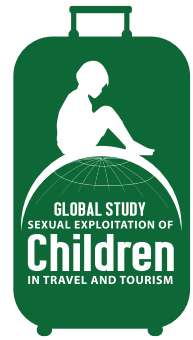


EXPERT PAPER

TRAVELLING SEX OFFENDERS

DR. JOE SULLIVAN



“The advantage [for me] in travelling to a developing country is that the children are much less developed. They are physically less developed but have a maturity mentally. This is very attractive as there is a better understanding of the ‘rules of the game’.”

Fred, a UK offender who sexually abused children in South America

INTRODUCTION



The term Travelling Child Sex Offender (TCSO) has become a widely used alternative to the inadequate concept of the ‘sex tourist’ and describes individuals who travel across jurisdictions to facilitate the sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of children. Since 2002, Mentor Forensics has been conducting qualitative research with this group by listening to their accounts and broadening our understanding of the nature and extent of sexual exploitation perpetrated by TCSOS shedding light on their motivations, planning and tactics. This paper summarises the findings of this research to date.

As our understanding of this group has expanded it has become necessary to broaden the definition to include those who travel in country as well as abroad.

Expansion of the foreign travel industry and in particular the phenomena of cheap air travel has opened new areas of the world to a greater number of people, some of whom have taken advantage of the increased accessibility to sexually exploit children overseas. Some offenders, even those with relatively little financial resources, have found it possible to travel several times a year to other countries for the purpose of sexually abusing children. Some have purchased property in foreign countries to provide them with a base from which to abuse more easily and better integrate into

the local community. Often the chosen countries are impoverished or associated with sexual exploitation. However, offenders also reported visiting the more traditional holiday destinations and bringing children with them to abuse rather than intending to abuse local children.

Hence, sex offenders who travel to facilitate the sexual abuse of children may be involved in both child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation (CSE). For the purposes of this study I have defined CSA as the global term encompassing all sexual abuse of children including behaviours which also involve the exploitation of a child, through third party involvement, CSE. Hence, using this definition, a man who has sex with a street child in South East Asia is engaging in CSA, however, if the child is provided by a pimp or the perpetrator photographs the abuse and shares the images with others this becomes CSE

These definitions are further illustrated in Figure 1 below, however this is not intended as a comprehensive classification;

Study group

To date, the cohort of TCSOS interviewed consists of 35 participants all of whom were male and white. Participants were predominately from the UK (25 participants; N=25) with six from the USA and four from Ireland. Twenty-two participants were aged between 35- 54 years. The majority (19 participants; N=19) were single and five were either divorced or separated at the time of the interview. Only seven of the participants were married or in a relationship at the time of interview. All of the participants had attended school up to secondary level and 18 of the cohort attained tertiary level education with four of these studying at a post graduate level. Less than a third of the cohort (9 participants; N=9) had their own children. The majority (21 participants; N=21) of the participants were employed or worked in a voluntary capacity with children. Six only worked with children and did not volunteer and four were only volunteers, while 11 volunteered as well as working with children.

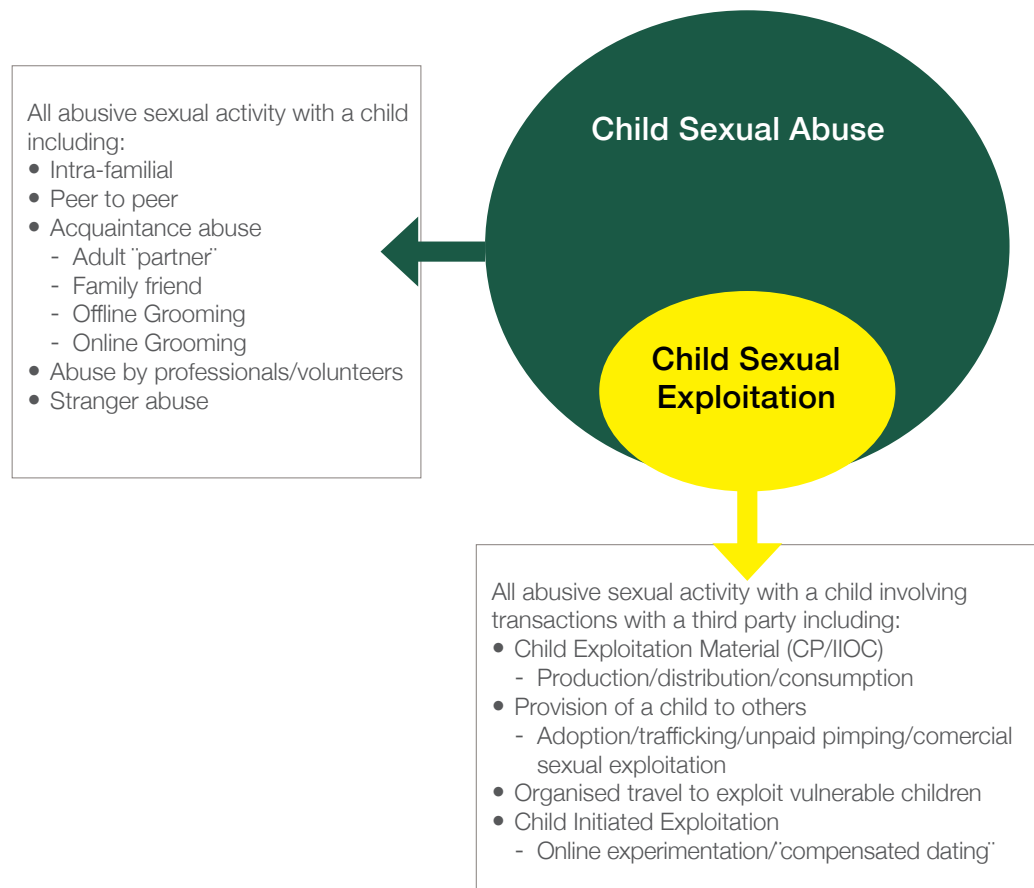


Figure 1 Defining Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

The majority (29 participants; N=29) acknowledged during the course of the interviews that they were aware of their sexual interest in children younger than themselves before they were 18 years old. Of these, most (24 participants; N=24) said that they had already engaged in problematic sexual behaviour with other children by the time they reached 18 years and three had been convicted of childhood sexual offences. The majority reported a sexual interest in post-pubescent children, and most reported an interest in girls.

Travelling Sex Offending Typologies

Analysis of semi-structured interviews with the participants have allowed for the creation of typologies of the typical behaviours described. These have been refined and updated since the original publication of early research findings (Sullivan, 2000). It should be noted that the typologies are used to describe the nature of the behaviour, not to categorise the person. Most of the cohort described engaging in several different contexts. The typologies also have aspects of overlap but seek to describe the behaviours highlighted by the participants. The typologies are:

1. Speculative exploring
2. Self-contained abuse
3. Networking perpetrators
4. Resident foreigner
5. Pseudo care-worker
6. Formal/informal adoption
7. Remote child exploitation

1. Speculative exploring: Nineteen participants said that they travelled to typical holiday destinations, tourist locations or event venues where children were present with the intention of identifying stranger children they might sexually exploit.

Others spoke of travelling to countries and locations where children are reported to be available for sex. In recent years, this has been greatly facilitated by the internet and the body of readily available information on child sexual exploitation it provides.

While this is unlikely to be a comprehensive list, the activities that could be associated with this typology, identified by participants and typical of this group, included:

- Research facilitated travel to known child exploitation hotspots
- Visiting common locations where children might be available for sex
- Approaching stranger children
- Photographing children on beaches and tourist areas
- Pretending to be lost to strike up a conversation with children

Mike is a US citizen who absconded to Mexico following a third arrest for sexual offences against children in the USA. Fearing a life sentence, he crossed the border where he continued to seek opportunities to sexually molest children:

'There was another girl when I was in Mexico and uh she was walking on the highway by herself and I stopped and pulled my car over and she came over. I talked to her in Spanish and told her I wanted to take her picture um, she was wearing a dress. I sat her in my car, I removed her panties, she was wearing a bathing suit and snapped a picture of her'.

Liam is serving a long prison sentence for sexual assault of boys who he also photographed in his own country. He travelled many times to South American countries to sexually exploit street children. His research in prison led him to conclude that on release he would travel to Eastern

Europe where he understood sexually exploiting children would be easier:

'I'd like to go to like Russia, somewhere you know, honestly. Russia or Romania or, you know, is that just, 'number one' you can bribe the officials easily enough, you know, if you do get into trouble and 'number two' they, like I said, they usually don't prosecute you, you know, at least that's what I've heard'.

2. Self-contained abuse: Just under half of the participants in the study (N=15) spoke of travelling with their own (N=4) and/or other people's children (N=15) for the purposes of abuse. This behaviour involved taking children away on trips, often to other countries, with the intention of engaging them in sexual activity.

Abuses described by the participants in this typology included:

- Group leaders taking children as part of a group activity or event - pilgrimage/camp/competition
- Taking friends' or their own children on a trip/holiday
- Bringing known, but unrelated, children to water parks, beaches, theme parks, etc.

One offender spoke of how he exploited the lack of extra-territorial legislation in his country, which he researched in advance of the school trip where he sexually abused a child in care:

'I abused a child while on a trip to France. It was a combined schools trip, he disclosed the abuse but because it was actually conducted

in another country there wasn't a way that I could be convicted in this country, but obviously the police were aware of it and I was questioned over it. Several members of staff were aware of this, so there must have been some question marks in their minds. But I was never asked formally or informally about anything like that, even though they knew that I was a cub leader, there is no questioning about it'.

3. Networking perpetrators: The majority of the study group (N=25) said that they networked with others to facilitate their offending in other locations. Of those who did, eight said they did this via the Internet, seven linked up with local abusers or facilitators in foreign countries and eight said they networked in multiple online and offline settings. Three spoke of networking within their own country to facilitate the abuse of children in a location where they did not live.

Activities associated with this typology included:

- Travelling to abuse children provided by other offenders
- Travelling to provide children to others
- Organising travel for other like-minded individuals for the purposes of sexually abusing children
- Locating brothels offering children for sex

A U.S. based offender who travelled to South America to sexually exploit children described the experience of using commercial brothels:

'We went there and I was, uh, it was like a big room after you, you know, you pay up front at this window and, you know you go in this big room and there's just kids around. Some were naked, some weren't, you know, it's like, I guess it would be smart to be naked if you want to make money, you know, I mean but, you just pick out the boy or the girl you're into... It was just like, there'd be like this little old lady there in the room with you though, and I'd noticed cameras in the rooms before too though, and by the fourth day or the fifth day they wouldn't even be in the room with us any more though. They knew we weren't going to hurt the boys, you know. And I was, uh, I mean the kids didn't seem upset about it, you know, they just..... you know it was just, I guess, their life, you know, really'.

4. Resident foreigner: The study group included nine participants who said that they lived in foreign countries to facilitate the exploitation of children. For some, the duration of their stay was only a few months, however, in two cases the participants had been living in a foreign country for more than two years.

Cheap foreign travel has facilitated the travel of sex offenders to developing countries and access to children who are vulnerable to grooming and sexual abuse or children who are provided by commercial enterprises for sex. Some perpetrators described this ease of access and a perceived naivety of the local population and/or an anticipated ability to bribe officials if caught as factors which encouraged them to seek victims overseas.

Activities categorised in this group included:

- Buying or renting property in a location where children are easily exploited
- Offering patronage to a family or community

One of the participants who lived overseas for prolonged periods to facilitate his sexual exploitation of children said that he would target local street children:

'I preferred street children, they were cheaper and easier to control, in Thailand'.

5. Pseudo care-worker: Eight participants said they posed or acted in the capacity of professionals and/or volunteers overseas to facilitate the abuse of children with whom they worked. These include faith, community and military missions, as well as charities, non-government organisations (NGO) and others volunteering to assist in developing countries or areas experiencing natural disasters or war.

Activities categorised in this group included:

- Volunteering to work with children in care homes or institutions
- Establishing an NGO in a vulnerable location where children might be easily exploited

Ben travelled to Bangladesh to work with children teaching English in a local school which was funded by an international NGO. He recognised the power his position gave him over the community in general and the children in particular.

'I was in a position of trust as an English assistant and used this to get close to my pupils and one in particular. It was an abuse of trust ... I was culturally and professionally empowered in a country of very powerless people'.

Jack was a well-connected offender who had developed networks of contacts with others who provided him with access to children. He spoke of fact that grooming techniques did not need to be so sophisticated in countries where there were high levels of poverty;

'In the old days they were pretty lapse, they didn't question who wanted to volunteer in Brazil in a boy's home and no questions asked, em I know that there are a couple of charities set up that are bogus, you'd get that kind of thing ... there was one of them that used to tell me he would get blowjobs off boys for those protein packs, yeah so getting sex for food. Em, so yeah I mean it happens a lot, and they are not going to say anything cause they are not going to get fed or they are getting something out of it that they just really need.'

6. Formal/informal adoption: Three members of the study group formally adopted children of which two were from foreign countries. Two participants informally adopted children during periods of living overseas. Of these, one remains in contact and continues to provide financial support to a victim who is now an adult with children.

Brian formally adopted the child of a sex worker he married and brought back to his country of origin. He sexually molested the child from age 5-7 on regular visits, while she remained in Thailand with her grandparents and he prepared the necessary paperwork to adopt the child and obtain citizenship for her of his country. Once she was a resident in his country he continued to sexually molest her until she finally told when she was 15 years old. Of the five participants who formally or informally adopted children, he is the only one to have been convicted of offences relating to these children.

Activities categorised in this group included:

- Marrying women with children who are seeking to move from a developing country
- Informally adopting a child while resident overseas

Marty was convicted of producing indecent images of children and distributing them via the internet. One of the children he filmed was his adoptive son. In interview he revealed how he revelled in being able to dupe the social workers who approved the adoption;

'I was interviewed by this woman for 4-5 hours in a hotel. At one point we were smoking a cigarette and I said "how do you know I am not a child molester?" She said "Oh I have been testing you throughout the day" And I am thinking "oh you stupid bitch you don't even know. And she said single father adoption would be great and I am just thinking "oh damn everybody wants to give me a kid" that was unbelievable I still can't believe it man.'

7. Remote child exploitation: While not associated with travelling offenders, this typology is included as it involves perpetrators actively sexually exploiting children in developing countries. This is an emerging typology which is facilitated by developing technologies. It was spoken about by two participants who became aware of commercial websites purporting to offer webcam sex with adults but which also offered sex with children. One spoke of how more extreme behaviour with children could be paid for without the risk of being caught.

Activities categorised in this group included:

- Commercial websites offering webcam sex with children
- Paying children met in developing countries to stay in touch via webcam for the purposes of exploitation
- Using technology to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children

Clearly, the attraction of this abuse of children overseas is that the travel is not required, and the abuse can be recorded via capturing software for use later, however, the drawback for many abusers is that they are not physically present or able to touch the child.

Andy was arrested when he travelled to sexually molest an eight year old boy who was being offered for sex on the internet. He justified his online abuse of children in the following way;

'That wasn't real life, that was over the internet. On a skype chat, so that wasn't – we weren't together in the same place, we were like whatever it is, 9,000 miles apart.'

CONCLUSIONS

Sex offenders tend not to specialise in one form of abuse and many of this cohort were sexually abusing and exploiting children in several different contexts. Offending against children overseas was therefore just one approach in their repertoire. Consequently, we need to be careful in applying the label TCSO as it refers to a type of behaviour not a type of person. Analysis of the accounts of TCSOS have identified distinct typologies of behaviour and it is clear that continued research is required to broaden our understanding of their evolving methodologies for sexually exploiting children nationally and internationally.

Since the arrival of the Internet, their capacity to identify, connect with and offend alongside or with the assistance of others has become greatly enhanced, and it would appear likely that this will continue into the future.

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