

Deterring online child sexual abuse and exploitation: lessons from seven years of campaigning

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Who we are

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is the only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to preventing child sexual abuse.

Around 1 in 6 children will be sexually abused. Around one third of this is carried out by under-18s. And around 9 in 10 children who are sexually abused know their abuser.

We work to stop this.

How we help keep children safe

We work to reach adults and young people to prevent abuse from happening in the first place – and, if it already has, to prevent it from happening again.

Where abuse has already taken place, we work with all those affected, including adult male and female abusers; young people with harmful sexual behaviour; children with concerning sexual behaviours; and victims of abuse and other family members. But we also work in families and with adults and young people where there has been no abuse, to help them keep themselves and others as safe as possible.

We run the **Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline**. A confidential service available to anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse, including adults worried about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts, feelings or behaviour towards children.

The Faithfull Papers

We research and evaluate our work to make sure what we do protects children, and we share the evidence with professionals and the public. We want to make best use of our expertise, our data and our insights, independently and in partnerships, to develop new strategies and interventions that help keep children safe.

We advocate for a greater focus on preventing abuse before it happens and for a public health approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse. The Faithfull Papers are a series of reports showcasing our understanding of what works to protect children to the widest possible audience – to policymakers, journalists, researchers and partner organisations in the UK and overseas.

Executive summary

Online child sexual abuse (CSA), involving making, viewing and sharing sexual images of children as well as online child sexual grooming, is a huge and growing problem in the UK and around the world. In a BBC TV interview in October 2016, National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Lead for Child Protection, Chief Constable Simon Bailey, said that at least 100,000 people in the UK were regularly viewing online sexual images of children; a number that will be significantly higher now. This Faithfull Paper describes the development, evolution and lessons learnt from our campaign to deter people from starting or continuing this behaviour.

Children across the globe are harmed when these images are made, and further harmed by the repeated viewing of the images. Governments, agencies and others must work to identify and rescue victims, remove the images from the internet, bring to justice those involved in the crimes committed, and reduce demand for this material.

The challenge we recognised in 2015 was the gulf between numbers arrested – around 4,500 people – and the 100,000 estimated to be involved. Since then we have pioneered a new approach to deter this vast number of people from viewing sexual images of children, targeting people who are offending but not yet arrested, and importantly those who are at risk but have not yet started.

We decided to pilot a communications campaign to see if we could, in fact, deter people from committing offences. To determine essential campaign messages, we undertook research with a number of men we worked with following their arrest for viewing sexual images of children. These messages included:

- raising awareness of UK law, that it is illegal to view, share or make sexual images of under-18s (also known in the UK as indecent images of children – IIOC)
- clarifying the harm done to children through making, viewing and sharing this material
- bluntly showing them some of the potential consequences to their families and to themselves of continuing their behaviour, especially following arrest (such as loss of family, friends and employment, as well as imprisonment and ending up on the sex offenders register)

Crucially, the research identified a need for these straight-forward warnings to be coupled with signposting to sources of help to address their behaviour and stop offending. We revised and re-launched an anonymous, self-directed online intervention (the Get Help, self-help website – previously called CROGA) to support help-seeking, which people can use alongside or separately from contact with our confidential Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline.

The research also found that these messages would be most effective when seen by men – who make up the majority of people who offend – multiple times and in their daily lives. This insight helped guide the campaign strategy to use a wide range of platforms to distribute messages and raise awareness, including conventional news media, social media, paid digital adverts, short films, partnerships with law enforcement and other statutory and voluntary organisations, and out of home adverts.

As well as this work with a broader reach, the campaign was also developed to use more targeted means to get messages to people closer to the point of offending. Working with technology companies including Google, the Internet Watch Foundation and MindGeek, we now serve warning messages to people who attempt to search for illegal child sexual content or to visit websites on a banned list.

The first campaign (2015/16) was independently evaluated and found to be effective in driving people to our helpline and self-help resources, in helping bring about self-reported changes in reducing or stopping risky or offending behaviour, as well as in understanding the law and consequences of offending.

The campaign has continued and developed each year since the pilot, with independent evaluation contributing to the planning and delivery of the next phase. Evaluations consistently show:

- the campaign is successful at driving people at risk of offending, or who have offended but are not yet arrested, to our helpline or online self-help resources
- people engaging with our resources following offending report positive behaviour and attitude changes

This paper will describe the evolution of our deterrence work and the impact on our service users, including the extension of campaign messages and resources to stop online sexual grooming of children. The campaign also addresses questions, concerns and needs of families concerned about a loved one's online sexual behaviour. Since 2015 our messages have reached millions of people, contributing to our helpline receiving contact from nearly 5,000 people about online offending in 2022, and more than 250,000 people visiting our online self-help resources.

Key points

Scale of online CSA

- Online CSA includes viewing of sexual images of children and having sexual conversations with children
- In 2016, it was estimated that around 100,000 people were viewing or sharing sexual images of children in the UK. More recent estimates put this figure in the hundreds of thousands
- People who offend come from all backgrounds and walks of life, and often do not conform to stereotypes
- The growth of internet connected devices makes it easier to commit online sexual offences
- Removing sexual images of children from the internet and bringing people who have offended to justice needs to take place alongside working with people who might offend. This stops the harm from occurring and helps us tackle the problem effectively
- The difference between the scale of offending – likely hundreds of thousands of people in the UK – and arrests – hundreds each month – means that other strategies are vital

Research with people who have offended tells us what they need to stop

- Drawing on their personal experiences, people who had offended felt that an effective communication campaign would need to:
 - disrupt their usual pattern of thinking, specifically challenging the excuses for offending they told themselves and forcing them to confront the consequences of their actions head on
 - offer an empowering, reassuring call to action: that it is possible for people who had offended to change their behaviour – to stop and stay stopped
- In response to support being vital for some to change behavior, we revised and updated online self-help interventions and prepared our helpline advisors to ensure effective delivery of support

Effectiveness of campaigning and support to stop offending

- Some people who need help will seek it – if they know it is available and confidential
- Campaign messages and effective support can mean people do not offend in the first place
- Self-reported behaviour change shows change is possible for some who have already offended online

Recommendations for the sector

- All online and technology companies should commit to making the internet a hostile place for offending and implement child safety by design
- We have shown that some people who are at risk of offending are worried about their online behaviour and want to change. They must have somewhere to go to support them in stopping and changing their behaviour – quickly and for good – before they harm a child. Such support needs to be confidential
- Linked to this, in wider society we must make it acceptable and commonplace for people who have offended or are at risk of offending to reach out for help to stop

Recommendations for running a similar campaign

The success of our campaigning builds on a solid foundation in research as well as ongoing evaluation. Different approaches, messages and delivery may work in different settings and so understanding and testing these is key.

Terminology

We recognise that people will have different views on the best use of language. To try to be clear and concise, we chose to use the following terms:

- 'sexual images of children' – also known as 'child sexual abuse material', 'indecent images of children', or similar variations
- 'un-arrested' – someone who has committed online sexual offences but has not been arrested
- 'people who had offended' – we have tried to use person-centric language but have used the term 'offender' in some places for simplicity and brevity

Introduction

Viewing and sharing sexual images of under-18s is illegal in the UK, but is a growing problem. In 2018, the UK National Crime Agency (NCA) estimated that 80,000 people in the UK posed a sexual threat to children online (1). In 2021, they estimated that up to 850,000 people pose a threat to children either online or offline (2). In 2022, UK police arrested around 850 people a month for suspected online sexual offences, up from 450 people a month in 2018. But even with such an increase in arrests, it is and was clear that additional strategies were needed to properly tackle offending at such a vast scale.

Since the internet and mobile devices have become more widely available, the number and profile of people viewing sexual images of children has changed. Before the internet, it was significantly harder to find this material, requiring a level of commitment and determination, involving risks of discovery or detection, plus national or international travel. Now, the NCA has shown that illegal content can be found easily on the open web and encrypted dark web (3). Pathways into online offending appear to have changed dramatically. Where previously we would have expected to see an established sexual interest in, and likely preference for, children, many people we now work with – both arrested and un-arrested – tell us that their offending was preceded by an escalating online adult pornography habit. Other academic research supports this finding (4).

Despite increases in resourcing and technical tools to assist in detection and investigation, the huge increase in the scale of offending means that law enforcement cannot be the only response if such online abuse is to be effectively tackled. Regardless of the scale, if society only responds after offending, then we do not prevent children from being harmed in the first place.

Our work with adults worried about their own sexual thoughts and behaviour towards children shows that some people will seek help to manage their thoughts and behaviour. Our helpline and other resources support them to put in place measures to prevent offending – whether or not they have already committed a crime. Such a public health approach takes the focus away from children needing to protect themselves and puts the onus on adults to not offend. We do this in several ways.

- Our deterrence campaign delivers messages to intervene and deter offending behaviour. Some people who see our messages will reach out for help to change, but we expect many will not need to do that, with the message serving as enough of a prompt to think twice about their actions
- Since 2002 our anonymous Stop It Now! helpline has supported anyone with a concern about preventing CSA. Around half of callers are adults worried about their own thoughts or behaviour. Ahead of the launch of the pilot campaign, we worked to brief advisors for an increase in calls from our target audience, including preparing and refining responses to anticipated questions and needs
- In 2006, we partnered with COPINE (Combating Paedophile Information Networks in Europe) in the development of a web-based self-help programme designed to reduce online offending. This was a website known as CROGA, which was periodically revised over time, and in 2015 became Stop It Now! Get Help – our online self-directed intervention (also referred to as online self-help resources). Different online modules enable users to work through different areas of focus including ‘understanding why’, ‘fantasy’, ‘images are children’ and ‘problematic collecting’
- Our direct delivery programmes support people who have been arrested – to help reduce the risk of reoffending in the future. And we provide support to their family members

Timeline of activity: Stop It Now! helpline and website

Contact to Stop It Now! regarding online CSA, tracked against helpline and Get Help stats

The new online self-help resources were launched in 2015 (website numbers)



Our pilot deterrence campaign: testing whether it could work

(October 2015 – April 2016)

In 2015 we decided to test whether we could intervene and deter online offending. We wanted to know if 1) it would be possible to reach an offending or potentially offending audience through communications and 2) whether those communications could drive people towards help to change.

Another substantial consideration which pushed forward this work was concern from law enforcement that the numbers of people committing offences online was outweighing their ability to conduct investigations and make arrests. It was felt that if we could intervene and deter people from offending, the police could focus their efforts on those most motivated to offend.

With all of this in mind, we started with research to create an evidence base to inform the campaign, initially specifically targeting those who were viewing sexual images of children or were at risk of doing so.

Understanding the target audience: People who had offended

We asked 20 people who had been arrested or convicted for viewing sexual images of children questions about their pathways to offending and the maintenance of their illegal online behaviour to identify intervention points and key messages (5). Although the age of first adult pornography use was not specifically assessed, half of participants volunteered that their first exposure to it was at an early age. Participants identified ease of access and online availability, as well as desensitisation to the type and amount of sexual material, as contributing to their escalation. The majority (17 out of 20 participants) stated they first saw sexual images of children accidentally.

Reflecting on their behaviour, those interviewed acknowledged that they had knowingly and willingly deceived themselves in order to maintain their offending. Some told themselves that the children in the images were not “real people” and blotted out any suspicion that the children could have come to any harm. Some claimed not to know that the images were illegal, especially if the children were clothed. Others did not feel that they were causing any harm simply by looking at images. The interviewees said they also pushed the likely consequences of their actions (specifically a “knock on the door” from the police or being labelled as “inhuman”) to the back of their minds or did not think they would be caught. Most had not considered the implications for their friends and family.

Some we interviewed told us that they became increasingly secretive and withdrawn in order to protect themselves from discovery, feeling isolated and trapped with nobody they could talk to about their behaviour. They said they would never have thought to seek help for their behaviour or did not think there was anywhere to get support.

Drawing on their personal experiences, research participants felt that an effective communication campaign would need to clearly explain:

- the law: that viewing sexual images of under-18s is illegal
- the harm: that this behaviour causes harm to children
- the consequences: that there are serious consequences for the offender and their loved ones
- the support available: that there is anonymous and confidential help to stop offending and stay stopped

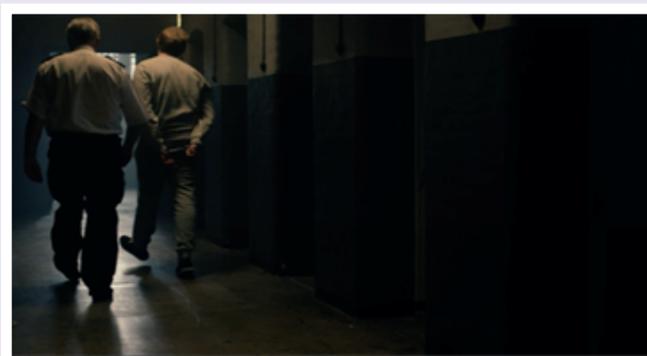
Delivery: reaching our audience

Using the insights gained from our research, we developed four short films to form part of the pilot campaign. We conducted focus groups to test their effectiveness and help us refine them.



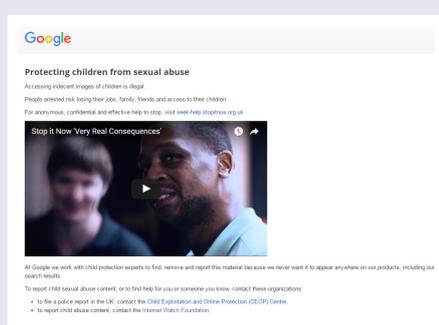
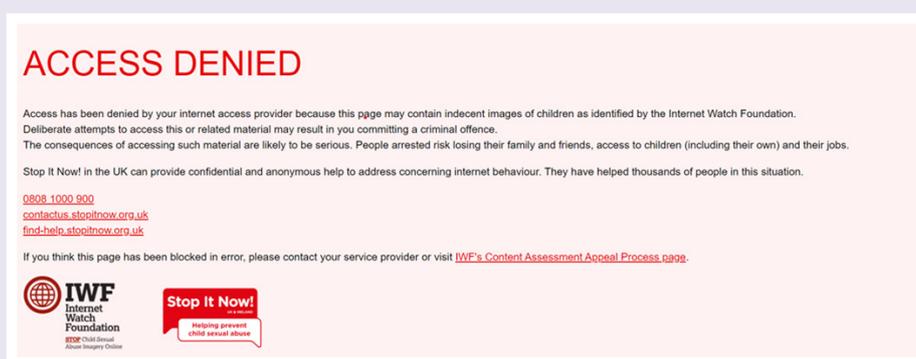
Challenging offender justifications

Two of our short films directly addressed insights from our research. The first challenged offender justifications and drove home the message that the behaviour causes harm to children. The second highlighted likely consequences if caught: loss of family, friends and employment, imprisonment and being placed on the sex offenders register.



Highlighting consequences

Delivery of campaign messages included press engagement; social media; digital promotion; search engine advertising; and splash pages (warning messages deployed by internet service providers in the UK when users attempt to access a URL blocked by the Internet Watch Foundation [IWF]). Messages across all channels pushed people to our online self-directed intervention and helpline.



We also worked with Google to implement deterrence messaging. When UK users searched for sexual images of children, they were presented with a warning message that signposted to us for help to change. In the pilot campaign we received 1,050 visits from Google keyword interventions.

During the six-month pilot campaign:

- we achieved 92 pieces of media coverage, which were estimated to reach 58% of UK adults
- our campaign films were viewed more than 2,300,000 times
- 24 active partners were involved in helping to spread messages including police forces and student unions

Thanks to this work:

- calls to our helpline increased by 25% and weekly calls from un-arrested offenders doubled
- media and online coverage drove 57% of helpline calls from un-arrested offenders
- our online self-directed intervention was used by more than 8,800 users – an increase of 469% over a similar period prior to the campaign

Case study 1:

Sean¹ saw a clip of our film 'No Justification', and felt encouraged to call Stop It Now!

Sean watched a news item on BBC News and as part of this saw a clip of the film 'No Justification'. As he watched the film he says he felt like he was watching "an image of myself".

He researched Stop It Now! and spent some time looking at the website to build up the courage to call. After explaining his fears about his online behaviour, Sean was given some advice about steps he could take to reduce the risk of reoffending in the future, including visiting our online self-help resources, Get Help.

Sean called back several weeks later and said he felt much more positive about his online behaviour. He had confided in his girlfriend, who installed parental controls on his laptop, and he ensures he only uses the internet when she is there. He had also worked through some of the Get Help modules and said he now understands that looking at sexual images of children is not a victimless crime. He says this gives him another reason not to lapse into his old habits.

Evaluation: what difference did it make

We also wanted to evaluate the success of the campaign through information from our target audiences. This involved two key components.

An analysis of 930 anonymised helpline call records, including first-time and repeat callers.

- 215 callers mentioned campaign activity
 - 159 people who had offended were known to law enforcement
 - 35 people who had or might have offended were not known to law enforcement
 - 21 family or friends of people who offended

An anonymous survey on our Get Help online resource itself received 93 responses.

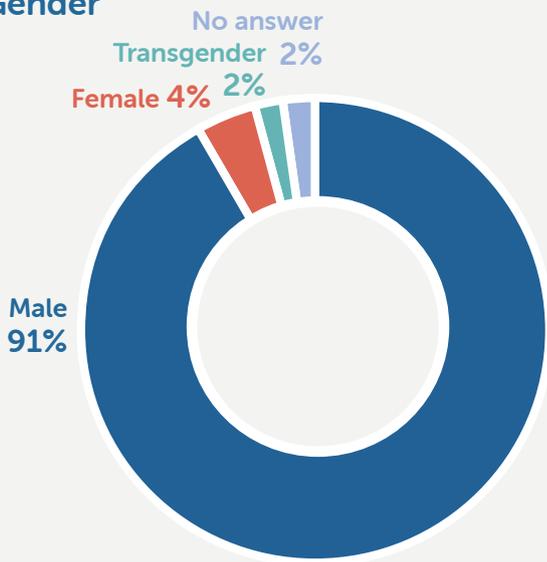
A sample breakdown of respondents is as follows:

¹ The names of the individuals in our case studies have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity.

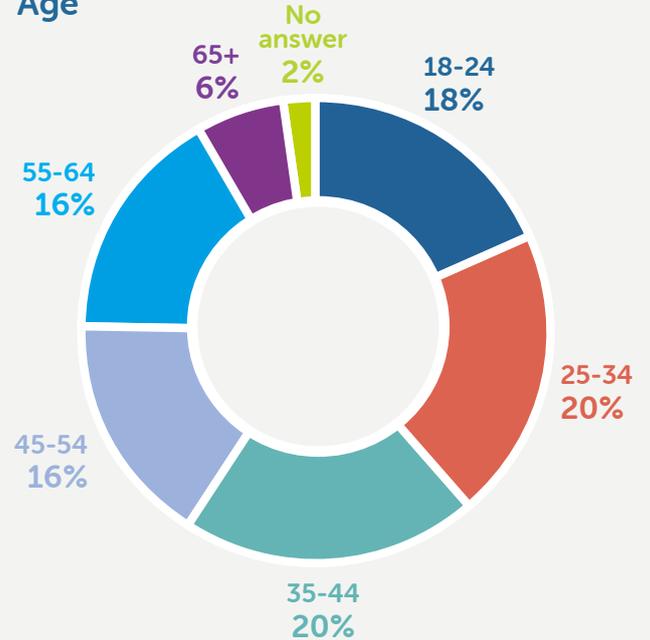
Figures 1-4

Get Help online resource survey participants breakdown (N=93)

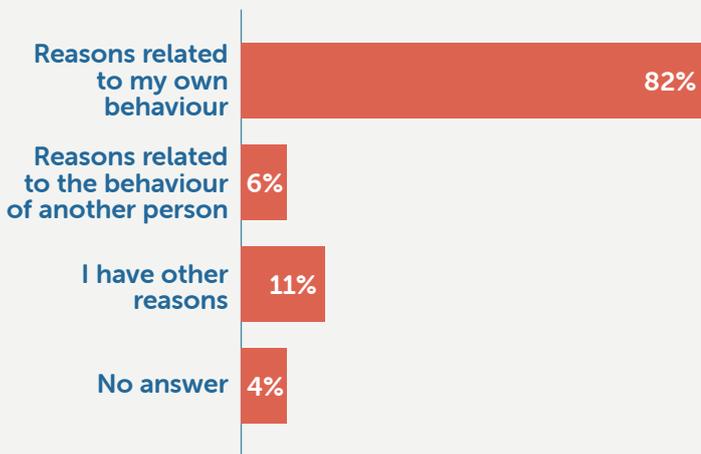
Gender



Age



Reasons for visiting the the Get Help resources



Region



Offending typically happens in secret and our audiences were anxious to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, so the number of responses received – whilst small – was more than we expected, and gave us a good insight into what was achieved.

Success of the campaign in bringing people to help to stop offending

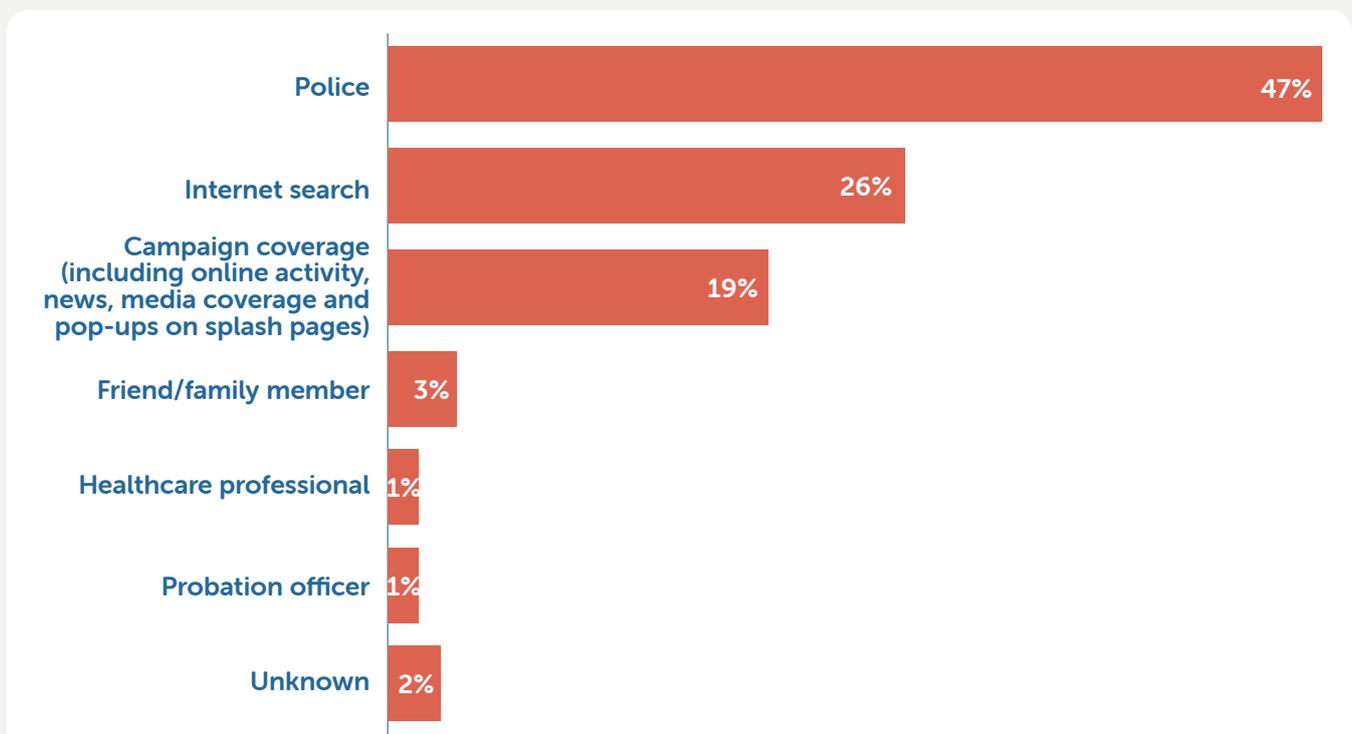
Table 1:

How callers to the helpline heard about Stop It Now! (N=215)

	Total (215 callers)	Offenders known to law enforcement (159 callers)	Offenders not yet known to law enforcement (35 callers)	Friends & family members of offenders (21 callers)
Police	71%	90%	0%	57%
Campaign coverage (including online activity, news, media coverage and adverts)	13%	2%	57%	29%
Internet search	8%	2%	34%	14%
Solicitor/probation officer	3%	1%	0%	0%
Healthcare professional	2%	2%	3%	0%
Friend/family member	1%	1%	3%	0%
Other	1%	2%	0%	0%
Unknown	1%	0%	3%	0%

Figure 5:

How Get Help online resource survey participants heard about Stop It Now! (N=93)



- **Internet search:** This avenue was particularly prominent amongst offenders not yet known to law enforcement who were increasingly concerned about their online behaviour but felt unable to manage this (15 helpline callers). Typical search terms included 'stop looking at child images', 'treatment for paedophilia' and 'concerned about online behaviour'
- **Internet searches were also used by three callers** who were family members and friends of people who had offended. These callers were looking for support in broaching the subject of online offending/offering help to a friend or loved one

- **Some came to us after seeing campaign activity online,** including adverts on Facebook, YouTube, and deterrence messaging on Google. Others said they had seen coverage on television, with BBC news the most commonly mentioned source. Some also mentioned the Channel 4 programme, *The Hunt for Britain's Paedophiles*

Right: A Facebook post including our no justifications film which had been watched [at that moment] 266,000 times.



- A significant proportion of callers and survey participants came to us via the police, who gave people they arrested information about our helpline and resources

Case study 2:

Alex searched for help on the internet, which directed him to Stop It Now!

Alex felt at "breaking point" with his viewing of sexual images of children. He had been looking at images for years and realised that he was no longer able to stop himself. He was also 'sick and tired' of having to behave secretly and dishonestly.

He took it upon himself to look for help, starting with a Google search. The search directed him to the Stop It Now! website, which he looked through carefully before deciding whether or not to call. Whilst browsing, he came across the film 'Very Real Consequences', which Alex says he watched on repeat several times, telling himself 'this is going to be my life if I don't stop offending'. He felt the film put his actions in perspective, meaning that the "short burst of pleasure" he felt whilst viewing images paled in comparison with the implications of his actions on those around him and on the victims.

He called the helpline and worked through some of the Get Help self-help modules, which helped him identify moments at which he was potentially 'at risk' (i.e. when he had drunk alcohol). He extended his thanks to Stop It Now! call-handlers, saying they had given him extra motivation and the tools to stop.

Immediate impact on people who had offended

People who had offended described the immediate impact of exposure to campaign activity or coverage.

Tapping into a growing concern about their online behaviour

Typically, the response to the campaign activity of people who had offended was one of self-reflection, which drew out some deep-seated fears about their online behaviour. Some said that pornography was 'taking over' their lives, and said they just wanted to be 'normal' again. Many were concerned that they were gradually 'losing control of their behaviour' and that it might 'escalate to the point where they viewed more and more extreme images'. In these cases, offenders said they wanted help to stop their pornography use altogether.

Learning that there is somewhere to go for advice and that it is possible to change

Some people said they had tried to change their behaviour in the past but were unsuccessful. Learning of our helpline and self-help website, they now felt they stood a stronger chance of taking back control of their online behaviour.

Realisation they may have broken the law and concern about arrest

Some said that before seeing campaign activity they had not realised that the boundary for legal pornography was 18 years of age, and they now felt distressed at the knowledge that they broke the law and faced possible arrest.

Long-term impact: sustained behaviour change

Using the same surveys, we looked for evidence of long-term impact. People who had offended reported sustained behaviour change as a result of seeing campaign materials or activity and reported feeling confident that they would not reoffend.

- 20 people not yet arrested reported that campaign materials and online resources or activity played a major part in helping them address their behaviour and subsequent steps to ensure they did not reoffend
- 129 people who were known to law enforcement engaged with campaign materials over the campaign period and reported these materials supported their ongoing desistance

The most common sustained action (particularly amongst arrested people) was to work through our online self-directed intervention, Get Help. In total, 135 callers to the helpline over the campaign period reported working through our online resource and reported feeling in greater control of their behaviour as a result (see below). Among them, 129 were known to law enforcement and 13 were not yet arrested.

Others, including eight people not yet arrested, took additional steps as a result of seeing campaign materials or activity and calling the helpline, which they said helped them understand their behaviour and stop offending. Actions included:

- adding controls or filters on digital devices
- stopping watching pornography (or, exceptionally, using the internet) altogether
- telling a loved one of their concerns and enlisting their help in monitoring their internet use
- pursuing new hobbies and interests to displace time spent on the internet

Impact of our online self-directed intervention – Stop It Now! Get Help

Thirty-eight people, including five not yet arrested, said our online self-directed intervention helped them to identify the triggers to their offending behaviour (for example, boredom, drinking alcohol, relationship problems), and they could now take preventive steps to avoid or resolve these features. As one person not yet known to law enforcement put it, he could now see a way ‘to work through this’.

Some (12 people who had offended including two not yet arrested) said the modules also helped them track the trajectory of their offending behaviour over time, and they could see how their behaviour escalated and spiralled ‘out of control’. One said he now struggled to understand how he believed the lies he used to tell himself, and how ‘warped’ his mindset became. Another said he now recognised how his ability to empathise with the victims in the images had been eroded as he was drawn to more and more extreme images.

Sections of our online self-directed intervention – Stop It Now! Get Help

Understanding the behaviour

- Introduction
- Get the facts
- Why change?
- Self-awareness
- Self-help
- Useful resources

Gain understanding of your online sexual behaviours, your motivations, trends and patterns.



Moving forward

- Introduction
- Get the facts
- Why change?
- Self-awareness
- Self-help
- Useful resources

How to continue moving forward, disclose your offending and build a fulfilling life.



In particular, helpline callers and survey respondents said they were struck by the victim empathy module, which encouraged them to contemplate the impact of their behaviour on victims. They typically stated that this contemplation led them to feel depressed and sickened by their behaviour, and that this knowledge alone was enough to deter them from reoffending. This was mentioned by 20 people who had offended including five not yet arrested.

The Get Help content was recognised by some as clarifying what an illegal sexual image of a child is and directly challenged self-justifications and misunderstandings with clear examples (mentioned in six cases, including three people as yet unknown to law enforcement).

Some respondents praised the module about disclosing to friends and family, and felt the advice given worked well from their own experiences.

However, some faced challenges in accessing or using our online self-help.

- Some were either reluctant or unable to do so due to limited or no internet access or were fearful of using it
- Some said it might be possible to access the modules at their local library, they felt very self-conscious about doing this and disliked feeling like they were concealing their internet use once again. One individual told us the website had been 'blocked' by library computers
- Two people not yet arrested reported that their partners were aware of their past illegal behaviour but would not allow them to use our website or contact the helpline in case these were being monitored by the police

Limitations

People who offend online, particularly those not yet arrested, can be hard to engage in research. It is very difficult to achieve a sample size large enough to deliver robust quantitative findings, however the evaluation of the pilot campaign is large for a piece that is qualitative in nature, which should give confidence in the findings.

Administering a questionnaire to helpline callers seeking advice, information and support was clearly not the primary function of helpline advisors, so not all questions were always asked of all callers, and the level of detail recorded varied. It is possible that callers who used our online self-help resources or changed their behaviour in some way were not recorded or included in this sample. There were also instances when helpline advisors chose not to ask these questions, for example with callers in severe distress or who appeared suicidal.

Evolution of the deterrence campaign: key highlights

(October 2016 – June 2019)

Based on the success of the pilot campaign, we have continued and extended our work to deter online viewing of sexual images of children. Our research and evaluation found that messages would be most effective if they confronted our target audience multiple times in their daily lives. This contributed to the campaign strategy and determined where assets (films and adverts) and campaign information would be targeted. The campaign messages and methods of delivery have largely stayed the same with press, social media, digital adverts, warning messages and partnerships playing key roles. However, through robust evaluation and fresh research, each campaign phase learns from the last and aims to be more sophisticated in reaching our audiences. The breadth and reach of the campaign have increased to bring in new platforms and partners so that awareness of the issue and the help available spreads.

Phase 2 – 2016/17

We worked with 138 new partners including the National Police Chiefs' Council, NSPCC, UK Safer Internet Centre, and National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). South Wales Police also drove cross-community engagement that included safeguarding leads and local sports clubs, as well as the Welsh Rugby Union. We generated 205 pieces of media coverage across the UK including BBC News, the Independent and the Daily Mail, more than double the previous campaign.

All this work helped to open up conversations around online sexual offending against children, bringing these into the mainstream, as well as engaging professionals.

Phase 2 Highlights:

- Our campaign films were viewed 2.2 million times
- We achieved 205 pieces of media coverage
- We worked with 138 new partner organisations



South Wales Police launched Operation NetSafe to support the campaign

Welsh Rugby Union got behind the campaign, conducting promotional activities, hosting information on their website and broadcasting our helpline number during a Six Nations Championship home game



Phase 3 – 2017/18

We extended our partnerships even further, working with police forces across Wales as well as in the north-west, south-west and south-east regions in England. We also worked extensively with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, who distributed tailored information to staff and patients through social media, printed materials, the intranet and face-to-face briefings. This was significant as it reached a substantial workforce, some of whom would have been affected directly by the issues highlighted by the campaign, and some who would see patients affected by the issues.

Through a partnership with British Universities and Colleges Sports (BUCS) we disseminated messages through social media and blog posts, enabling us to reach a younger age range. We also created a pack for other helplines who may receive calls from our target group, for example Samaritans, so that their staff were fully aware of the support we can offer. Working with the NHS and other important partners not only adds credibility to the prevention approach and demonstrates the support of a wide range of sectors, it also helps reach substantial numbers of people.

Phase 3 Highlights:

- Campaign films were served 13 million times, with 62% of viewers watching them to the end
- Five un-arrested offenders said seeing a film on Facebook prompted their contact to our helpline
- We achieved 337 pieces of media coverage
- We ran partnerships with relevant sectors including the NHS, Police and education

THE TIMES

36,000 people seek help for viewing child abuse images

The number of people seeking help to stop viewing child abuse images has risen by 40 per cent, figures suggest.

The Stop it Now campaign run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a child protection charity, said 36,443 people contacted the scheme last year, up from 26,089 in 2016.

Most came through the campaign's website, although 2,251 people called the anonymous helpline with concerns about their own or someone else's behaviour.

The National Police Chiefs' Council head of child protection, Simon Bailey, who is also chief constable of Norfolk, said more offenders were being arrested for viewing or sharing sexual images of children, but added that it could not be tackled by enforcement alone. "It requires schools and parents to educate children to ensure they stay safe, as well as for technology and social

media companies to take their responsibilities seriously in protecting young people online," he said. "It is also crucial that offenders who are yet to be arrested are given the opportunity to seek help."

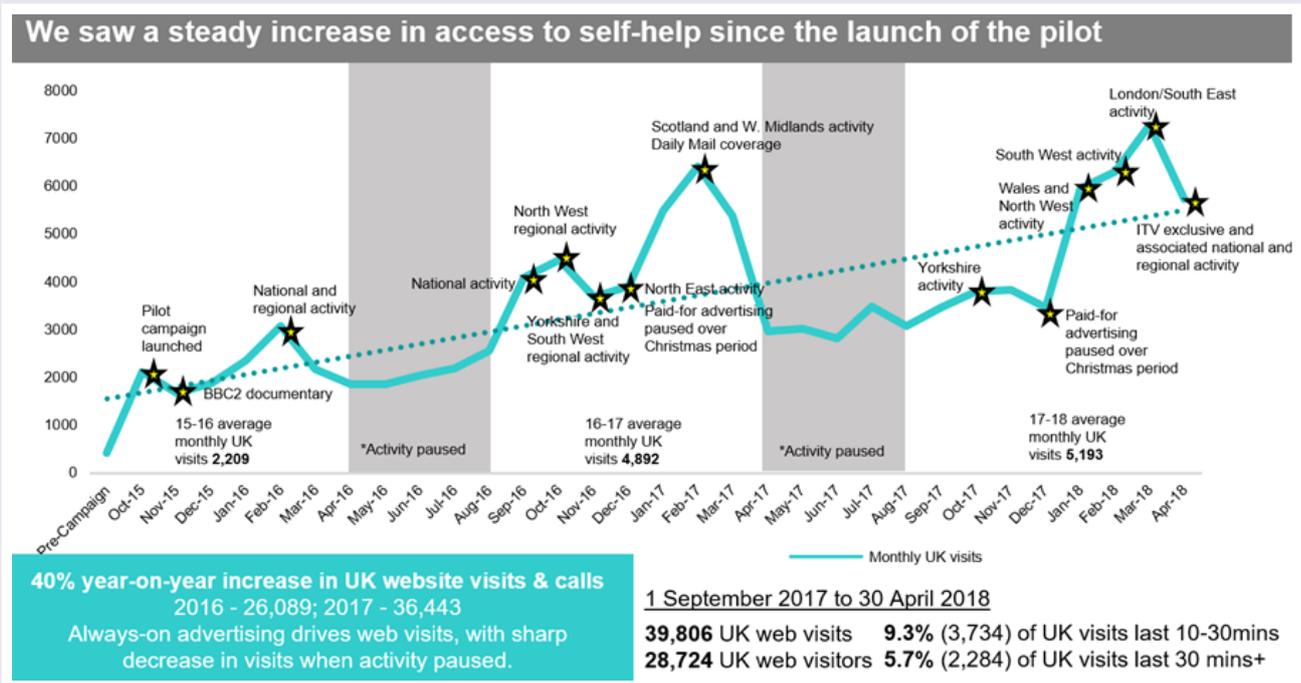
The number of people in England contacting the campaign went up 41 per cent from 22,325 in 2016 to 31,373 the following year. In Scotland it was up 55 per cent from 1,614 to 2,508 while in Wales there was a 20 per cent increase from 896 to 1,073. Contacts made from Northern Ireland rose from 456 to 639.

Tom Squire, the clinical manager at The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, said: "When you make people aware that help is available to stop, people will take up that offer of help. We work with many men arrested after downloading huge numbers of abusive images of children. Nearly all of them say they wish they had known sooner about the help that's available to stop."

Coverage in The Times

Phase 3

Bespoke materials made in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust – a poster



We tracked campaign activity, including partnerships and media activities across the UK, against contact with our online resources

Phase 4 – 2018/19

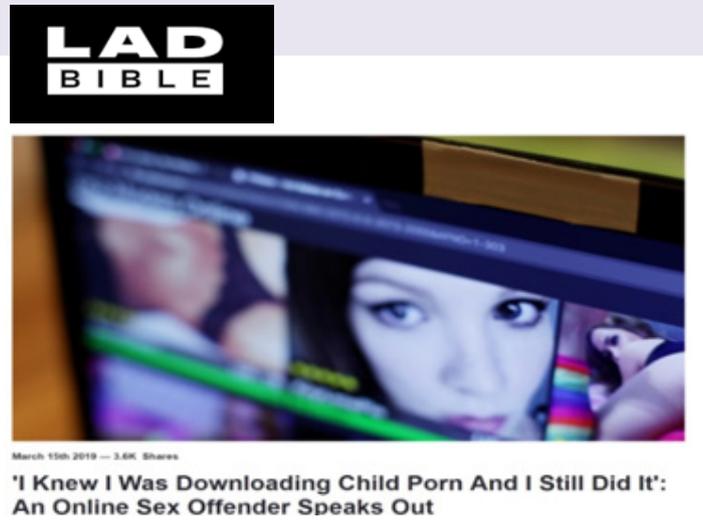
We piloted whether monitoring and replying to posts on online forums including Reddit was an impactful method of engagement, and this approach resulted in engagement across 12 threads with young men concerned about their thoughts and behaviour.

We delivered five regional media partnerships with local police – in West Yorkshire, West Midlands, south-east, south-west and north-west. This work built on and extended what we knew worked previously, and used vital links with existing key partners.

We targeted our campaign videos on online behaviour traits (e.g. heavy pornography use) resulting in 29,000 clicks through to our online resources. One of our films, 'The Knock', remained the highest performing of the three short campaign films, achieving 5 million views.

Phase 4 Highlights:

- Eight national media features ran in major titles including interviews with LFF experts, an ex-offender and an ex-partner of an offender
- Digital improvements to our online self-help led to a 30% increase in return visitors
- We spoke to 89 un-arrested helpline callers and the number of calls received doubled compared to 2017/18 - from 5 to 12 calls a month



We worked with media outlets targeted at men, and Lad Bible ran an interview with an ex-offender to encourage men to think about their online behaviour



Our film, The Knock, was watched in full over five million times

Case study 3:

Will called the helpline after being arrested by the police

Will was arrested for possession of sexual images of children and was directed to Stop It Now! by the police. After calling the helpline for the first time, he was advised to visit the website and work through the Get Help modules. Will was sceptical about accessing the modules at first, and could not understand how these might help him address his behaviour. He was also put off by the number of modules, and initially dismissed some as irrelevant.

In order to help him focus and reflect on his behaviour, he signed up to the practitioner call back service, a service we offer that enables callers to discuss the modules with a specialist worker. He found these calls, coupled with his work on the modules, a good opportunity to explore his behaviour in full and realise the implications of his actions. As he worked through the modules he realised that his offending behaviour had been triggered by boredom and by disagreements with his wife. He also learned that he had used a range of excuses to justify his behaviour no matter how many times he told himself 'this is the last time'. In particular he found the module on Victim Empathy "got me thinking" and he now has sufficient arguments against his prior justifications.

Will is confident that he can now control his behaviour and he is more optimistic about his future than he was following his arrest. He says: "The services made me realise that there is life after this pending conviction, and that I can change."

Evolution of the deterrence campaign

(August 2019 – June 2022)

Grooming deterrence pilot campaign

In the same way that the availability of technology and the internet has contributed to increases in the viewing of sexual images of children, this has also facilitated an increase in the grooming and exploitation of children online. Compared to 20 years ago, adults and children have access to more devices and ways of communicating online. Research investigating the types of online grooming (OLG) behaviour (6,7) has identified a diverse group of people engaging in this type of behaviour, with motivations and strategies that vary substantially. On the one end, there are people who are highly invested in desensitising children to sexual materials and discussions to coerce them into sexual interactions offline or online. Others are seeking intimacy, invest much time socialising with the child, and consider themselves in a romantic and consenting relationship with the child. On the other end of the spectrum, people presenting with a more opportunistic profile will primarily discuss non-sexual as opposed to sexual matters with children, and generally spend little to no time building a relationship with them. And yet, others present with a more adaptable profile, adjusting their behaviour to each child.

In the second half of 2019, alongside the existing sexual images of children deterrence campaign, we piloted a digital-only campaign targeting online groomers, to evaluate whether we could engage this population. It was used as a proof of concept to establish whether the model created to deter viewing offending could be successfully applied to people attempting to have sexual conversations with under-16s online (the legal boundary in the UK).

Research with people who had offended: key messages and delivery

Building on our successful model for deterring those viewing sexual images of children, we reviewed the available literature on pathways into offending behaviour, and conducted research with men who had been arrested for online child sexual grooming offences. We found that:

- self-reported triggers to offending included feelings of loneliness and isolation; specific difficulties in their personal life such as depression, substance abuse, and porn addiction
- they typically exhibited a lack of empathy for their victims, and victim harm messaging was not sufficiently impactful to motivate them to seek help
- very few offenders said that they lived in fear of arrest

Based on these insights we decided that effective campaign messaging should:

- educate the audience on the law and make them confront their own behaviour: it is illegal for adults to have sexual conversations with under-16s online
- emphasise the legal and personal consequences: arrest, prison, job loss and family breakdown are likely
- provide reassurance that effective anonymous help to stop is available: change is possible

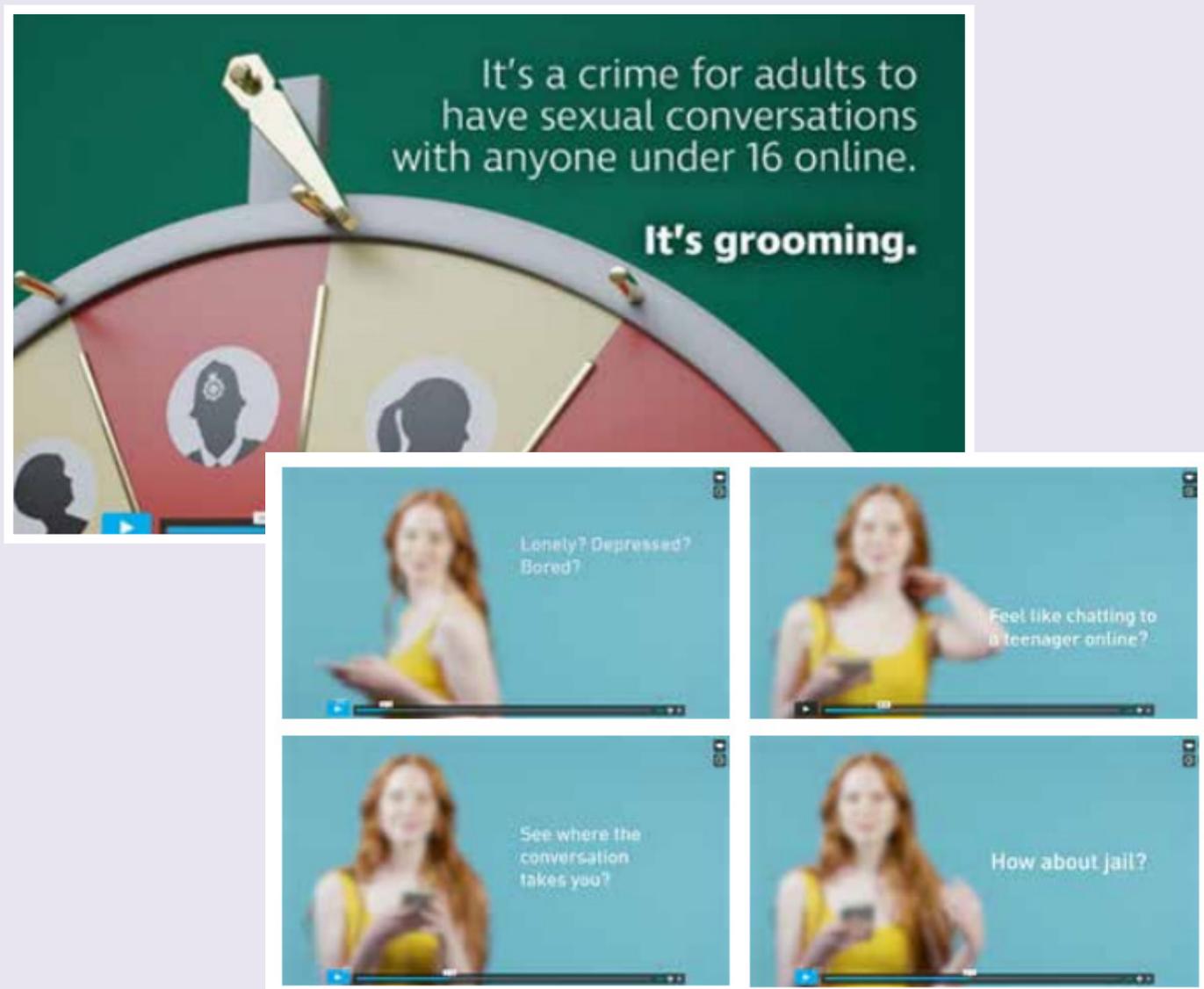
Importantly, and to aid that change, we developed a new module in our online self-directed intervention to focus specifically on sexual conversations with under-16s and ways to stop. We also adapted the content of existing modules to make it more suitable for adults worried about their own grooming behaviour.

To bring people to our resources, we made two new short films with this messaging for online adverts. Based on law enforcement intelligence and our work with people who had offended, we delivered these messages at moments when insight showed susceptibility to deterrence and at points of risk, for example through specific websites, chat, gaming and social networking platforms used to offend.

Over the course of a four-month pilot, of the 170,000 users that reached the campaign landing page on our website, on average those users visited the landing page twice. Adverts in apps and websites were seen more than 17 million times and the full videos were watched nearly 1.2 million times.

While evaluation data was limited to 16 survey responses including 11 people who told us they had groomed children online and had not yet been arrested, this proof of concept suggested that the online advertising provided a route for our target audience to reach our services.

Grooming deterrence pilot campaign



Phase 5 – 2019/20

We created two new campaign films based on the fear of being caught. These again drove home the consequences of these crimes and the availability of help to stop offending. These were developed from research with our target audience.

We also merged three of our websites: our corporate Stop It Now! website; Get Help (for concerns about online offending); and Get Support (for concerns about offline offending). This was based on feedback from some users that it was unclear which self-help modules were relevant for their situation and that the presentation was not user-friendly or engaging. Research also informed the development of these resources including their presentation to improve user experience.

During Phase 5 our adverts on social media were seen more than 1 million times and adverts on websites and through search engines added another million views.

We delivered a campaign with the Metropolitan Police in London, achieving significant local press coverage and an increase in people coming to our resources.

The end of this campaign coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In recognition of the increased risk of offending behaviour, with stress, social isolation, and opportunity all elevating risk levels, we extended our digital advertising and ran the campaign for longer than the usual six months. We also secured funding to run a more generic campaign promoting the helpline for anyone concerned about CSA and we piloted live chat on the helpline, to ensure those in lockdown situations could still easily reach out and have private conversations with a helpline advisor in real time.

Phase 5 Highlights:

- We made two new films based on the fear of being caught: **The Wife and The Housemate**
- Almost all (99%) of media coverage included one of the campaign key messages: ‘Help is available, and change is possible’, ‘There are consequences to the behaviour’, ‘By looking at images you are harming children’
- Engagement with our online resources was consistently higher during the campaign period compared to normal, and this had grown year-on-year



Our new campaign film, The Wife



Coverage across major titles, including the Daily Telegraph and Sky news



Phase 6 – 2020/21

In this phase, grooming deterrence was combined with the main viewing deterrence campaign for the first time.

We achieved strong media coverage and used case studies and stories of our service users to good effect, securing national articles in the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian as well as an in-depth piece on the BBC's Woman's Hour.

Phase 6 Highlights:

- We achieved 195 pieces of media coverage
- We aimed to increase visits to our online self-help from 970 a week to 3,000 a week - but we achieved an average of 6,363 a week
- We aimed to increase the number of calls from un-arrested offenders from 4.5 a week to 5.5 a week – but we drove this up to 12 a week

the guardian

Charity says pornography in lockdown a gateway to abuse

Harriet Grant

Child abuse experts have reported a rise in the number of men contacting a specialist helpline for people who are watching or considering watching online child sexual abuse material.

The **Stop It Now!** helpline had its busiest year in 2020, handling more than 12,500 calls, emails and live chats. More than 3,500 individuals asked for help because they were worried about their own or someone else's online sexual behaviour towards children.

Donald Findlater, director of the helpline, is concerned that the reported rise in individuals using Pornhub during lockdown could have led some people to watch illegal material.

He said: "Tens of thousands of people in the UK are viewing sexual images and videos of children. They aren't all the stereotypical loners of popular imagination: they are friends, family, neighbours and colleagues.

"With the increase in online pornography viewing over lockdown, we're worried there will be a new set of people, mostly men, moving on to illegal sexual images of under-18s."

The **Stop It Now!** helpline is run

by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a charity that provides counselling to men who have been watching child abuse material. New research by the charity shows two-thirds of UK adults would not seek help or advice if they knew or suspected their partner, parent or child was viewing sexual images or videos of under-18s online.

Michael Sheath, of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, told the Guardian in December that legal rape- and abuse-themed pornography was desensitising users, leading them on to illegal material: "This isn't looking at naked ladies: it's group sex, it's rape- or incest-themed. Porn is an entry drug for a lot of them. They go down what I call an escalating pathway."

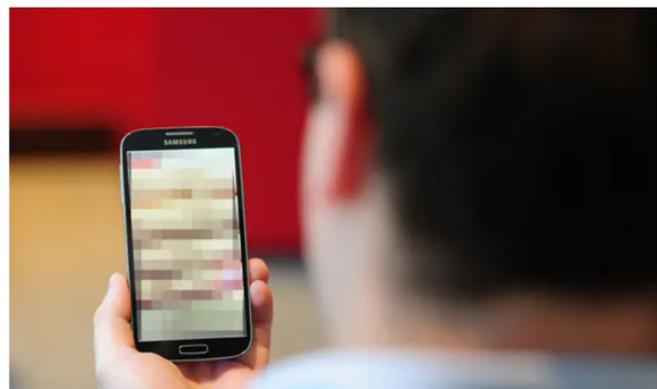
Jennifer, an adviser taking calls on the helpline, urged anyone to call if they were worried about their own or a family member's behaviour online.

"Feelings of isolation, stress ... are often what lead to escalating pornography habits and then in turn to illegal online behaviour," she said. "Obviously for most people these worries don't lead to offending, but for some they do. We listen and don't judge."

Child abuse hotline reports rise in calls from men viewing illegal content

Growing use of adult pornography in lockdown may lead to more people seeking out images of under-18s, experts say

- **'It's an arms race': the tech teams trying to outpace paedophiles online**



▲ 'Porn is an entry drug for a lot of them. They go down what I call an escalating pathway.' Photograph: PA

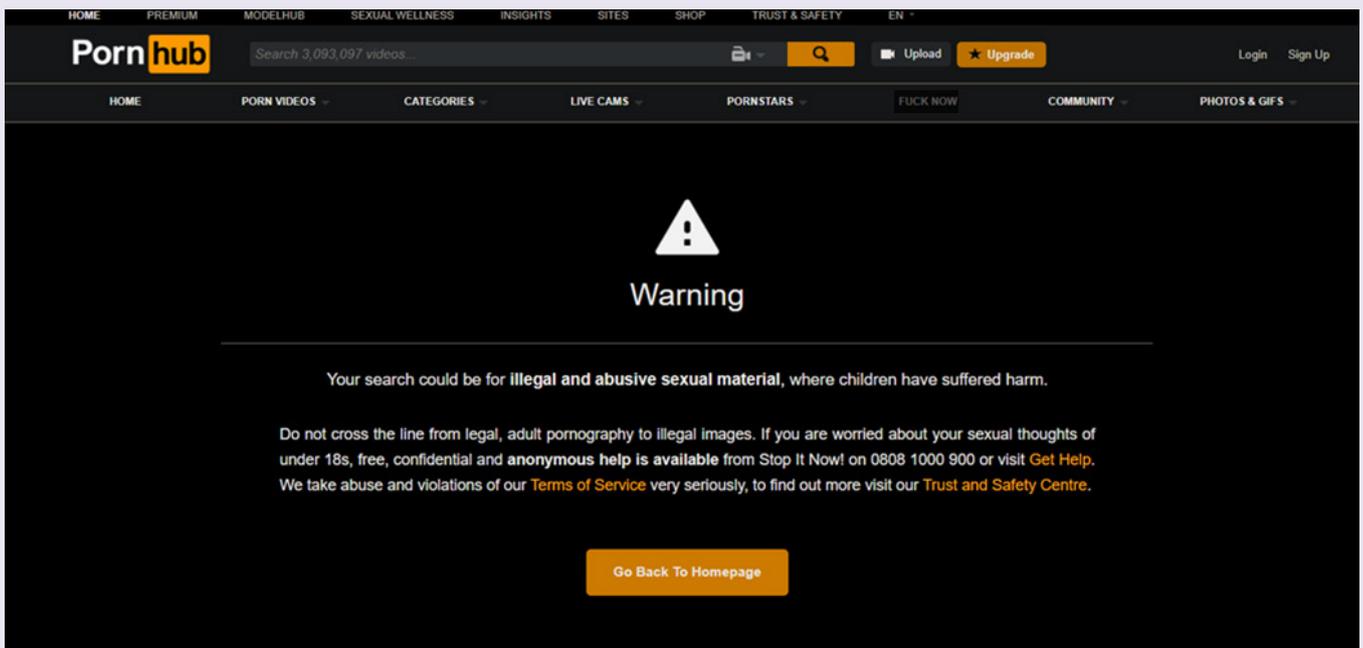
Child abuse experts have reported a rise in the number of men contacting a specialist helpline for people who are watching or considering watching online child sexual abuse material.

Media coverage continued to drive people to our helpline and online resources

Phase 7 – 2021/22

As described above, working with Google and IWF in 2015 we developed online warning messages to be deployed when people attempted to search for illegal material or visit URLs that had been found to host it. Since the start of phase seven in February 2021, through to February 2023, the Google warning message has brought 19,365 users to our online self-help, whilst 4,350 users have been referred directly from the IWF splash page.

In 2021, we worked with MindGeek to provide similar deterrence messages when users searched for illegal content on their adult pornography websites, including Pornhub. Many of the men we work with tell us that a heavy and escalating legal adult pornography habit preceded their online offending. This new collaboration offered a huge opportunity to reach people who are at risk of offending or who are in the early stages of doing so. Between February 2021 and February 2023, the warning messages brought over 260,000 users from around the world to our online self-help.



Users of Pornhub are shown a warning message if they enter a search term banned by MindGeek

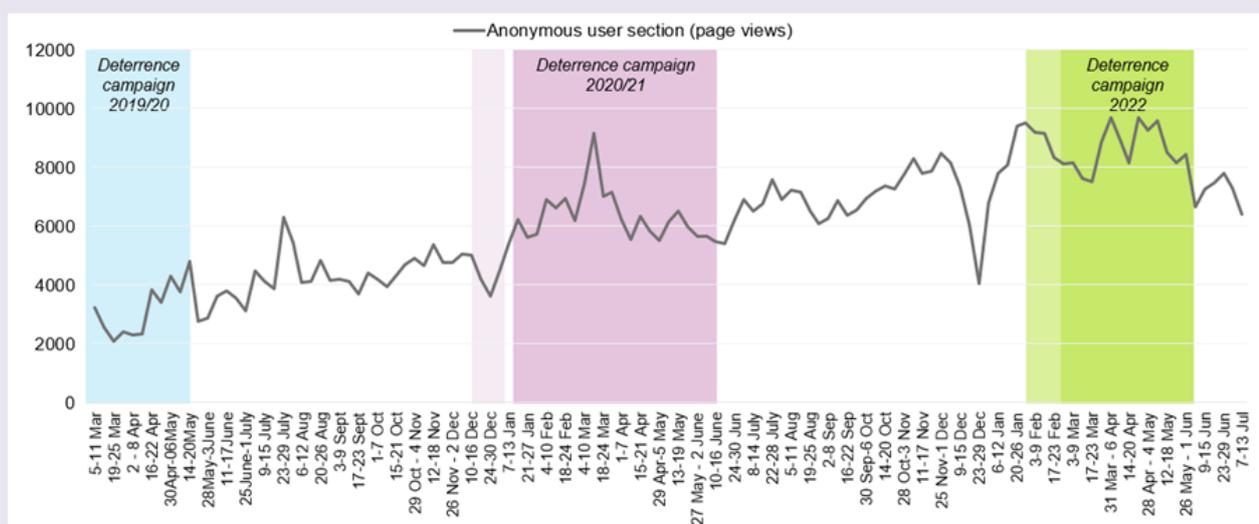
Taking this work one step further, and in partnership with IWF, in March 2022 we helped develop and launch a first-of-its-kind chatbot. Hosted on Mindgeek-owned Pornhub, it engages users whose searches indicate that they are looking for illegal sexual content, and points them towards our helpline and online resources.

In the first 30 days following the launch of the pilot project in March 2022, 173,904 search attempts potentially relating to sexual imagery of children led to the chatbot initiating conversations with users. This again demonstrated a proof-of-concept, and the project will be independently evaluated.

Phase 7 Highlights:

- We launched deterrence messaging on MindGeek owned websites, including Pornhub
- We planned to maintain visits to our online self-help at an average of 6,300 a week – but we drove them up to 8,725
- Our campaign films were viewed over 13.5 million times on social media alone

There were 259,943 total sessions during the 2022 campaign period



There was an increase in average weekly sessions on the whole Stop It Now! website, peaking during periods of campaign activity, and reaching a new average weekly high during the 2022 campaign

Case study 4:

Simon was presented with a warning message that signposted to Stop It Now

Whilst browsing pornography one day, a warning message appeared on Simon's screen advising him that he was attempting to view illegal content and directing him to Stop It Now! Simon had been viewing images he thought were 'probably illegal' for the past six months, including some of girls as young as 13, and his behaviour endlessly played on his mind.

He could not understand why he engaged in the viewing of images when he knew it was wrong, and he describes himself as a "good person with high morals". He says he would never even consider physically abusing a young person, but somehow it feels different looking at images online.

Simon decided to call the helpline and talk through his concerns. He felt the call handler understood his anxiety and gave him advice he could use to regain control over his behaviour. He was directed to the Get Help modules online to help him try and understand his behaviour and identify the trigger points to his viewing of sexual images of children so that he could take steps to change his behaviour.

Evaluation

Each campaign phase is independently evaluated to ensure that delivery and resources are effective, and to allow us to learn and adapt the following phase. There are several elements to this including a helpline survey, online survey and advisor focus groups (see appendix for a summary of evaluation methodology). The information below relates to the most recent evaluation (2021/22).

Profile of people who took part in our surveys

The profile of people who had offended online is summarised below, including both arrested and not arrested.

Gender

As seen in previous evaluations, the vast majority of the people who had offended and completed the helpline survey identified as male (29 out of 37 respondents), the remaining respondents did not disclose their gender identity. Of those completing the online survey, almost all (73 out of 75) were male, only two were female.

Age

Callers to the helpline ranged in age, with 20 the lowest recorded and 61 the highest. Of the 28 people who gave their age, around half (15 out of 28) were below 30 and a similar number (13 out of 28) were aged 30 or over. Age breakdown within the online survey was more evenly spread.

Mental health

It was common for people to describe mental health issues, in varying degrees, as something that impacted their online behaviour. Contributing factors such as past abuse, substance use and issues including anxiety and depression were described. Others reported the negative impact their online behaviour was having on their current mental health and expressed the need to stop to help address this.

People were not asked specifically about whether these factors affected their thoughts and behaviour and therefore these were spontaneous mentions. There were 14 mentions of mental health issues as a pathway to their online behaviour, including stress, loss of loved ones, general feelings of loneliness and family conflict.

“ I’m tired of hating myself and the effect this has on my mental health ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ I was beginning to suffer from insomnia and was probably depressed by work events ”

arrested offender, online survey

“ Had lots of stress in my personal and work life alongside substance abuse issues ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Death of mother and being on my own and stuck indoors because of Covid ”
arrested offender, online survey

Pathways to offending

Consistent with previous evaluations, excessive use of legal pornography remained a commonly cited pathway to viewing sexual images of children by people who had offended. Becoming desensitised to pornography was also mentioned as one of the reasons that led them to viewing illegal images, with preferred content becoming increasingly graphic over time. People who had offended often noted that their use of pornography provided a form of escapism.

“ I sought out adult porn, and this escalated ”
arrested offender, online survey

“ Normal porn got boring. I started to look for more excitement ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ When I started I didn't realise how wrong what I was doing was. It led from watching porn, to watching more severe [...] porn. I don't even remember how I got to what I was doing ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ I'm normally a worrier but I found my anxiety becoming unbearable. Looked for somewhere to escape to, somewhere where reality didn't intrude. Felt I needed something to help me block out all the bad feelings. Found a refuge in (adult) pornography ”
arrested offender, online survey

Drivers to seeking help and changing behaviour

Most online survey respondents who had viewed sexual images of children expressed motivation to change, with 16 out of 19 un-arrested respondents reporting that they had wanted to stop their online behaviour before contacting us.

When asked about their attitudes toward seeking support before contacting us, 12 out of 19 un-arrested offenders reported being scared of losing their friends or family and the same proportion were scared of being arrested. A lower number (5 out of 19) reported feeling guilty about the harm caused to children by their online behaviour, indicating that the motivations of people seeking help to change their behaviour are often focussed on their own lives rather than an acknowledgement of the harm caused to victims.

Fear of the consequences

As seen in previous years, fear of the consequences of their online actions was one of the main driving factors among un-arrested people seeking help, with the majority expressing fear or concern over possible arrest. This was also reflected in the helpline survey and noted by many helpline advisers in the discussion groups.

Discussions with helpline advisers referenced 'the knock' as something people who had offended felt was inevitable in the event of their continued behaviour, and was a significant concern, motivating them to contact us with the aim of avoiding arrest.

“ Anxious about the police becoming involved ”
un-arrested offender, helpline survey

“ Been accessing illegal images for a while and is worried about 'the knock' ”
un-arrested offender, helpline survey

“ Deeper down the rabbit hole, scaring myself with possible consequences and dreading every knock at the door ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

Self-interest

In addition to concerns over being caught, helpline advisers also noted that some people who had offended called the helpline in order to build a log of calls that could be presented as evidence that they at least tried to change their behaviour. This applied to both arrested and un-arrested people, either to attempt to prove to police that they were taking action or pre-emptively building their case in the event of arrest.

“ I think that most people want to self-help, but you do have those people who are calling to show they've called
helpline adviser, focus group ”

“ Their main concern is that they will be arrested. They say at least I have proof on my phone that I called
helpline adviser, focus group ”

External sources

Helpline advisers mentioned adverts on the internet as a recurring driver for people who had offended, ranging from warning pages and pop-ups on pornographic websites. Targeted adverts on Reddit were mentioned in both the helpline and online surveys as a reason for offenders contacting us.

Un-arrested offenders also reported being encouraged by partners who became aware of their online behaviour.

“ I first accessed Stop It Now! back in 2011 or 2012 when I spoke to my recovery worker for drug addiction she looked in to it for me and gave me the info I have since accessed it quite a lot over the years
un-arrested offender, online survey ”

“ I don't want to lose everything because I couldn't stop this one thing, my wife is so hurt and has encouraged me to stop. I don't want to hurt them and ruin their lives! I feel so guilty I'm heading that way...
un-arrested offender, online survey ”

Guilt and shame surrounding behaviour

People also mentioned longer term influences such as guilt, shame, and self-disgust over their actions as driving factors in their desire to change their behaviour. Some highlighted sudden moments of clarity that led to these feelings, whilst others linked this to mental health issues which had contributed to their behaviour. Helpline advisers made mention of offenders expressing remorse and self-loathing over their actions, serving to drive offenders to change. However, little insight was given in terms of whether feelings of guilt and shame relate to the victims, and instead tended to reflect a more general acknowledgement that their behaviour was wrong.

“ My thoughts disgust me ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ I hate myself and want to stop ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Remorse, regret and guilt from viewing inappropriate materials. Having the clarity to see my actions for what they are is frightening, however it can be hard to control at times ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Felt shame, remorse ”

un-arrested offender, helpline survey

Barriers to seeking help and changing behaviour

Amongst people not yet arrested, barriers to contacting us included worries over confidentiality and fear of being reported to the police. Nine out of 19 online survey respondents not yet arrested reported that they were worried about confidentiality before contacting us. Helpline advisers also noted the significance of confidentiality concerns.

Concerns about confidentiality tended to reflect:

- concern that the caller might inadvertently provide too much detail, making them identifiable
- scepticism that the service is in fact not confidential, with concern around calls and IP addresses possibly being traced

“ I’m worried that people will find out and I will get reported to the police ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Phone systems are not secure and governments collect metadata. Even if you promise not to collect data the government can still see a list of numbers that called you if they wish ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Not being able to talk completely openly for fear of them contacting the police ”

arrested offender, online survey

“ Identification from you to the police ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

During the focus group discussions, helpline advisers noted that people not yet arrested often lacked understanding of anonymity and confidentiality.

This is supported by the finding that, even after having contacted us, 6 out of 18 online survey respondents not yet arrested remained worried that our services are not anonymous or confidential. This suggests that though engagement goes some way to mitigate these concerns, a segment of the un-arrested audience remain sceptical and are therefore unlikely to engage fully. Helpline advisers in the focus groups, when considering the campaign, felt that confidentiality should be central to the creative messaging.

“ They don’t always believe it’s [live chat] confidential if someone has spoken to them before, there’s some doubt [that it is confidential]. Offenders ask “How do you know I’ve contacted you before?” ”

helpline adviser, focus group

“ It’s very important to put something in there to enhance that we are anonymous to help target un-arrested ”

helpline adviser, focus group

“ [Worries about confidentiality is] one of the biggest barriers for the un-arrested ”

helpline adviser, focus group

Amongst people arrested, concerns over anonymity were lower. Before contacting us only 2 out of 14 were worried that our services are not confidential or anonymous. This is most likely due to arrested offenders being encouraged to contact us with clear potential benefits to their engagement.

Shame surrounding behaviour

Whilst also a driver to seeking help, feelings of shame among offenders in relation to their behaviour have also acted as a barrier to seeking support, with over half (12 out of 19) un-arrested offenders reporting they felt too ashamed of their thoughts or behaviour to contact anyone. This decreased to a third (6 out of 18) following contact with us suggesting that speaking to advisers can give people who had offended more confidence and enable them to make changes to their behaviour.

“ Ashamed mostly. It [is] almost like seeking help is accepting this part of myself ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ I’m scared of interaction. I feel like a disgusting person and don’t deserve to waste someone’s time ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Shame and guilt. How on earth can you talk to someone about being attracted to children ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Voice makes it more real ”
un-arrested offender, online survey

Impact on friends and family

Reluctance to contact us was also expressed amongst un-arrested offenders relating to concerns they had around the potential impact of their behaviour on their personal relationships. Helpline advisers reported that un-arrested people were often reluctant to get their families (who were usually unaware) involved, linking to previous points of shame felt over their online behaviour.

Un-arrested people who had offended noted concern and uncertainty over how their families or friends might react to their behaviour.

“ I worry that my family will see I’ve visited Stop It Now! and disown me ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ Even though I have used Stop It Now!, I am still worried about having to talking to family/friends as not knowing their response to what I have done. It’s a very sensitive subject and everyone has different reactions, I am not saying talking to Stop It Now! doesn’t help, I think it’s a subject that’s unclear on how to tackle the conversation ”

arrested offender, online survey

“ I wouldn’t be forgiven for my behaviour ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

“ The more that others know the less likely they will want to interact with me ”

un-arrested offender, online survey

Reported attitude and behaviour change

The majority (23 out of 26 in the online survey, 19 out of 20 in the helpline survey) of un-arrested people who had offended reported at least one positive change in their attitudes or behaviour since seeing or engaging with our campaign or resources. Most commonly reported, as in previous evaluations, was increased awareness of the personal and legal consequences of their actions, following their interaction with us.

Motivation to stop viewing illegal images appeared to be higher among un-arrested people contacting the helpline, likely reflecting the greater sense of urgency often seen among helpline callers. Reported behaviour change was universal among un-arrested people who had offended in both the online and helpline surveys.

In the online survey, restricting use of the internet generally, or social media specifically, were the most commonly reported actions. In the helpline survey, changing behaviour to avoid particularly risky situations was most commonly reported.

In the online survey, more un-arrested people who had offended reported reducing their use of sexual images of children than ceasing all together. In the helpline survey, ceasing use of illegal images completely was more commonly reported. In addition to high levels of reported behaviour change, half of un-arrested offenders felt they still had more to do in order to successfully stop their thoughts and behaviour.

Longer-term change

Half of un-arrested offenders reported needing to take further action beyond what they had already done. This tended to be (re)visiting our website and exploring the self-help modules. This arguably reflects the opinion of the helpline advisers who noted that un-arrested offenders intended to engage less with the helpline or live chat due to feelings they want to 'do it alone', though these channels would be beneficial.

The self-reported level of confidence in the ability to change of people who had offended was mixed, with arrested people demonstrating significantly higher confidence. When asked what prompted this confidence, un-arrested people who had offended tended to cite their desire to stop viewing illegal images, linked to feelings of shame and concern for the consequences. These sentiments were mirrored by arrested people who had offended, though they tended to cite professional help as something that boosted their confidence.

Though the sample of repeat callers to the helpline was small, there was an indication that their confidence in their ability to change was higher compared to first-time callers. Helpline advisers also emphasised the benefits of repeat calling, particularly for un-arrested people who had offended due to their first call being sometimes much more heightened in tone and urgency. Therefore, repeat calling provides opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of their behaviour whilst the first call focuses on calming the person down.

Repeat interaction with our resources also appeared to positively impact confidence by providing an outlet for people who had offended to share their successes. Helpline advisers suggested it was common for people to call back, updating advisers on their sustained positive behaviour change.

The self-help modules were very well-received, with people who had offended almost universally reporting that they were easy to understand, clear and personally relevant to them. The modules appeared to provide new perspectives for offenders, on the consequences and wider impact of their actions and this was highly valued.

People completing the module(s) universally reported confidence in their ability to make positive behaviour changes. All those answering the module surveys intended to make at least one change: stopping the use of illegal materials, speaking to a professional and avoiding risky situations were most commonly mentioned. Those using the self-help modules also largely intended to re-engage with us whether using website content, completing more modules or calling the helpline.

Limitations

As stated above, our audience is hard to engage in research and unlikely to want to get in contact with us or to engage with surveys. This makes a campaign and associated resources hard to evaluate. Compared to the amount of people offending, our sample size is relatively small and so it might not be possible to extrapolate.

Evaluations of campaigns can focus on a change in attitudes, knowledge, or hypothetical behaviour rather than actual behaviour change, though there are challenges in determining how behaviour could be measured in relation to child abuse deterrence. Veracity of self-reported change may be an

issue and there might be sample bias in those who take part in the research. The number of people viewing illegal images is unknown, so there is no baseline against which any changes in viewing behaviour can be compared.

Data on conviction rates might reflect detection of offending rather than behaviour, and therefore are not a reliable indicator of incidence. Evaluations tend to lack a control group, though it would be hard to identify an appropriately matched control group with little risk of contamination by inadvertent exposure to the campaign or other influential events during the campaign period (for example, ongoing convictions/court cases, media coverage or competing campaigns). Such contamination might be even harder to avoid with an online campaign, where almost anyone could access and share materials.

Recommendations

Our work has shown that deterrence campaigning is a viable and successful route for preventing online CSA. It has demonstrated that some offenders will reach out for help to change their behaviour, when they know help is available.

Recommendations for the sector

- Relative to the scale of offending, these results have been achieved with a small budget. The priority now should be scaling up across the UK and globally
- Despite the campaign being established and successful, not all advertisers and platforms will deliver our deterrence messages. All online and technology companies should commit to making the internet a hostile place for offending and implement child safety by design
- We have shown that some people who are at risk of offending are worried about their online behaviour and want to change. They must have somewhere to go to support them in stopping and changing their behaviour – quickly and for good – before they harm a child. Such support needs to be confidential
- Linked to this, in wider society, we must make it acceptable and commonplace for people who have offended or at risk of offending to reach out for help to stop. We must work on the public perception of those who sexually offend against children and improve understanding that they come from all backgrounds and walks of life, that some want to stop and that desistance is possible

Recommendations for running a similar campaign

- The success of our campaigning builds on a solid foundation in research as well as ongoing evaluation. Different approaches, messages and delivery may work in different settings and so understanding and testing these are key
- Using a mix of channels has proven effective and allowed us to reach our audiences in their daily lives, something which our research identified as important. There are different pressures for these channels, for example traditional media has a rapidly changing news agenda and fierce competition for coverage. Using a mix of channels, both at a national and regional level, therefore gives some resilience and contingency
- Backing from partners, such as law enforcement and NHS, provides credibility and support for this approach, and extends the reach of the campaign

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Appendix

Strands of the evaluation

This evaluation comprises analysis of four data sources, with a focus on offenders.

Online survey

An anonymous online survey hosted on the Stop It Now! website, in the Get Help section.

Questions covered demographics, campaign and resource awareness, drivers and barriers to change, reported attitude and behaviour change, and confidence in changing.

The survey was open to both individuals who committed IIOC and OLG offences, and those who were currently or previously under investigation, as well as those who had never been investigated for their online behaviour.

Helpline call survey

Responses to questions asked of un-arrested viewers and groomers who contacted the helpline.

Helpline advisers completed the survey during all calls they were able to, and questions covered demographics, drivers and barriers to change, reported attitude and behaviour change and confidence in changing.

The survey also gathered data on whether the individual was a first-time or repeat caller and additional behaviour change questions were asked of repeat callers to assess longer-term change.

Post-module surveys

Five anonymous online surveys hosted on the Stop It Now! website, in the section providing self-help resources for people concerned about their online behaviour, placed immediately after completion of certain modules.

Questions covered reactions to the module content as well as perceived usefulness and immediate impact on attitudes and behaviour. The surveys also look to measure, as far as possible, intended longer-term behaviour change among offenders, and were a new addition to the 2021 evaluation in order to assess this in more detail compared to previous evaluations.

Stop It Now! helpline adviser discussion groups

Two discussion groups with three helpline advisers in each.

Advisers have the most direct interaction with offenders, so there will be an emphasis on their experience talking to offenders and exploring their views regarding callers' context, motivations, attitudes and behaviour change, also covering the longer term where possible. As helpline advisers also cover the live chat and an anonymous email service, where appropriate these were also discussed in the groups.

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