

What Deters Child Sex Offenders? A Comparison Between Completed and Non-Completed Offences

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Biographies

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Introduction

Attempts to prevent child sexual abuse (CSA) can be divided into two main types – efforts that seek to change the propensity of individuals to perpetrate CSA, and those that seek to prevent individuals from acting on that propensity. The former category includes interventions along the developmental pathway and post-offence treatment programmes, which are aimed at effecting psychological changes that make individuals less risky. The latter category includes efforts to thwart or disrupt the performance of CSA by creating conditions that are unfavourable for offending at the time an offence is being contemplated. These two approaches may be characterised, respectively, as offender-focussed and offence-focussed prevention. To date the overwhelming weight of research on CSA has been applied to the problem of understanding and changing those who offend. However, there is a growing literature on the factors that encourage or permit CSA to occur and how these facilitating circumstances might be changed.

Our focus in this article is on the prevention of child sex *offending*. Offence-focused prevention involves altering the situational dynamics in ways that make CSA less likely to happen. The aim is to create safer environments for children to inhabit; there is no assumption that the potential perpetrator will be changed in any permanent way, though of course thwarting early attempts to offend may prevent some individuals from commencing a cycle of repeated offending. The necessary ingredients for CSA – and therefore the potential targets for intervention – are illustrated in the so-called crime triangle (Clarke & Eck, 2003. See Figure 1). Derived from the routine activities approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 1995), the crime

triangle suggests that crime results from the confluence of an individual likely to offend and a suitable target or victim in a place that allows an offence to occur. Crime can be prevented by neutralising any one of these three elements – by controlling potential perpetrators, by protecting potential targets or victims, and/or by making potential crime sites less favourable for offending. As the outer triangle of Figure 1 shows, one way (but not the only way) to achieve these three objectives is through the intervention of capable third parties – *handlers* (e.g., spouses, friends, probation officers) who might exert some control over potential offenders, *guardians* (e.g., parents, friends, police) who are able to protect vulnerable objects and people, and *place managers* (e.g., landlords, bar managers, security guards) who are responsible for looking after specific locations.

Returning to the specific crime of CSA, in the sections below we identify three research streams that can be mapped onto the crime triangle. One stream of research is concerned with making potential victims of CSA less vulnerable through personal safety programmes. Another stream examines how the physical environment (place) can be designed in ways to make CSA more difficult or risky to carry out. The third stream examines the role of guardians, handlers and place managers in preventing CSA. In our discussion of these three streams we highlight the potential value of perpetrator accounts of their offending experiences as an avenue for researching ways to prevent CSA.

Figure 1 here.

Victim-focussed Prevention

In language of crime prevention, victim-focussed interventions seek to ‘target-harden’ children in order to make them less vulnerable as objects of sexual abuse. This strategy is most commonly operationalized via personal safety programmes, which

aim to equip children with knowledge and skills to recognise, avoid, resist and report sexual advances made to them. Targeted primarily at children aged from 5 to 12 years, programmes are usually delivered in schools as a structured classroom activity. Typically, in addition to educating children how to recognise ‘good’ touch and ‘bad’ touch, and instilling in them a sense of ownership over their bodies and the right to control access to it, the programmes encourage children to be assertive and to adopt various self-protective strategies when they feel in danger – to say ‘no’, demand to be left alone, yell, threaten to tell, and try to get away (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000).

The evidence for the success of such personal safety programmes is mixed (see Topping & Barron, 2009 and Walsh, Zwi, Woolfenden & Shlonsky, 2018 for reviews of evaluations). Using a pre-test/post-test design and with follow-up periods on average of around 3 months, evaluation studies generally provide good evidence that children retain key concepts covered in the programmes (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000; Holloway & Pulido, 2018; Pulido, Dauber, Tully et al, 2015; Rispens, Aleman & Goudena, 1997; Topping & Barron, 2009; Walsh et al, 2018). Evidence that children actually employ the strategies learned is more limited (Topping & Barron, 2009; Walsh et al, 2018), with only scattered findings of behavioural change in participants. In a national (US) telephone survey of 2000 children aged 10-16 years, Finkelhor and colleagues (Finkelhor, Asdigian & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995) found that, in response to feeling threatened, children who had participated in a comprehensive personal safety programme were slightly more likely to report having used self-protective strategies compared to children who had been in a less comprehensive programme or in no programme at all. However, there was no difference between the two groups in completed sexual victimisations or in the level of injury reported. Only one study could be located that reported evidence of reduced

victimisation by programme participants. Gibson and Leitenberg (2000), in a survey of 825 female undergraduates on their self-reported experience of child sexual victimisation, found that 8% of program participants had been subsequently sexually abused, compared with 14% who had not participated in a program.

The research to date on victim-focused prevention has concentrated on how successful programmes are in imparting to children specified self-protective strategies. However, there is a more fundamental question that has been largely ignored in the literature, and that is, how valid is the content of these programmes? The advice given to children – to be assertive, to resist sexual advances and to attempt to run away – is largely based on common sense. In fact, we know very little about how the responses of children affect the behaviour of potential abusers, and which, if any, are the most effective.

A small number of studies have addressed this issue by obtaining perspectives on prevention of those who have perpetrated CSA (Conte, Wolf and Smith, 1989; Cook, Reynald, Leclerc & Wortley, 2018; Elliott, Browne & Kilcoyne, 1995; Leclerc, Feakes & Cale, 2015; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000. See Jacques & Bonomo, 2017, for a defence of this research method in criminology more generally). Elliot et al (1995) asked a sample of 91 men convicted of CSA what children, parents and teachers might do to prevent CSA. Advice relating to self-protective actions that children might take centred mainly on avoiding risky situations – e.g., avoid remote places, don't be so trusting of adults, don't accept lifts, tell your parents where you are going, go out with other children – with some coverage of what to do if they felt in danger – e.g., 'knock on the door of a nearby house' or 'make up a fib and get away'. The advice was largely directed at 'stranger danger' and did not cover the resistance strategies typically covered in personal safety programmes. Extending Elliott et al,

Smallbone and Wortley (2000) asked a sample of 182 men convicted of CSA how often in their experience children used various self-protective strategies. The most commonly used strategies (from a list of 12) were ‘told they didn’t want to’ (45%), ‘said no’ (40%), ‘told they were scared’ (28%), and cried (28%). In those cases in which self-protective strategies were employed, participants reported that the most successful strategies for stopping the offence were ‘told they didn’t want to’ (86%), ‘said no’ (77%), ‘cried’ (71%) and ‘told someone else what was happening’ (64%). Interestingly, the results suggest that showing distress was almost as effective as resistance. However, because participants were asked to respond in terms of their general experience (i.e., across multiple offences), there were limitations on the extent to which the findings could be further unpicked to reveal offence-specific variations in strategy effectiveness (see Leclerc, Wortley & Smallbone, 2011).

Place-based Prevention

Place-based prevention seeks to create safer environments for children in which the risk of CSA is minimised. There are two main (overlapping) place-based approaches in the general crime prevention field – Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). Both approaches examine how physical design can be employed to reduce opportunities for crime, but they differ in their scope and some of the methods employed.

Based on the seminal work of architect Oscar Newman (1972), CPTED is centrally concerned with how the design of buildings, streetscapes and open spaces influences crime in urban settings. The goal of CPTED is to create ‘defensible space’ that empowers residents to exercise greater control over their local environment in order better to deter intruders and potential offenders. Strategies for making spaces defensible include establishing a clear demarcation between public and private areas,

controlling access to and movement within the area, improving the capacity to observe suspicious behaviours, and protecting vulnerable areas with increased physical security (Armitage, 2017).

Where CPTED comprises a set of general crime-safe design principles, SCP involves targeted prevention strategies to address specific crime problems. Ron Clarke, the prime architect of SCP, argued that every crime has different opportunity structures, and that appropriate interventions can only be determined following detailed analysis of the criminogenic features of the particular crime in the particular setting in question (Clarke, 2017). Tailor-made responses are then devised using five basic strategies as a guide – increasing the effort to make the crime more difficult, complicated, inconvenient and/or time-consuming to carry out; increasing the risk to make it more likely that the offender will be observed, identified, detected, and/or caught; reducing the rewards that the offender is expecting from committing the crime; removing excuses or challenging distortions that offenders might employ to minimise their behaviour; and reducing provocations that may create, prompt, and/or intensify the motivation to commit crime.

Wortley and Smallbone (2006) set out the case for applying place-based prevention to CSA, suggesting a range of potential interventions. These interventions were later categorised in terms of their applicability to public, organisational and domestic CSA settings (Smallbone, Marshall & Wortley, 2008). Suggested strategies for public settings include installing CCTV in high risk locations, screening entrances into child-focused events, designing playgrounds to increase the capacity for natural surveillance, and designing child-safe public toilets. Strategies for organisational settings include developing clear rules governing how staff interacts with children, designing buildings to reduce blind spots and low-traffic areas, and controlling access

to premises by outsiders. These suggestions echoed what was found in a study asking men convicted CSA what might prevent the abuse of children in this setting – rules to prevent staff from being alone with a child, to eliminating isolated areas in organisations and prohibiting staff from taking children home were often suggested by participants (Leclerc, Smallbone & Wortley, 2015). Domestic settings are more problematic in that they are private spaces and in most cases any prevention strategies must be implemented via the homeowner. One approach has been to develop place-based prevention advice to caregivers in the form of suggested ‘house rules’ that set out appropriate behaviour in the home with respect to clothing, rough-housing, closed doors, bathroom etiquette, sleeping arrangements and so forth.

While there is good evidence for the efficacy of place-based prevention for general ‘volume’ crime (i.e., offences with many victims such as robbery, burglary, car theft etc) (e.g., Clarke, 1997; Guerette & Bowers, 2009), as is the case with child safety programmes there is little supporting research specifically on place-based prevention of CSA. While it is possible to use pre-/post-test designs to evaluate interventions for, say, burglary (e.g., Fielding & Jones, 2012), such a research strategy is ethically and logistically inappropriate for CSA. What we do know from accounts by those who have perpetrated CSA is that their offences typically occur in places that offer protection from surveillance. In their perpetrator self-report study, Elliott et al (1995) found that 61% of CSA occurred in the perpetrator’s home, 49% in the child’s home, and 44% in secluded public places, while Smallbone and Wortley (2000) reported figures for the same locations of 69%, 20% and 26% respectively. As far as we are aware, however, there are to date no perpetrator accounts that might throw light on the specific features of the immediate environment that encourage or inhibit offending.

Guardianship

The routine activity approach provides a framework for conceptualising the role of capable third parties as crime prevention agents. The framework can accommodate related research streams examining bystander intervention in crime (Hollis-Peel, Reynald, Bavel, Elffers & Welsh, 2011; Reynald, 2009, 2010), and, in the case of children in particular, parental caregiving and supervisory skills and behaviour (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996; Schreck & Fisher, 2004).

Since the infamous case of Kitty Genovese, who in 1964 was stabbed to death while numerous witness apparently looked on,¹ bystander intervention – or the lack of it – has been a popular research topic in social psychology (Banyard, 2011; Hamby, Weber, Grych & Banyard, 2016; Nickerson, Aloe, Livingston, & Feeley, 2014). While in the routine activity approach the mere presence of others is seen as having a deterrent effect on crime (Felson, 1995), an important distinction has been made in bystander research between ‘passive’ bystanders, whose inaction may actually encourage offenders to continue offending, and ‘active’ bystanders, who are capable of and willing to intervene (Foubert, Tabachnick & Shewe, 2010; Reynald, 2009, 2010; Staubb, 1993). Factors found to increase a bystander’s willingness to intervene include having a personal sense of obligation or responsibility, making a specific prior commitment to undertake a guardianship role, believing he/she has the training and skills to intervene, having access to tools or weapons if necessary, believing the victim has not caused the offence, and seeing others modelling appropriate intervention.

Increasing bystander intervention has been the focus of a number of sexual abuse prevention programmes. Most programmes are college-based and are aimed at increasing bystander efficacy in cases of adult sexual assault (Coker, Cook-Craig,

Williams et al, 2011; Fenton, Mott, McCartan & Rumney, 2016). Evaluations generally indicate these programmes are successful in increasing participants' self-reported estimation of their ability and willingness to intervene, although there appears to be no behavioural research examining whether these intentions are put into practice. With these programmes as a model, it has been suggested that public awareness campaigns should include messaging that encourages bystander intervention for CSA (Brown & Saied-Tessier, 2015; Kemshall & Moulden, 2016).

In the case of parents and caregivers, lack of parental supervision has been identified as a risk factor for CSA (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986). Mendelson and Letourneau (2015) proposed that parent awareness programmes should encourage parents to 'play a gatekeeper role regarding who enters their home and when and with whom children are left alone' and 'to take protective measures, such as dropping in unannounced when their child is spending time alone with an adult' (p. 847).

Turning again to accounts by perpetrators of CSA, the participants in Elliott et al's (1995) study advised parents to be suspicious of those taking extra interest in their children and to be aware that offences may be carried out by family members and friends. Smallbone and Wortley (2000) found that 71% of men convicted of CSA reported that the parents knew that they were spending time alone with their child and in a third of cases that they were babysitting the child when the offence occurred. These findings reinforce Mendelson and Letourneau's (2015) call for parents to be more selective gatekeepers of who has access to their children. The potential protective role of parents is demonstrated by Leclerc, Smallbone and Wortley (2015), who found that the presence of a potential guardian nearby at the time of the offence significantly reduced the severity and duration of the sexual abuse experienced by the child.

The current study

As noted in the preceding review, there is a general lack of research examining the efficacy of various offence-focussed CSA prevention approaches. Part of the reason for this is that tying a reduction in CSA to any particular intervention is an inherently difficult thing to do. As a general rule, pre-test post-test designs are not appropriate. One promising research avenue is to obtain accounts from those who have perpetrated CSA of instances of when they failed or succeeded in committing an offence.

The current study contributes to the small body of research that draws on perpetrator accounts to examine CSA prevention. We extend previous research in three ways. First, we explicitly examine the three types of offence-focussed prevention, covering the role of victim behaviour, of the physical setting, and of the availability of guardianship. Second, rather than asking participants to respond in terms of their general offending experience, we get them to focus on specific CSA incidents in which they have been involved. Third, we directly compare incidents in which CSA was successfully carried out with incidents that were prevented or disrupted.

Method

Sample

The total sample recruited for this project comprised 363 adult males convicted of sexual offences against a woman or child incarcerated in Queensland, Victoria or Northern Territory (Australia). A sample comprising 238 adult males serving a custodial sentence for one or more CSA offences were used for this study. Of this total, 82 participants identified an occasion in which they had tried to have sexual contact with a child against his/her will but did not because they were stopped or discouraged either beforehand or during the incident.

Materials

Participants were asked to complete a comprehensive self-report questionnaire about their offending behaviour. Two sections are relevant to the current study. The first section comprised questions about the most recent time participants tried to have sexual contact with a child against her/his will but did not because they were stopped or discouraged either beforehand or during the incident. Questions covered the gender and age of the child, the participant's relationship to the child, the time and place of the attempt, whether there was anyone nearby, the consequences the participant considered, the stage at which he discontinued, and the reasons he gave for discontinuing. In the case of reasons for discontinuing the offence, the pool of options included items referring to victim reactions (e.g., 'asked you to stop'), place characteristics (e.g., 'there were no isolated places'), and possible intervention by third parties (e.g., 'the child's mother was nearby'). The second section comprised questions about the most recent time participants were caught for having sexual contact with a child against her/his will. Questions covered the same offence details as the previous section, except that instead of being asked when and why they discontinued with the offence, participants were asked their reasons for proceeding with the offence, and what might have stopped them continuing with the offence. Again, when probing for reasons for discontinuing, items covering victim reactions, place characteristics and third parties were included in the pool. For most questions, participants selected responses from a list, and were also able to include free responses (which were then coded) if their option did not appear. The exception to this format was the question about victim age, which required a numeric value.

Procedure

The corrective services departments in each of the three jurisdictions identified the prisoners in their facilities who were currently serving or had previously served a sentence for a sexual contact against a child. Staff asked potential participants if they agreed to learn more about the project. Participants who were involved in a therapeutic program were approached during one of their weekly group sessions, whereas offenders not participating in a program were approached individually to maintain their confidentiality. A self-report questionnaire was then provided to consenting participants in the presence of at least one of the research team members, and was checked to make sure there were no misinterpretations or omissions. This assisted in minimising missing fields in the data. For participants undergoing treatment it was not necessary to shield their identity from the other prisoners in the group. Participants thus completed the questionnaire individually in the group setting. Participants who were not undergoing treatment completed the questionnaire in a private room away from other prisoners. Prison authorities assigned each participant a unique identification number to be used in the research; to maintain privacy, the names of participants were not revealed to the researchers and no particulars were recorded that would allow an individual being identified.

Results

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, we examine the characteristics of the non-completed offence (victim gender, victim age, offender-victim relationship, location of offence and time of offence). Second, we examine the circumstances relating to the non-completion of that offence (the consequences participants considered, the stage at which they discontinued, the reaction of the child, the presence of others nearby, and the reasons they gave for discontinuing). Third, we then compare the characteristics

of the non-completed offence with the most recent completed offence by the same participants. Finally, we examine the circumstances or strategies that these participants suggest might have stopped them completing this completed offence, and compare these responses with those from participants who did not identify having a non-completed offence.

Characteristics of the Non-completed Offence

Fourteen (17%) of the children were male and 68 (83%) were female. Forty-five incidents (55%) were classified as intrafamilial and 37 (45%) as extrafamilial. A 2X2 Chi-square (gender by intra-/extrafamilial) was significant ($\chi^2=4.72$, $df=1$, $p=.030$), indicating a greater tendency for intrafamilial victims to be female (91% of intrafamilial v 73% of extrafamilial). The mean age of the child was 11.4 years ($SD = 3.2$ years; range = 3 – 15 years) with no significant age difference between intra- and extrafamilial incidents ($F=2.67$, $df=1$).

Seventy incidents (85%) took place in a private location, the most common being the participant's (56%) or victim's (16%) home (if different), while the remaining 12 cases (15%) took place in public areas (including a car). Unsurprisingly, intrafamilial offending was more likely to occur in private locations ($\chi^2=8.29$, $df=1$, $p=.004$).

The most common time for the attempted offence to occur was between 6pm and midnight (38%). However, there was a significant difference between the timing of intrafamilial and extrafamilial offences ($\chi^2=8.26$, $df=3$, $p=.041$), with extrafamilial more likely than intrafamilial to occur between 6am and noon (19% of intrafamilial and 35% of extrafamilial).

The Decision to Discontinue

Participants were asked if they had thought about the possible consequences prior to attempting to offend (Table 1). Most respondents (59%) indicated that they had not considered the consequences. Those who indicated that they had (42%) were then asked what those consequences were (multiple responses permitted). Fear of imprisonment was the most commonly nominated, followed by loss of family and friends. Only 15% of respondents mentioned loss of relationship with the child, and only one respondent nominated negative consequences for the child. There was no significant difference between those engaging in intra- and extra-familial offending with respect to considering consequences (yes/no) ($\chi^2=0.53$, $df=1$).

Table 1 here

Participants were then asked at what point they stopped offending. A third of respondents (33%) stopped during the set-up phase (e.g., trying to gain trust, trying to be alone with child) while the remaining two-thirds (67%) stopped while trying to perform sexual acts. The stage at which the participant stopped did not differ significantly by private/public offending ($\chi^2=0.44$, $df=1$), intra-/extrafamilial offenders ($\chi^2=0.23$, $df=1$), victim gender ($\chi^2=2.76$, $df=1$), or whether the participant was thinking about the consequences ($\chi^2=0.92$, $df=1$).

In response to the question about the reaction of the child as they attempted to engage him/her in sexual activity, fourteen respondents said that they were stopped before the child could react (12), or that they couldn't remember (2). Of the remaining 68 respondents, 12 (18%) said the child showed no reaction, 41 (60%) said the child reacted negatively (said no, appeared to be scared etc), and 15 (24%) said the child reacted positively (engaged willingly, appeared to enjoy it). There were no significant differences for intra-/extrafamilial offending ($\chi^2=0.40$, $df=2$).

Forty-eight participants (59%) reported that there was someone nearby at the time of the attempted offence (e.g., asleep in another room), while 28 (34%) said there wasn't and 6 (7%) said they stopped prior to this point. Where there was someone nearby, in 58% of cases it was another child, 31% the participant's partner, 17% the child's parent/guardian, 13% another relative of the child, and 6% another adult (multiple responses permitted). There was no significant difference for intra-/extrafamilial offending ($\chi^2=1.817$, $df=1$).

Table 2 shows the reasons given by participants for discontinuing sexual activity with the child (multiple responses permitted). As the table shows, the single most common reason for stopping is being asked to do so by the child (30%). Overall, the negative reaction of the child was nominated by more than half (55%) of respondents as the reason for stopping. It is noted that the number of respondents who reported negative reactions of children in the previous analysis closely parallels the number here who claim the child's behaviour as the reason for stopping. To the extent to which these self-reports are accurate they suggest that, for this sample at least, if the child was perceived to react negatively then the participant would generally not proceed.

Because of the overlap among categories, a dichotomous dummy variable was created based on whether or not respondents nominated child's behaviour as a reason for not continuing. A significant difference was found for victim age ($F=7.74$, $df=1$, $p=.007$), with the children in the 'child's behaviour' group on average nearly two years older than the children in the 'other' group (12.3 years versus 10.4 years). Thus it seems that older children are more likely to react negatively, or to be more persuasive when they do, compared to younger children who it seems are more reliant on external intervention. There were no significant differences for intra-/extrafamilial

offending ($\chi^2=2.17$, $df=1$), the gender of the child ($\chi^2=0.16$, $df=1$), the location of the offence ($\chi^2=0.14$, $df=1$), time of day ($\chi^2=0.18$, $df=3$), whether the participant had previously thought about the consequences ($\chi^2=1.43$, $df=1$), or whether there was someone nearby ($\chi^2=3.54$, $df=1$).

Table 2 about here

Comparison Between Non-completed and Completed Offences

Of the 82 participants who reported an incident of a discontinued offence, 56 also reported their most recent completed sexual contact with a child. Where applicable, responses given with respect to the incomplete offence were compared with those for completed offence. There were no significant differences (using McNemar's test) between the two incidents for the gender of victim, offender-victim relationship, the location of the offence, the time of the offence, whether the participant had considered the consequences, or whether there was anyone nearby. Significant differences were found for the age of the victim and the perceived reaction of the victim. In the case of victim's age, a paired sample t-test produced $t=2.78$, $df=52$, $p=.008$. Inspection of the means revealed that the average age of victims for the incomplete offence was significantly higher than for the completed offence (11.6 years versus 10.7 years). For the perceived reaction of the child, the McNemar test coefficient was 19.79, $p<.001$, indicating that for the completed offence in comparison to the incomplete offence, respondents were significantly more likely to perceive a positive reaction from the victim (53% v 19%) and correspondingly less likely to perceive a negative reaction (19% v 66%).

For the completed offence, participants were asked why they proceeded with the offence. As Table 3 shows, the most commonly given reason was the belief that the child would enjoy it (55%). Around a third of respondents framed the sexual contact

in terms of emotional gratification (wanted to feel close) and showing the child affection. Less than a quarter worried that they might get caught. A minority of respondents described their behaviour in purely instrumental terms (did not care what the child wanted, was stronger).

Table 3 about here

What Might Have Stopped the Completed Offence?

All participants who recorded a completed offence (n=198) were asked what might have stopped or discouraged them from having sexual contact with that person. Responses from participants who had both a non-completed and a completed offence (n=56) were compared with responses from those who had only a completed offence (n=142) (Table 4). As can be seen, both groups indicate that a negative reaction from the child as the strongest deterrent, and in the case of those who had the experience of a non-completed offence, all respondents nominated at least one example of a negative child reaction. Factors that increased the chance of being detected – someone being nearby and the possibility of being observed were also strongly endorsed. Attempts by the child to establish an emotional bond with the participant were generally seen to have little preventive effect.

It appears that participants who did not have an experience of a non-completed offence were generally less likely to say that they would have been deterred by the various situational contingencies. In order to test this statistically, as with the data in Table 2 overlap between categories meant that it was necessary to create a dummy variable negative child reaction/no negative reaction. The result of the chi-square was $\chi^2=5.03$, $df=1$, $p=.025$, indicating that participants who had had experienced an incomplete offence were significantly more likely to suggest a child's negative reaction as a preventative strategy. This suggests that the participants who had

experienced a non-completed offence may be somewhat more susceptible to situational deterrents than the other participants. It must be acknowledged, however, that the association is weak in practical terms, with 92% of the completed-only group also suggesting at least one negative child reaction.

Table 4 about here

Discussion

Just over one third of our sample of convicted child sex offenders identified an attempted offence that was discontinued for some reason. The most common reason for stopping the offence, given by more than half of the participants, was the negative reaction of the child. In particular, the direct request by the child to stop was cited by nearly a third of participants, nearly three times more often than the next cited reaction (said they didn't like it). Actual or potential actions by third parties were the next most cited reasons: in around a quarter of cases the participant was interrupted by another person; in nearly a fifth of cases there was someone nearby; while in a tenth of cases the participant feared someone might arrive or call unannounced. Just four participants cited aspects of the setting that might lead to being observed as the reason for discontinuing.

There were two significant differences between non-completed and completed offences. First, the child was more likely to be younger, and second, the child was more likely to be perceived as a willing participant, in the completed offence. The relationship between victim age and perceived willingness is unclear. It may be that younger victims are more easily persuaded to cooperate or less confident in offering resistance than are older children. In any event, most noticeable about participants' perceptions of the completed offence was the tendency to frame the incident as something the child would enjoy, and that the CSA was about emotional closeness

and affection. When asked what might have prevented the completed offence, a negative reaction from the child was most commonly cited, presumably because this would shatter the illusion of a consensual relationship. Increased surveillance and the presence of others nearby were also seen as strong deterrents. The child expressing affection towards the participant was generally not considered a deterrent, and given that the majority of participants were seeking an emotional relationship with the child, may in fact be likely to encourage offending.

What emerges from these findings is that – from the perspective of participants at least – the child’s behaviour is an important situational determinant on how a CSA event plays out. Offering resistance or showing distress can disrupt the potential perpetrator’s intended course of action. However, pursuing the implications of this finding needs to be done with care. In the first place, any suggestion that the child bears some responsibility for not properly resisting the offender’s advances needs to be immediately dismissed. But even avoiding any imputation of victim blaming, the idea that children can or should be taught to offer resistance is controversial. Personal safety programmes are premised on the assumption that children can be taught to recognise sexual advances as unwelcome and to develop the resources to rebuff them. However, as Smallbone et al (2008) argue, children are ill equipped to negotiate their personal safety with adults. They are physically smaller, are cognitively and socially immature, and are naturally submissive to adults, especially when the adult is in a position of authority with respect to the child. Beyond these practical matters, on philosophical grounds Smallbone et al argue that the burden of preventing CSA *should not* fall onto the shoulders of children – that this must always remain the responsibility of adults.

Just the same, we need to take on board the empirical finding that an assertive refusal by the child to cooperate with the offender in some cases can be an effective way to terminate the offence in some cases. One response to this dilemma has been to draw a distinction between resistance – the focus of personal safety programmes – and resilience (Barron, Miller, & Kelly, 2015; Smallbone et al, 2008). Children are often perceived as suitable targets for CSA because they seem to lack confidence and to have low self-esteem (Barron & Topping, 2010; Conte et al, 1989; Elliott, et al, 1995). An alternative to resistance training is resilience training, involving interventions designed to develop protective factors that make children less vulnerable to the attentions of potential perpetrators. These interventions might include self-esteem programmes directly aimed at at-risk children (e.g., Barron et al, 2015; Daro & Salmon-Cox, 1994) or the provision of services and resources to at-risk families (e.g., Lerner, Stevenson & Behrman, 1998).

The findings also highlight the potential preventative role to be played by bystanders and caregivers, with around two-thirds of participants indicating that the presence of others nearby would deter them from offending. At the same time, it was notable that just over half of the non-completed offences were initiated while others were indeed nearby, with no difference in this regard between the completed and non-completed offence. While those nearby were most often children – and for the reasons described above there are limits on what interventions might be expected of them – this number also included partners, parents and other adults. The mere presence of others nearby, it seems, is not always enough to deter offenders; rather it is the capacity and willingness to intervene that seems to be crucial. At present there are few examples of programmes and campaigns aimed at increasing bystander intervention for CSA. However, there are numerous examples of this strategy used in the case of

adult sexual assault, and these provide a possible model. Parents and caregivers have a special duty to provide proper guardianship over the children in their care and to appropriately screen who has access to them. It is noted that while there are numerous CSA prevention programmes designed for parents, these typically are restricted to providing factual information about CSA. As Mendelson and Letourneau (2015) have argued, these programmes could be usefully expanded to include explicit advice on the role caregivers have to play in keeping children safe.

In terms of the physical setting, few respondents cited concerns that they might be observed as a reason for discontinuing their offence. This is not surprising since in the overwhelming majority of cases (85%) the incident took place in a private location where the perpetrator is likely to have considerable control over being observed. Where others were nearby, as outlined above, one can assume that the perpetrator was able to find a relatively secluded location within the residence in question. At the same time, when it came to what might have prevented the completed offence, around 80% of participants cited factors associated with increasing surveillance of their activities. The findings underscore the fact that CSA offenders undertake the same cost benefit analyses to calculate the risk of offending as other for other areas of offending. As such CSA can be subjected to the same situational crime prevention strategies that have been shown to be effective for a wide range of other crimes.

The current research adds to the small number of empirical studies that have sought the perspective of perpetrators of CSA on its prevention. This is both its strength and the source of its main limitation. The reliance on self-report inevitably raises concerns about the validity of the data. We sought to improve on the validity of previous self-report studies by anchoring responses to specific events. Nevertheless,

as is the case with all self-report studies, the validity of the findings is dependent upon the accuracy of the responses. There are two main threats to validity. First, it may be that participants do not clearly remember the circumstances of the events in question, events that may have occurred years previously. They may be answering to the best of their ability, but simply not be capable of providing accurate responses. Second, responses may be subject to motivational distortion. Participants may have provided answers that cast themselves in a favourable light, either to project a good impression to others or to assuage their own feelings of guilt. We have no way of knowing the extent to which the findings have been affected by recall or motivational issues, but it is safe to assume some level of distortion. For example, all 56 participants who had a previous non-completed offence nominated at least one example of a negative reaction by the child that they said would also have stopped their completed offence (Table 4). But in fact, 19% also said that the child *did* react in a negative way for the completed offence. While it is technically possible to reconcile these two responses – endorsement of individual items in the ‘negative reaction’ category ranged from 66-80% and it is possible that the child did not display the particular *kind* of negative reaction that would have deterred the offender – the findings do suggest some respondents have exaggerated their readiness to desist. By providing anonymity to respondents we took what precautions we could to minimise social desirability effects. But we acknowledge that participants may have nevertheless have harboured suspicions that their response were not confidential and thus our findings need to be interpreted with some caution in this regard.

Notwithstanding the limitation of self-report data, the current study further demonstrates the potential value of learning about crime and its prevention through the perspectives of those who have offended. We should be clear in distinguishing

between asking participants about their behaviours, thoughts and feelings on the one hand, and asking them about their opinion on how much they benefited from a particular intervention on the other (Wilson, 2011). The **later** strategy asks participants a question they are incapable of answering - how can they know if the intervention was successful if they cannot compare it with not experiencing the intervention? – and moreover, entails demand characteristics that are liable to prompt an acquiescent response. The former strategy, however, gives us access to information about how the offence was planned and carried out, and the accompanying thought processes, that is otherwise not available. Interestingly, there is relatively little parallel research examining the perspectives of CSA victims on the victimisation process (Berliner & Conte, 1990; Widom & Morris, 1997). We suggest that a fruitful avenue for future research is to compare, contrast and synthesise the perspectives from perpetrators and victims. Such a strategy may help clarify the presence of distortions, misperceptions and inaccuracies in perpetrator accounts. For example, from the victims' perspective, is resistance as effective in stopping abuse as participants in the current study suggest?

In summary, the current study has taken an offence-focused approach to understanding CSA and its prevention. Our results indicate that the performance of CSA is dependent upon the situational dynamics, and that altering those dynamics has the potential to deter those considering perpetrating CSA from carrying out a contemplated offence. We identified three types of situational influence – the reaction of the child, the nature of the physical setting, and the presence and actions of third parties – that can guide the design and implementation of offence-focussed prevention of CSA.

Footnotes

¹ It is now widely accepted that the original portrayal of this case in the media exaggerated the number of witnesses and ignored the fact that some did indeed intervene (Manning, Levine & Collins, 2007). Nevertheless, the case is responsible for stimulating interest in the topic of bystander intervention and remains an often-used parable.

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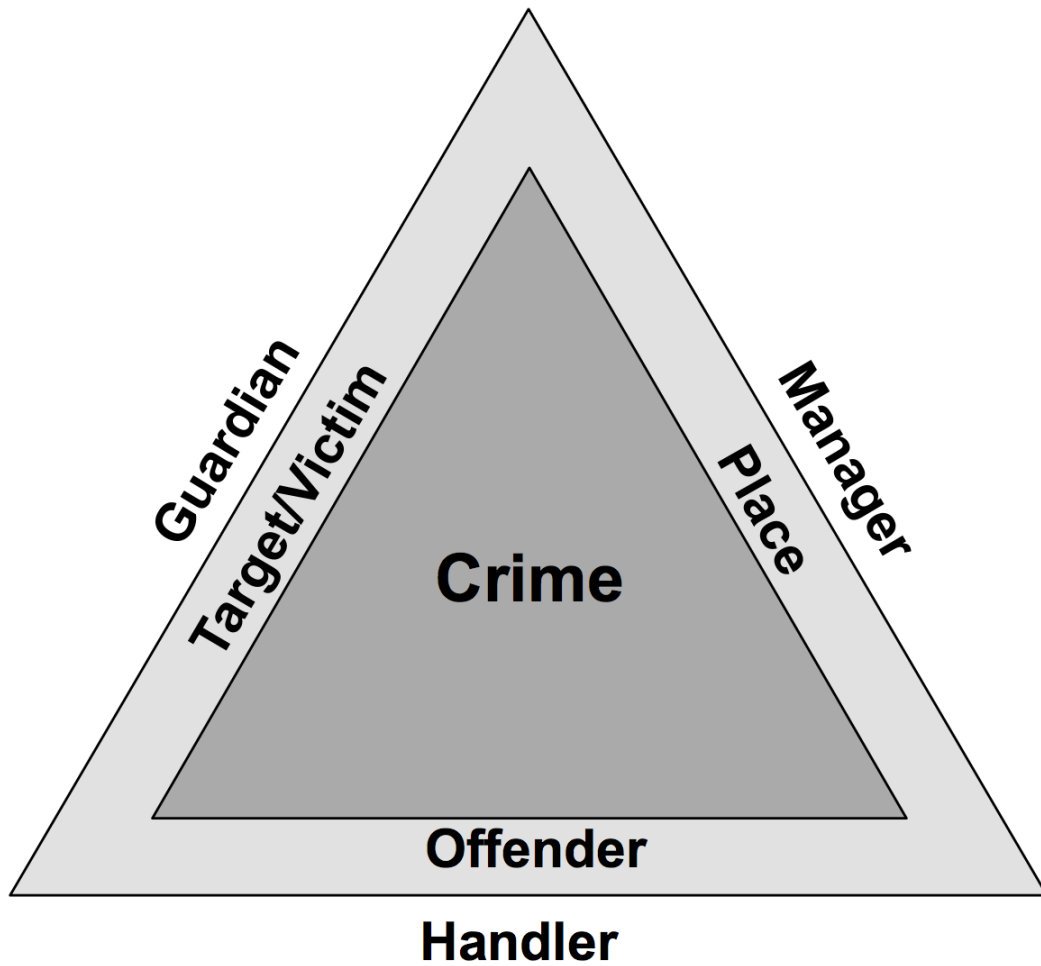


Figure 1. The crime triangle (based on Clarke & Eck 2003)

Table 1. Thinking about the consequences of offending.

Consequences	N	%
Didn't think about consequences	48	59
Thought about consequences	34	42
<i>Going to prison</i>	29	36
<i>Loss of family</i>	20	24
<i>Loss of friends</i>	19	23
<i>Loss of reputation</i>	17	21
<i>Loss of partner</i>	17	21
<i>Loss of job</i>	14	17
<i>Loss of the child</i>	12	15
<i>General social/legal</i>	7	9
<i>Effect on child</i>	1	1
Respondents	82	

Table 2. What stopped offenders

Reason for Stopping	Total	
	N	%
Child's reaction	45	55
<i>Asked you to stop</i>	25	30
<i>Said they didn't like it</i>	10	12
<i>Cried/distressed</i>	8	10
<i>Threatened to tell</i>	6	7
<i>Physically fought back/resisted</i>	5	6
<i>Tried to run away</i>	5	6
<i>Yelled for help</i>	2	2
<i>Showed no interest</i>	2	2
<i>Non-compliant</i>	1	1
Interrupted	19	23
<i>Disturbed by parent</i>	9	11
<i>Disturbed by other person</i>	7	9
<i>Ran out of time</i>	3	4
People nearby	15	18
<i>Mother nearby</i>	8	10
<i>Another adult nearby</i>	6	7
<i>Another child nearby</i>	3	4
<i>Father nearby</i>	2	2
Might be disturbed	10	12
<i>Parents might arrive</i>	6	7
<i>Another adult might arrive</i>	4	5
<i>Parents might phone</i>	1	1
<i>Another child might arrive</i>	1	1
Stopped of own accord	8	10
<i>Felt sorry for child/guilt</i>	5	6
<i>Thought about consequences</i>	5	6
Might be observed	4	5
<i>Exposed location</i>	4	5
<i>Camera present</i>	2	2
Child safety house rules in place	1	1
Respondents	82	

Table 3. Reason for proceeding with offence

Reason for Proceeding	N	%
Thought child would enjoy it	31	55
Wanted to feel close	17	30
Showing the child affection	15	27
Didn't think get caught	13	23
Needed sexual gratification	11	20
Sexually aroused and lost control	11	20
Needed to feel in control	4	7
Under influence of drugs/alcohol	4	7
Didn't care what the child wanted	2	4
Not thinking straight	2	4
Child initiated/agreed	2	4
Was physically stronger	2	4
We were in a relationship	1	2
Respondents	56	

Table 4. Suggested factors that might have stopped offenders completing their offence, comparing offenders who had both a non-completed and completed offence with those with just a completed offence

Reason for Stopping	Both		Complete only	
	N	%	N	%
Child's negative reaction	56	100	130	92
<i>Threatened to report</i>	45	80	91	64
<i>Said 'no'</i>	44	79	114	80
<i>Yelled for help</i>	42	75	99	70
<i>Asked you to stop</i>	40	71	112	79
<i>Tried to run away</i>	40	71	100	70
<i>Said they didn't like it</i>	40	71	101	71
<i>Cried</i>	40	71	95	67
<i>Physically fought back</i>	38	68	95	67
<i>Acted scared</i>	37	66	89	63
Surveillance	46	82	88	62
<i>Security camera</i>	43	77	79	56
<i>No concealed places</i>	36	64	62	44
<i>Location accessible to others</i>	17	30	50	35
<i>Motion sensitive lights</i>	17	30	30	21
<i>Emergency contact device</i>	14	25	42	30
Someone present	35	76	101	71
<i>Your partner</i>	40	71	85	60
<i>Adult acquaintance/just met</i>	37	66	86	61
<i>Adult friend</i>	37	66	83	58
<i>Adult stranger</i>	37	66	77	54
<i>Security officer</i>	35	63	77	54
<i>Another child</i>	35	63	75	53
<i>Colleague</i>	33	59	79	56
<i>Child's parent/guardian</i>	32	57	80	56
Child encouraging bonding	11	20	45	32
<i>Child says they trust you</i>	8	14	27	19
<i>Child says they love you</i>	6	11	17	12
<i>Child says they want to be best friend</i>	5	9	9	6
<i>Child says they want to be like you</i>	4	7	23	16
Respondents	56		142	