39 studies reviewed, the study authors identified specific strengths of the work they had done; these strengths can be grouped under eight themes, as shown in Table 2. Seven studies did not report any distinct strengths of their methodology or their findings.

Limitations to the research were noted by the authors of 33 studies. Fourteen types of limitation were identified, as set out in Table 3; many of these are expanded upon in Chapter 5.

The authors of 18 studies stated that they had developed new knowledge in the field, and 14 studies reported findings that the authors said were consistent with previous studies in this area.

Few authors said their studies had developed findings that could be considered representative or generalisable. This may indicate that knowledge development in relation to CSA is not yet at a point where common understandings of perpetrators and perpetration can be agreed. However, given that two-fifths (n=16) of the studies acknowledged a lack of generalisability or representativeness as a limitation, it seems more likely that studies commonly experienced difficulties in accessing sources of diverse and/or representative data.

> Unsurprisingly, studies collecting primary data used smaller samples than those featuring only secondary data analysis

Table 3. Limitations identified by the authors of the studies

Theme	Limitation	No. of studies
Sampling and recruitment (see section 5.1)	Small sample size	15
	Selection bias	4
	Reliance on data obtained using 'decoy victims'	3
Types of data used (see section 5.2)	Data not collected for the research purpose	8
	Incomplete data	8
	Self-report bias	5
	Use of retrospective accounts	3
	Issues with data collection tools	2
	Use of accounts from practitioners	1
Analysis (see section 5.3)	Findings unsatisfactory	2
	Narrow classifications	1
Applicability of the typology (see section 5.4)	Lack of generalisability	13
	Requires validation	5
	Lack of representativeness	3
	Total	**73**

n=33.
Note: Authors of some studies identified multiple limitations.

5. Learning from the limitations of the studies reviewed

As noted in Chapter 1, the rapid review was conducted in order to inform the development of a new typology of CSA offending, to be conducted by the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) at Middlesex University and the CSA Centre.

This chapter explores several of the reviewed studies' limitations – those acknowledged by their authors, as listed in section 4.8, alongside wider limitations identified from in-depth reading of the studies – in more detail. The CSA Centre and CATS research teams took these limitations into account when establishing the methodology for the new typology's development, and the steps they took are summarised in this chapter below each relevant limitation.

5.1 Sampling and recruitment

5.1.1 Small sample size

While a larger sample size does not necessarily result in a better-quality study, the authors of two-fifths of the reviewed studies identified a small sample size as a limitation of their work; small sample sizes may not be representative of the populations from which they are taken, and findings drawn from them may not be generalisable (see section 5.4).

Addressing limitations: small sample size

The CATS research team purposively selected a relatively small number of case files for analysis when developing the initial draft typology, so that they had the resource to analyse each case file in depth as part of the study's inductive approach. Subsequent stages of the study included reviewing and testing of the draft typology against somewhat larger data sets.

5.1.2 Selection bias

Currently there is limited knowledge of who the perpetrators of CSA are, and limited access to them. There is a risk of selection bias when using data derived from perpetrators to develop a typology of CSA offending, because:

- all the perpetrators whose data is used are identified CSA perpetrators who are typically known to criminal justice agencies (since it is rare for perpetrators of CSA to self-identify to researchers or authorities if they are not yet known to these agencies) – but research shows that the majority of CSA goes unreported
- their 'journey' may have an impact on their responses (e.g. whether they have been convicted, and whether they are on or have completed a treatment programme).

Selection bias may also occur when other data sources are used. This was noted by Alexy et al (2005), for example: their study focused on media reports of offending, and they considered selection bias to be likely because of the media's preference for 'sensational' cases.

Some typologies focusing on online offending were developed using transcripts of online behaviour, but the authors (e.g. DeHart et al, 2017) were concerned about the use of 'decoy victims' – the drawing of data from samples where criminal justice agencies had posed as children and young people. This might have skewed the sample, so knowledge drawn from the study might not provide an accurate account of perpetrator-to-victim interaction online.

Where administrative data is used as the basis of a typology, a further source of selection bias is the potential for criminal justice agencies to be encouraged (e.g. by strategic police requirements or the commissioning of specific task forces) to provide additional attention to particular types of crime – this may mean that less attention is paid to other offences, which feature less in the administrative data as a result.

Addressing limitations: selection bias

While police files were the main source of data for the CSA Centre/CATS study, the research teams sought to reduce the impact of selection bias through triangulation in five ways:

a) Each police case file's inclusion in or exclusion from the study was based on the completeness of its data and an assessment of its quality, not on the legal confirmation of an offence. So the case file from an investigation that had not ended in conviction would be included if its data completeness and quality were as adequate as those of a case file from an investigation that *had* led to a conviction. Furthermore, the CATS research team sought access to 'atypical' cases within the police case files, with the aim of ensuring that less common cases were considered within the typology.

b) Case files were included (if they met the same inclusion criteria) from an organisation outside the criminal justice system, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, which works with people concerned about their own and others' sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children. This supported a broader understanding of offences committed by people who might not be identified as offenders by criminal justice agencies.

c) The draft typology was tested with focus groups of practitioners from partner organisations which respond to cases where the criminal justice system is not involved; this supported a broader understanding of the majority of CSA offending which is not reported to the police.

d) Further testing took place using case files from Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre, which carries out medical examinations for children and young people who disclose or are thought to have been the victims of sexual abuse.

e) The CSA Centre also sought review of the typology from the National Crime Agency (NCA), which investigates cases of CSA different from those typically encountered by police forces.

This triangulation meant that the typology's categories could be structured within a wider understanding of the perpetration of CSA, and reduced the impact of unavoidable selection bias.

5.2 Types of data used

5.2.1 Use of individuals' accounts

Whether they appear in administrative data or in primary data collected for the purpose of the research, retrospective accounts – by offenders or practitioners – are a common feature of research into CSA offending. Their use comes with the risk, however, of cognitive distortions or recollection inaccuracy.

Additionally, there is a risk of social desirability bias in accounts by offenders, while practitioners' accounts may be prone to bias and inaccuracy in their perceptions of offenders' behaviour and motivations.

The use of individual accounts generally has less impact where offence case files are used, because they may contain various accounts of the offence and subsequent investigation/ interventions (e.g. witness testimony, victim statements, various practitioner input); this places checks on the accuracy of recall or reporting.

Addressing limitations: use of individuals' accounts

Police files were the main data source used by CATS and the CSA Centre to build the new typology. They included information from a range of sources, not just the notes made by police officers; statements by victims and offenders were treated with importance during the analysis.

These accounts were triangulated through focus groups involving practitioners who work with victims outside the criminal justice setting. This enabled other voices to be incorporated into the assessment of the typology's accuracy and applicability in different settings; any contentions were synthesised into the overall findings.

5.2.2 Use of administrative data

There was a heavy reliance on secondary analysis of administrative data (such as case files and clinical files held by police forces, probation services or prison services) across the 39 reviewed studies. Several noted that incomplete data from official sources was a problem; given our knowledge of administrative data sources (Kelly and Karsna, 2017), this was not surprising.

Incomplete data presents a number of concerns, particularly related to researchers' confidence in the mutual exclusivity of their categories. Additionally, it can mean that research studies lack detail in their description of their sample demographics, where this information was missing in the original records.

The authors of one-fifth (n=8) of studies said they felt limited by using data that had not been collected for the purposes of their research. This is clearly a challenge associated with the use of administrative data – but it should also be noted that such data can reduce a different type of bias, as primary data collected for the purposes of the research might be shaped by the researchers' conceptual presumptions.

Addressing limitations: use of administrative data

It was expected that some of the police case files analysed in the CSA Centre/CATS study would contain incomplete data. The research teams established inclusion criteria for case files, which included a requirement of data completeness (see section 5.1.2); where data was incomplete in the files accessed, they were excluded from the analysis.

5.3 Analysis

5.3.1 Certainty of category allocation

Typologies are built on the principles that categories should be mutually exclusive; the items being classified should easily be categorised; and this categorisation should be protected as much as possible from the impact of individual researcher or reader subjectivity.

Bickley and Beech (2002) noted that the allocation of a 'type' to an individual perpetrator depends on the depth and breadth of information available to the practitioner doing the allocation. A single individual may reflect different aspects of different types at different times, they pointed out, so practitioners may label a perpetrator differently depending on the amount and type of contact they have had with the perpetrator.

A number of studies used independent raters to apply their typologies' categorisations to a sample. This would strengthen the study findings by ensuring that:

- definitions of the typology's categories were interpreted consistently
- the allocation of cases to categories was agreed across a number of different people, reducing the potential for researcher bias and subjectivity to affect the findings.

Addressing limitations: category allocation

Separate and joint coding was undertaken by the researchers at various stages of the typology's development.

To ensure that the categories developed in the new typology would be understood and interpreted consistently, the CSA Centre and CATS research teams asked a diverse range of practitioners and other researchers to comment on and verify the draft categories at various stages of the study. The review stage, for example, involved practitioners and researchers attending conferences hosted by Rape Crisis England & Wales and the National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers, and the wider staff team at the CSA Centre.

The new typology is of CSA offending, not CSA perpetrators, and it is accepted that some cases will fall into multiple types.

5.4 Application

5.4.1 Representativeness

Representativeness is the extent to which a sample accurately reflects the population from which it was drawn. Selection bias (see section 5.1.2) is an issue here: where a typology of perpetrators is developed, for example, it may not be possible to say whether it applies to all perpetrators of the type(s) sampled, or only to those who have been identified by criminal justice services. A small sample size (see section 5.1.1) may also raise questions about whether a study is representative.

Addressing limitations: representativeness

Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 explain how the CSA Centre/CATS study sought to address issues around sample size and selection bias.

The work by the CSA Centre and CATS was a developmental, qualitative study, and we hope that further work can be carried out to clarify to what extent its findings are representative or in any sense generalisable.

5.4.2 Generalisability

Generalisability describes the extent to which research findings can be applied to settings other than those in which they were originally developed and tested. Where a study has collected data from a single setting (e.g. a prison or treatment centre), it is not possible to extrapolate its findings confidently to wider populations of perpetrators until further research is done to test the typology in those populations.

It should be noted that, owing to the exploratory and qualitative nature of the studies reviewed, none of them sought specifically to develop a typology that could be applied to a general population.

Addressing limitations: generalisability

The CSA Centre/CATS study was a qualitative study which could not seek to be generalisable. Nevertheless, as a typology of CSA offending it sought to include data relating to a wide variety of offences.

The CATS research team analysed case files from four diverse police forces across England and a voluntary-sector organisation working with perpetrators and potential perpetrators; within the police data, they sought to include atypical case files in the sample.

The resulting draft typology was then tested on a large data set provided by a sexual assault referral centre, and reviewed with the NCA, in order to understand the extent to which the typology could be applied to CSA offending encountered in different contexts.

6. Conclusions

This review has identified a number of challenges to consider when undertaking research to develop a typology of sexual offending against children. Understanding these challenges is key to establishing the best possible research method, and to ensuring that the results of the research are of practical value.

- The emphasis on the individual perpetrator, which was seen in most of the 39 studies reviewed, has been criticised on the grounds that many perpetrators will commit varied offences over time, and a great deal of their offending behaviour may be hidden (see section 2.3). In recent years, more work has been done to understand the offence committed, rather than the person who committed it, but studies of this type are still in the minority.
- Because studies in this field inevitably analyse data relating to *known* offences or offenders, selection bias is an issue. Using multiple data sources, including some outside the criminal justice system, can reduce this bias.
- The reviewed studies' reliance on administrative data sources (offender case files and clinical files) highlights the issue that data captured in these sources is often incomplete.[1] Applying data inclusion criteria based on completeness can be beneficial, but reduces the size of the sample.
- Data based on individuals' accounts can be of variable quality; offenders may exhibit social desirability bias and have issues with recall when talking about their offences retrospectively, and practitioners may perceive offenders' behaviour and motivations inaccurately. Triangulating the accounts of offenders, practitioners and/or victims may address this limitation and improve data validity.
- The generation of new knowledge is seen frequently across studies, but the validation of previous findings is also important – not least to establish whether typologies are generalisable to settings outside those in which they were developed. However, the manner in which studies report their methods, particularly in relation to details of the individuals studied, is not consistent in transparency and detail. This reduces the ability of academics to replicate studies reliably and 'build' knowledge in a way that is cumulative and valuable.

Many of these challenges may be unavoidable when developing a typology, and reducing their impact is the most that a research team can do to address them. This rapid review has detailed how the research teams at the CSA Centre and CATS have sought to address these limitations and improve the validity of their study's findings, increasing confidence in the new typology of CSA offending that they have developed.

> The generation of new knowledge is seen in many studies, but the validation of previous findings is also important

1 The CSA Centre is working with relevant agencies to improve the consistent recording of core administrative data. The 'data collection template' (Karsna, 2019) provides a framework to improve understandings of perpetrators, victims, the context in which offences occur and how different elements of an offence should be categorised.

Appendix A. Scope and content of typologies in the studies reviewed

See the references list on page 28 for the full title of each study.

1	Brennan and Hammond (2017)	Patterns of offending	7	Gerontophilic Bestiality Paedophilic Hebephilic Sadistic Rape Incest
2	DeHart et al (2017)	Patterns of offending	4	Cybersex Cybersex/Scheduler Scheduler Buyer
3	Ennis et al (2016)	Offender characteristics	3	Low-risk Low to moderate risk Moderate to high risk
4	Black et al (2015)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	8	Flattery/compliments Sexuality in the context of relationships Parents work schedule Online sting operations Inappropriateness of behaviour Dangers of the internet/assurance of safety Trusting relationship Travel plans
5	Calkins and Fargo (2015)	Offender characteristics	4	CSA offenders Inappropriate but non-criminal sexual behaviour with adults General clinical problems of a non-sexual nature (e.g. clinical depression, substance abuse) No identified clinical or sexual issues
6	Cortoni et al (2015)	Patterns of offending	2	Promoting prostitution of a minor only Traditional sex offenders
7	Margari et al (2015)	Offender characteristics	3	Juvenile sexual offenders Juvenile non-sexual offenders Control group

Ref	Author(s) and year of publication	Focus of typology	No. of types	Classifications applied
8	Navarro and Jasinski (2015)	Patterns of offending	3	Internet-facilitated sexual offence involving an identified minor Child pornography without online sexual exploitation of an identified victim Solicitation of online undercover law enforcement
9	Tener et al (2015)	Offender characteristics	4	The Experts The Cynical The Affection-Focused, The Sex-Focused.
10	Wortley and Smallbone (2014)	Patterns of offending	4	Limited/specialised Limited/versatile Persistent/specialised Persistent/versatile
11	Christiansen and Vincent (2013)	Offender characteristics	6	General reoffending Non-sexual reoffending Sexual offenders sexual reoffending Sexual offenders non-sexual reoffending First offence non-sexual, subsequent sexual, all reoffending First offence sexual, all reoffending
12	Briggs et al (2011)	Offender characteristics	2	Contact driven Fantasy driven
13	Elliott et al (2010)	Offender characteristics	4	Lone offender (<12) Lone offender (>12) Co-offender (associated) Co-offender (coerced)
14	Gannon et al (2010)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	3	Background factors Pre-offence period Offence and post-offence period
15	Pagé et al (2010)	Offender characteristics	2	Young sex offenders Non-offenders
16	Pflugradt and Allen (2010)	Offender characteristics	6	Criminally limited hebephiles Criminally prone hebephiles Young adult child molesters High risk chronic offenders Older non-habitual offenders Homosexual child molesters
17	Coxe and Holmes (2009)	Offender characteristics	2	High risk Low risk

Ref	Author(s) and year of publication	Focus of typology	No. of types	Classifications applied
18	Mandeville-Norden and Beech (2009)	Offender characteristics	3	Offenders reporting low levels of self-esteem and intimacy and an inability to deal with negative emotions Offenders demonstrating a poor understanding of the harm caused to their victims Offenders with global offence-specific and socioaffective problems
19	Gannon et al (2008)	Offender characteristics	3	Explicit approach Directed avoidant Implicit organised
20	Terry and Ackerman (2008)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	6	Late onset of behaviour Low level of paraphilic behaviour Low incidence of stranger abuse Low level of networking Low level of child pornography Situations of opportunity
21	Gallagher (2007)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	3	Offenders offering children for sexual abuse Offenders inciting one another to sexually abuse children Offender seeking a child for sexual abuse
22	Van Wijk et al (2007)	Offender characteristics	5	Non-violent offenders Violent offenders Non-violent sex offenders Violent sex offenders Child molesters
23	Wood (2007)	Patterns of offending	3	Sexual offenders presenting with few additional risks Violent offenders with a greater propensity for domestic violence, and a much lower probability of psychological disorder or mental health illness or substance misuse problem Violent offenders with additional risks of emotional instability and substance misuse
24	Middleton et al (2006)	Patterns of offending	6	Pathway 1: Intimacy deficits Pathway 2: Distorted sexual scripts Pathway 3: Emotional dysregulation Pathway 4: Anti-social cognitions Pathway 5: Multiple dysfunctional mechanisms Multiple pathway individuals.
25	Yates and Kingston (2006)	Offender characteristics	4	Avoidant-passive Avoidant-active Approach-automatic Approach-explicit

Ref	Author(s) and year of publication	Focus of typology	No. of types	Classifications applied
26	Alexy et al (2005)	Offender characteristics	3	Trader Traveler Combination 'trader-traveler
27	Craissati and Beech (2005)	Offender characteristics	2	Child molesters Rapists
28	Vandiver and Kercher (2004)	Offender characteristics	6	Heterosexual nurturers Noncriminal homosexual offenders Female sexual predators Young adult child exploiters Homosexual criminals Aggressive homosexual offenders
29	Hunter et al (2003)	Offender characteristics	2	Offenders of children Offenders of pubescent girls
30	Bickley and Beech (2002)	Patterns of offending	4	Avoidant-Passive Avoidant-Active Approach-Automatic Approach-Explicit
31	Butler and Seto (2002)	Offender characteristics	4	Sex Only Sex-plus Versatile Nonaggressive
32	Cohen et al (2002)	Offender characteristics	2	Paedophiles Non-paedophiles
33	Looman et al (2001)	Offender characteristics	4	Non-paedophiles High fixation - high social Low fixation - low social Low fixation - high social
34	Worling (2001)	Offender characteristics	4	Antisocial/Impulsive Unusual/Isolated Overcontrolled/Reserved Confident/Aggressive

Ref	Author(s) and year of publication	Focus of typology	No. of types	Classifications applied
35	Långström et al (2000)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	5	Offenders who had each molested one unknown male child victim in a public area, using low to moderate amounts of violence. The offence included at least oral penetration. Offenders with non-contact, exhibitionist behaviours against female peers or adults. Almost 90% had offended on several occasions and 70% against more than one victim. The level of violence was low. Offenders who had each committed one contact offence (moderately to highly violent) in a public place against an unknown adolescent or adult female victim; 80% had penetrated their victim at least genitally, and 75% had orally or manually stimulated victim genitalia. Offenders who had sexually molested known child victims in a non-public area, using low levels of violence. Fewer than 30% had multiple victims, but 70% offended more than once against the same victim; 40% assaulted at least one male victim. All had orally or manually stimulated victim genitalia, and penetration occurred in almost all cases. Moderately to highly violent offenders who had each perpetrated contact sexual crimes against one known adolescent or adult female victim. The offences always took place indoors, and involved at least genital penetration but almost never oral or manual stimulation of victim genitalia.
36	Hudson et al (1999)	Patterns of offending	8 (3 of which were identified in the study)	Pathway 1: Positive affect – explicit plan – positive affect – mutuality – positive evaluation – persistence Pathway 5: Negative affect – explicit plan – positive/ negative affect – self-focused – negative evaluation – avoidance Pathway 8: Negative affect – implicit plan – negative affect – self-focused – negative evaluation – avoidance
37	Beech (1998)	Offender characteristics	4	Low-deviance – low-denial Low-deviance – high-denial High-deviance – low-denial High-deviance – high-denial
38	Canter et al (1998)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	3	Aggressive Intimate Criminal-opportunist
39	Gold et al (1998)	Context/ characteristics of the offence	3	Coercion Subjugation Objectification

Appendix B. Methodologies applied in the studies reviewed

See the references list on page 28 for the full title of each study.

Ref	Type	Primary/secondary analysis	Types of data analysed
1	Deductive	Secondary	P2P search submission records
2	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files
3	Deductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files
4	Deductive	Secondary	Transcripts of online activity
5	Inductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files
6	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files
7	Deductive	Primary	Researcher administered battery tests
8	Deductive	Secondary	Offender case files, interviews with practitioners
9	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files, interviews with practitioners
10	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Offender case files, offender questionnaires
11	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files
12	Inductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files, transcripts of online activity
13	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files, offender clinical files
14	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Offender case files, interviews with offenders
15	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Offender clinical files, questionnaire
16	Deductive	Primary	Researcher administered battery tests
17	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files, existing offender battery tests
18	Deductive	Secondary	Existing offender battery tests
19	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Interviews with offenders
20	Deductive	Secondary	Questionnaire
21	Inductive	Primary and secondary	Interviews with practitioners, offender case files
22	Deductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files

Ref	Type	Primary/secondary analysis	Types of data analysed
23	Inductive	Secondary	Minutes of practitioner meetings
24	Deductive	Secondary	Offender case files
25	Deductive	Secondary	Offender case files
26	Deductive	Secondary	Newspaper reports
27	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Offender case files, interviews with practitioners, offender clinical files
28	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files
29	Inductive	Primary and secondary	Offender case files, questionnaire, researcher administered battery tests
30	Deductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files
31	Deductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files, offender case files
32	Inductive	Primary	Offender questionnaire, phallometric measurement, PET scanning
33	Deductive	Secondary	Offender case files
34	Inductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files
35	Inductive	Secondary	Offender case files
36	Deductive	Primary and secondary	Offender case files, interviews with offenders
37	Inductive	Secondary	Offender clinical files
38	Deductive	Secondary	Offender case files
39	Inductive	Primary	Interviews with victims

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Figures in bold denote the reference numbers of the 39 studies reviewed, as listed in Appendices A and B.

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