

# Child Pornography Offenders: A Review

2018-S001

www.publicsafety.gc.ca

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

For CP-exclusive offenders, CP is not a gateway to contact sexual offences against children. It is important to distinguish CP offenders with a history of contact sexual offence from those who exclusively have CP offences.

## BACKGROUND

Child pornography (CP) offenders (also referred to as Child Sexual Exploitation Materials [CSEM] offenders) represent a large proportion of caseloads of sexual offenders seen by police, corrections, community supervision officers, and treatment providers (Dauvergne & Turner, 2010). In the early 2000s, CP offenders were a relatively unknown type of offender and there was little empirically-based direction in terms of management and policy strategies.

Should we manage CP offenders similarly to offline contact sexual offenders against children? Through enhanced research activity and engagement with professional practice, our understanding of CP offenders has increased steadily in the last few years.

## METHOD

The goal of the review was to summarize the current state of knowledge on CP offenders, to determine implications for practice, and to highlight areas that are relevant for future research.

The key questions that were addressed in the review were: (1) How do CP offenders differ from typical contact sexual offenders? (2) What is the chance that CP offenders would commit a contact sexual offence in the future? (3) What are the practical implications for policy makers and law enforcement services on CP offending?

## FINDINGS

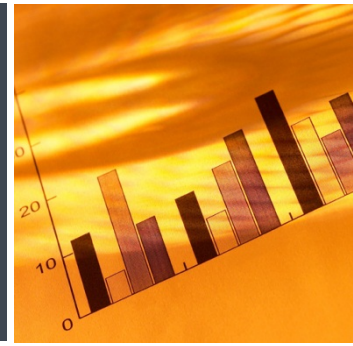
CP offenders differ from both typical contact sexual offenders and offenders with both a contact sexual offence and CP offence (mixed offenders). About 13% to half of individuals with a CP offence will also have a contact sexual offence; these individuals are

classified as mixed offender. CP-exclusive offenders score lower than typical contact sexual offenders and mixed offenders on measures of antisocial tendencies, hostility, criminal history, substance misuse, and unemployment.

The sexual reoffence rate is much lower for CP-exclusive offenders than mixed offenders (those with both CP and contact sexual offence) and typical, offline contact sexual offenders. After a five year follow-up, 0.2-2% of CP-exclusive offenders reoffend with a contact sexual offence compared to 6-8% of mixed offenders. The rate of sexual recidivism is virtually identical for mixed offenders and typical offline sexual offenders (at approximately 8%).

Given the important differences in risk profiles, it is best practice to manage CP-exclusive offenders differently than mixed offenders and contact sexual offenders.

A small proportion of CP-exclusive offenders do cross-over to commit a contact sexual offence. CP-exclusive offenders most at risk for cross-over offences (i.e., commit a sexual offence after a CP offence) are those who have high levels of sexual interest in children, sexual self-regulation problems, antisocial tendencies, access to children, and few psychological barriers to committing a contact sexual offence (for example, holding attitudes tolerant of sexual offending against children). CP-exclusive offenders would be considered low risk to cross-over if they score low on measures of antisocial tendencies and sexual self-regulation, have limited access to children, and have psychological barriers to committing contact sexual offences. This latter group is the majority of CP-exclusive offenders. Policy makers and law enforcement services are faced with the challenge of how to best deploy their limited



resources to address an ever-expanding number of CP offenders. When police receive a CP case, they do not yet know if the case can be classified as a CP-exclusive offender or a mixed offender. This distinction is risk-relevant as mixed offenders would have a past victim of contact sexual offence (and possibly current victims) and are at a higher risk to reoffend with a contact sexual offence in the future. Prioritizing mixed offenders over CP-exclusive offenders is considered best practice.

The empirical literature offers guidance on case prioritization. Tools designed to identify CP offenders most at risk of being mixed offenders can be used to sort through CP offence cases. The KIRAT is one example of such tool that is designed to identify CP offenders most at risk of contact offending. Such prioritization tools allow law enforcement to take action to protect children, improve investigation prioritization, workload management, and risk management. The KIRAT requires analysis of factors based on: (1) previous offending behaviour; (2) access to children; (3) living arrangements (with a partner and children that are not their own); (4) grooming and producing indecent images; (5) internet behaviour, such as payment for indecent images; and (6) post-arrest behaviour, such as ‘no comment’ interviews. Travel to high risk areas are also used to prioritize investigations and prosecutions.

## IMPLICATIONS

Three main practice implications were identified.

1. It is important to distinguish CP offenders with contact sexual offence history (mixed offenders) and typical offline contact sexual offenders from those who exclusively have CP offences (CP-exclusive offenders). These type of offenders differ in risk posed to children and, thus, should be managed differently.
2. Risk factors for sexual reoffending include antisocial tendencies (e.g., past criminal history), access to children, and sexual criminality (e.g., sexual interest in children). Individuals interested in assessing the risk for cross-over offences should collect information on these important characteristics.
3. When a CP case is first reported to police it is typically unknown whether the individual can be classified as a CP- exclusive or mixed

offender. There are case prioritization tools available that can identify with accuracy cases that are likely to be mixed offenders.

CP offenders remain an important avenue for future research. Research on the trajectories of CP offenders would be useful in identifying the markers for cross-over offence (contact sexual offences), as well as to highlight the strategies that can reduce the cross-over of CP offenders to contact sexual offences. These markers can be integrated in the development of a Canadian-specific case prioritization tool for law enforcement.

---

## SOURCE

Babchishin, K. M., Merdian, H. L., Bartels, R. M., & Perkins, D. (in press). Users of Child Sexual Exploitation Materials: A review. Manuscript accepted for publication. *European Psychologist*.

For more information on research at the Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Public Safety Canada, or to be placed on our distribution list, please contact:

Research Division, Public Safety Canada  
340 Laurier Avenue West, K1A 0P8  
Ottawa, Ontario  
[PS.CSCCBResearch-RechercheSSCRC.SP@canada.ca](mailto:PS.CSCCBResearch-RechercheSSCRC.SP@canada.ca)

Research Summaries are produced for the Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Public Safety Canada. The summary herein reflects interpretations of the report authors’ findings and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Public Safety Canada.

---