

Characteristics of Online Offenders (non-contact) vs. Contact Offenders
A summary of the studies described on the next four pages

		Online Offenders	Contact Offenders
Characteristic		(child porn and/or soliciting)	(Attempted or actual online interactions)
General Characteristics	Male	Same	Same
	Age	Younger	Older
	Intelligence	More	Less
	Education	More	Less
	Caucasian	More	Less
	Childhood abuse compared to gen population	More	More
	History of childhood abuse between 2 groups	Less	More
	Cognitive impulsivity	Less	More
	Emotional disorders / Psychiatric diagnoses	Same	Same
	Externalized Locus of Control	Less	More
Social Isolation	Socially isolated	Same	Same
	Emotional loneliness	More or Same	Less or Same
	Involved in intimate adult relationships	Less	More
	Ever have been married	Less	More
Criminal	Criminal history	Less	More
	Previous sexual convictions	Less	More
	Disclosed previous undetected sex offenses	More	Less
	Offense-supportive attitudes	Less	More
	Psychopathy traits / antisocial	Less	More
Sexual	General measures of sexual deviance	More	Less
	Phallometrically assessed arousal to children	More	Less
	Sex drive / preoccupation	More	Less
	Problems with sexual self-regulation	More	Less

	Admit sexual interest in pre/post-pubescents	More	Less
	Fantasizing about children	More	Less
	Fantasies that include non-consent	Less	More
	Emotional identification with children	Less or Same	More or Same
	Empathy for children	More	Less
	Perspective-taking	More	Less
	Identified as a pedophile	More	Less
	Identified as a hebephile	Less	More
	Clinicians rate as sexually deviant	More	Less

Findings from Various Studies

Babchishin, Hanson, & Hermann (2011)

- More than 99% of online sex offenders (non-contact) are male, with few cases of female online offenders. Those that occur appear to be in coordination with a male co-offender (boyfriend).
- Online-only offenders are less antisocial than contact offenders. They have less criminal history and lower scores on psychopathy measures.
- Online offenders (non-contact) more likely to be sexually deviant in terms of phallometrically assessed sexual arousal to children, self-reported sexual fantasies, and clinician ratings.

Bates and Metcalf (2007). **Child pornography offenders (non-contact)** scored:

- higher in emotional loneliness
- lower in emotional identification with children
- lower in empathy deficits for children
- lower in offense supportive attitudes and beliefs

Elliott, Beech, Mandeville-Norden, and Hayes (2009). **Contact sex offenders** had:

- greater offense-supportive cognitions
- greater victim empathy deficits
- greater perspective-taking deficits
- lower in fantasy
- higher in cognitive impulsivity
- more external in their perceived locus of control.

Babchisin et. al. (2011). **Online offenders** are:

- less antisocial, on average, than contact offenders
- have less criminal history
- lower scores on psychopathy measures
- have greater victim empathy
- scored higher on sex drive/preoccupation and sexual deviance than contact offenders.
- more likely to be sexually deviant in terms of phallometrically assessed sexual arousal to children, self-reported sexual fantasies, and clinician ratings. Child porn offenders with and without victims score higher on phallometric measures than do sex offenders with only child victims (no child pornography), adult victims, or general psychology students.
- Online and dual offenders were more likely to report sexual fantasies about girls under age 15 than contact offenders. In contrast, contact offenders were more likely to report sexual fantasies involving some form of confrontation and nonconsent.

- younger on average than contact sexual offenders in six separate studies that compared the two groups. Online offenders are also younger in comparison with the general male population. This is most directly tied to the fact that younger age males have greater Internet involvement.
- better-educated than contact sexual offenders in comparison studies.
- scored higher in intelligence than did Contact sexual offenders, with an average IQ score close to the population average of 100. Whereas contact sexual offenders are typically 10 points below the population average, consistent with research showing that offenders generally score lower on intelligence tests than the general population (White, Moffitt, & Silva, 1989). Pedophilic sex offenders (contact offenders with child victims below the age of 12) scored lower in intelligence than non-pedophilic sex offenders or other kinds of offenders (Cantor, Blanchard, Robichaud, & Christensen, 2005).
- are significantly more likely to be Caucasian than contact sexual offenders. The proportion of Caucasians among online offenders is also greater than the proportion among general offenders or the general population.
- online offenders in nine samples were less likely to have ever been married than the general population.
- There is theorizing that those who sexually act out online are more socially isolated than the general population. However, there were no group differences in loneliness from four studies. This is in contrast to the findings of Bates and Metcalf (2007).
- There was no difference between online and contact offenders regarding emotional identification with children. This is in contrast to the findings of Bates and Metcalf (2007).

Webb, Craissati, and Keen (2007). **Child pornography offenders** (non-contact):

- fewer previous sexual convictions
- more likely to have problems with sexual self-regulation (as compared to a sample of child sexual abuse / contact offenders).
- less likely to express offense-supportive attitudes about children
- less likely to be involved in an adult intimate relationship.
- scored lower on psychopathy.

Seto, Cantor, & Blanchard (2006); Seto, Reeves, & Jung (2010), Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra (2008).

- The majority of child pornography offenders are likely to be pedophiles or hebephiles, according to their sexual arousal patterns and self-report.
- In contrast, most solicitation offenders are unlikely to be pedophiles because they focus on adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15.

Seto et al, 2012

- Child pornography offenders scored higher on sexual deviance than solicitation offenders.
- Overall, 61% of child pornography offenders show a preference for depictions of children over depictions of adults.
- But an important contradiction is that solicitation offenders are consistently found to be more antisocial/psychopathic.

Hanson, Harris, Scott, & Helmus, (2007)

- Fewer solicitation offenders admitted sexual interest in prepubescent or pubescent children or disclosed undetected sexual offenses.
- Solicitation offenders received lower clinician ratings on sexual deviance items of the Stable – 2007 as compared to online child pornography offenders.

Psychiatric symptoms (Seto, 2013)

- Some psychology models suggest emotional dysregulation plays a role in sexual offending (Finkelhor, 1984; Hall & Hirschman, 1991; Ward et al., 2009) and some studies suggest a link between disturbed mood and compulsive or excessive sexual behavior (Kafka, 1997).
- Kruger, Kaplan, and First (2009) found no differences in psychiatric diagnoses between their groups of solicitation offenders and child pornography-only offenders.

Antisociality (Seto, 2013)

Criminal history is an established risk factor for recidivism among every offender population that has ever been studied and this is highly likely to be relevant for online offenders as well. Criminal history is also important because it is an indicator of anti-sociology (antisocial tendency)

- Several studies found that online offenders are less likely to have a prior criminal history and they score lower on measures of antisocial tendencies than contact offenders. Motivans and Kyckelhahn (2007) found that child pornography offenders were less likely to have a prior felony conviction than contact offenders.
- In United Kingdom, Webb (2007) found child pornography offenders had less extensive criminal histories and lower scores on psychopathy than child contact offenders. Child pornography offenders also scored lower on offense supportive attitudes and beliefs and negative peers.
- McWhaw (2001) found that contact-only offenders had more extensive sexual/nonsexual criminal histories and were more likely to have conditional release violations than online-only offenders.
- Babchishin et al. (2011) found that online offenders scored higher on measures of victim empathy than did contact offenders. They also found that online offenders were unlikely to have a prior criminal history involving nonsexual offenses.
- Jung, Ennis, Stein, Choy, and Hook (2013) found that a group of child pornography offenders had a less extensive criminal history than a group of contact offenders. (Page 159)
- Magaletta, Faust, Bickart, and McLearn (2012) compared contact sex offenders with child pornography offenders using the personality assessment inventory (PAI). Pornography offenders were similar to male norms but significantly lower than contact offenders on scales tapping into anti-sociology, including dominance aggression, antisocial features, alcohol use problems, and drug use problems.

Sexual or physical history abuse (Seto, 2013)

- Both adolescent and adult sex offenders are significantly more likely to have histories of sexual abuse than their non-sexually offending counterparts (Jespersen, Lalumiere, & Seto, 2009; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010).
- There is longitudinal evidence that childhood abuse and other forms of maltreatment predict later delinquency, including sexual offending (Maxfield and Widom, 1996). Salter (2003) found that approximately 10% of children who'd been sexually abused were later detected for sexual offending. Research supports the notion that sexual offenders are more likely to have been sexually abused themselves. This is often referred to as the "*abused-abuser*" or the "*cycle of abuse*" hypothesis.
- Babchishin et al. (2011) found that online and contact offenders were both more likely to have a history of sexual abuse than men in the general population. There was a trend for online offenders to be less likely to have physical abuse histories compared with contact offenders.

Comparing Online Offenders With-and-Without Contact Histories

Seto, 2013, page 184

In one study, online offenders with and without contact defense histories did not significantly differ in their phallometrically assessed sexual arousal to children. (Seto, Cantor, and Blanchard, 2006).

McCarthy (2010) showed dual offenders (child porn and contact) were more likely to report using illicit drugs, to have had prior sexual offense, and more likely to be diagnosed with pedophilia. They were more likely to report masturbating to child pornography, more likely to view child modeling sites, and more likely to read sexual stories involving minors, which suggests they were more likely to be pedophiles or have stronger sexual preoccupations.

McCarthy also found that dual offenders were more likely than contact minors to send child or adult pornography to minors, and attempt to meet minors online. They were also more likely to network on pro-pedophilia forums with others who were sexually interested in children.

There was no significant difference in adult pornography use. Dual offenders were also more likely to engage in adult cybersex, consistent with the idea the dual offenders are higher in sexual preoccupations. McCarthy's results suggest dual offenders were more sexually deviant, engaged in a wider variety of online criminal sexual behavior, and posed a greater risk to reoffend than online only offenders.

Prentky et al. (2010) found that dual offenders differed from online only offenders by scoring higher on a measure of antisocial and criminal behavior.

Overall, comparison studies of Internet offenders with or without contact offending histories have suggested that those who commit contact offenses are higher in antisocial tendencies (McCarthy, 2010; Prentky et al., 2010), sexual deviance (McCarthy, 2010e; Prentky et al., 2010), and sexual preoccupation (McCarthy, 2010). Online only and dual offenders do not differ in psychological factors such as loneliness, empathy, emotional identification with children, and offense supportive attitudes and beliefs (Neutze et al., 2011).

Reference

Contact sexual offending by men with online sexual offenses.

Seto, Michael C., Hanson, R. Karl, Babchishin, Kelly M. Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research and Treatment, Vol 23(1), Mar, 2011. pp. 124-145.

Abstract:

There is much concern about the likelihood that online sexual offenders (particularly online child pornography offenders) have either committed or will commit offline sexual offenses involving contact with a victim. This study addresses this question in two meta analyses: the first examined the contact sexual offense histories of online offenders, whereas the second examined the recidivism rates from follow-up studies of online offenders. The first meta-analysis found that approximately 1 in 8 online offenders (12%) have an officially known contact sexual offense history at the time of their index offense ($k = 21$, $N = 4,464$). Approximately one in two (55%) online offenders admitted to a contact sexual offense in the six studies that had self-report data ($N = 523$). The second meta-analysis revealed that 4.6% of online offenders committed a new sexual offense of some kind during a 1.5- to 6-year follow-up ($k = 9$, $N = 2,630$); 2.0% committed a contact sexual offense and 3.4% committed a new child pornography offense. The results of these two quantitative reviews suggest that there may be a distinct subgroup of online-only offenders who pose relatively low risk of committing contact sexual offenses in the future.

The Development and Validation of the Cognitions of Internet Sexual Offending (C-ISO) Scale.

Paquette, S., & Cortoni, F. (2020).

Sexual Abuse, 32(8), 907–930. <https://doi-org.lopes.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1079063219862281>

Abstract

Tools designed to measure the cognitions of individuals who engage in sexual activities with children over the Internet are either based on knowledge about men who had committed contact sexual offenses or cognitive phenomena not specifically associated to offending behaviors. Thus, there is no validated tool specifically designed to assess the offense-supportive cognitions of men who use the Internet to sexually offend children. This study developed and validated the Cognitions of Internet Sexual Offending (C-ISO) scale. A sample of 241 men with online and contact sexual as well as with nonsexual offenses completed the C-ISO scale and its psychometric properties, and latent structure was analyzed using both Classical Test Theory (CTT) and Item Response Theory (IRT), resulting in a final version containing 31 items. The analyses indicate that the C-ISO has excellent psychometric properties and discriminates men with online sexual offenses from those with contact sexual and nonsexual offenses. Implications of the findings for clinical practice and future research are discussed.

The Connection Between Online and Contact Offending

Seto, 2013, p.169-177

The phrase, "view evil, do no evil" was the motto of Adrian Thompson, a British man convicted in 2000 for child pornography crimes in the United Kingdom. This model captures the idea that child pornography could be a substitute for contact sexual offending among individuals who are attracted to children. Is in fact child pornography cathartic? A similar question, are fantasy-driven solicitation offenders – those who currently restrict their sexual interactions with minors to sexual chat, pornography, requests for suggestive or more explicit photos, an exhibitionist – less likely to seek sexual contact with minors?

One of the most fundamental problems with this concept is that people are not good at identifying the causes of their own behavior. Because of ethical reasons, this is an impossible hypothesis to test scientifically. We are left with retrospective research, which can be problematic.

Experimental studies show pornography exposure in the laboratory at least temporarily increases the endorsement of offense supportive attitudes and beliefs and also increases physical aggressiveness, both of which are seen as underlying factors for sexual offending against peers or adults (Kingston, Malamuth, Fedoroff, 2009; Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000, Vega & Malamuth, 2007). Yet, in contradiction, the results of population level studies have mostly shown an inverse association between pornography availability and sex crime rates (Diamond, and How, 2011). Bhuller, Havnes, Leuven, and Mostad (2011), did a study in Norway that showed access to greater broadband Internet had a correlation of 3% increase on sex crimes region by region.

Allen, D'Alessio, and Emmers-Sommer (2000) reviewed several studies that compared pornography used between sex offenders and other groups of men. Sex offenders were not found to have used pornography more often or earlier than other groups of men. However, across seven different studies that asked questions about sexual behavior after pornography use, sex offenders reported they were more likely to fantasize, masturbate, or engage in sexual intercourse after viewing pornography.

Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, and Acker (1995) pornography predicted sexual aggression over a ten-year period. This was replicated by Vega and Malamuth (2007).

Kingston, Fedoroff, Firestone, Curry, and Bradford (2008) among convicted sex offenders with child victims, pornography use predicted violence (including sexual) recidivism, interacting with estimated risk using a validated, actuarial risk measure. Both overall frequency of pornography use and use of child or violent pornography predicted violent recidivism but only among high-risk offenders.

Ybarra, Mitchell, Hamburger, Diener-West, and Leaf (2011) found that exposure to violent pornography predicted sexually aggressive behavior. Over three waves of sequential research, an average of 23% of youth intentionally used pornography. Five percent of those youth had been sexually aggressive. Only 4% of the youth, however, were exposed to violent pornography. Intentional use of violent pornography was associated with a six-fold increase in perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior, whereas there was no significant increase in perpetration for exposure to nonviolent pornography.

Exposure to mainstream adult pornography had a significant, medium-sized effect on negative attitudes about women (offense supportive attitudes and beliefs), and second review showed that exposure to pornography had effects on physical aggression in laboratory tasks. (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995)

Similar effects were also shown for pornography depicting violence; consistent with the even larger experimental literature showing that exposure to violent media content has an effect on subsequent aggression (C.A. Anderson & Bushman, 2001; C.A. Anderson et al., 2003).

Possible explanation for pornography's experimentally demonstrated effects include social learning, excitation transfer, and habituation (desensitization).

- In social learning, one's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of social norms are influenced by environmental inputs.
- In excitation transfer, the physical and sexual arousal elicited by exposure to pornography can be expressed in aggression if the person has been provoked.
- In habituation, repeated exposure to similar content produces smaller and smaller sexual responses, causing the person to need more intense, real-life experiences to achieve the same level of excitement or gratification. P. 176