FEMALE CHILD SEXUAL OFFENDERS: EXPLORING THEIR MOTIVATIONS AND ATTITUDES, AS WELL AS PERCEPTIONS HELD BY PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS THIS POPULATION

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to build upon the limited research in the area of female child sexual offending. Following an introduction to the thesis, a systematic literature review is presented in Chapter 1. It provides an overview of goal-based motivations and offence-supportive cognitions reported in women who sexually offend against children, highlighting similarities between motivations in male and female offenders, and identifying those that are specific to females. Implications for practice and future directions are discussed. To enable further exploration of attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, an empirical study was conducted, which is presented in Chapter 2. Unlike most studies in the area of attitudes towards those who sexually offend, this study utilises a qualitative design and compares attitudes and perceptions between students and professionals who work with females in a therapeutic capacity. Using Thematic Analysis, four themes were identified: (i) the 'facilitating role of women in society', (ii) 'why women offend', (iii) 'what should happen to women who offend', and (iv) 'factors impacting on attitudes and perceptions'. Chapter 3 presents a critique of the most commonly used scale to measure attitudes and perceptions towards those who sexually offend – The Attitude Towards Sex Offender Scale (ATS) (Hogue, 1993). An overview of the ATS's development and psychometric properties along with its strengths and limitations is presented. The thesis concludes with an overall discussion.

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Statement of Authorship

Chapters 1 and 3 contain material that has been published or prepared for publication to academic journals. Consequently, each chapter has an introduction and discussion. Repetition of material has been avoided where possible; however, there may be some overlap between chapters. The authorship on each chapter (published or unpublished) indicates collaborative working. To clarify, I obtained and analysed the data in Chapter 3 and I am the primary author. My supervisor Juliane Kloess is named as an author in Chapter 1, and will be named on the publication of the work presented in Chapter 3, due to her role in providing comments and feedback on their earlier drafts.

Introduction

Having a more in-depth understanding of female child sexual offending will allow clinicians and other professionals to conduct their work in an evidence based way (Fortney et al., 2007). Much research in the area of child sexual offending has focused on males, with limited exploration of females (Ten Bensel et al., 2019). This lack of an established evidence base has implications for practitioners who work with females in a therapeutic capacity. It has been argued that society tends to minimise, deny and reframe sexual offending by females as a result of social norms constructed to evoke a perception of females as being nurturing and caring. Thus, sexual offending by females is viewed as being inconsistent with the social construction of a female (Denov, 2001). Furthermore, it has been suggested that due to such responses to female sexual offending, literature exploring this phenomenon has been hindered (Ten Bensel et al., 2010). However, more recently, there has been a shift to begin to explore sexual offending by females (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010).

Gannon and Cortoni (2010) argue that the recent rise in empirical studies has led lay people and professionals (who work with females who have committed sexual offences) to question the extent to which females are similar to their male counterparts, and whether there are similarities and/or differences between females who commit sexual offences and those who commit non-sexual offences. The authors acknowledge that answering these questions will likely take time and further research. Consequently, they note that professionals working with females who sexually offend must allow for the evidence base to grow in order to facilitate the implementation of more evidence-based approaches and strategies to treatment and intervention.

Research has noted that sexual offences that are committed by females are rare in comparison to those committed by males (Gannon & Rose, 2009). Estimates suggest that

female sexual offending accounts for 5% of all sexual violence (Cortoni et al., 2010). However, the lower incidence rate of sexual violence committed by females has been argued to be a result of underreporting. This is especially prominent in incidence rates of sexual offending against children by females. Saradjian (2010) posits that the underreporting of offences is impacted by societal perceptions and the stigmatisation of female offenders – society views the sexual abuse of children by females as inconceivable, and the idea thereof is therefore dismissed (Saradjian, 2010). As such, there is a need to better understand the underlying attitudes towards and perceptions of this type of offending behaviour when engaged in by females specifically. This is not only important as the social construction of women in society impacts upon the detection and reporting of offending behaviour, but the general disbelief, victim blaming and minimisation of offending by females evokes guilt and shame that also inhibits reporting (Saradjian, 2010).

Attitudes and Perceptions

Firstly, it is important to differentiate between attitudes and perceptions before exploring these in more depth. An attitude is noted to comprise three distinct components: cognition, affect and behaviour (Breckler, 1984). Harper et al. (2017) further expand upon this, explaining how they all relate and can guide behaviour. Cognition is reported to relate to beliefs, which could arise from stereotypes held towards an entity, in this case females who sexually offend against children. Affect refers to the emotional response towards the entity, and behaviour refers to the way in which the individual acts in the physical world with consideration of the entity. Perceptions are said to be like stereotypes and are more focused on attributions formed by knowledge. They reportedly do not reflect evaluations. Consequently, attitudes are argued to allow for deeper exploration of the affective responses underpinning perceptions, and their impact on behavioural responses (Harper et al., 2017).

Generally, it is found that attitudes towards and perceptions of those who commit sexual offences are more negative than those who commit non-sexual offences (Craig, 2005). Furthermore, those who commit sexual offences against children are regarded as more morally reprehensible than those who commit sexual offences against adults (Weekes et al., 1995). Kernsmith et al. (2009) explored the perceived severity of a range of sexual offences (i.e. statutory rape, marital rape, date rape), including those against pre-pubescent children and incest, in a sample comprising members from the general public, and found that all offences evoked fear in participants. However, those who had committed sexual offences characterised by incest, and those against pre-pubescent children, elicited higher levels of fear, suggesting that emotional responses to sexual offences against children are different to those against adults.

Ferguson and Ireland (2006) report gender differences to a similar effect when they explored the influence of sexual offence type with students and a range of forensic professionals (i.e. psychologists, prison officers, probation officers, administrative staff, counsellors and prison governors). Males reported finding sexual offences against children to be more severe than stranger rape. However, this could not be found in female respondents who perceived severity across sexual offences (i.e. stranger rape, acquaintance rape, incest child sexual abuse, and child sexual abuse) to be comparable. Nonetheless, it is typically found that sexual offences against children elicit greater fear responses and are thought of as substantially more severe.

As noted by Harper et al. (2017), affective evaluations can moderate behavioural responses, which is evidenced by studies that have identified a link between fear of a sexual offender living nearby and support for community notification programmes (Levenson et al., 2007). This suggests that affective evaluations, which are heightened in response to child

sexual offences, consequently mitigate attitudes towards reintegration. Furthermore, inaccurate beliefs held by the general public are thought to influence attitudes. In Levenson et al.'s (2007) community survey on perceptions of individuals who sexually offend, it was reported that the general public perceived recidivism rates to be high (75%). However, the authors report that the best evidence of recidivism rates for those who have previously been convicted of a sexual offence ranges between 5% and 14% (over a 3-6 year follow-up). Additionally, individuals who sexually offend were regarded to be a homogeneous group in respect of risk. Consequently, the authors concluded that the general public's beliefs are not consistent with the evidence base. Such inaccurate perceptions are problematic as they heighten the perceived threat, which Levenson et al. (2007) linked to more hostile attitudes and behavioural responses by the general public.

One explanation for these effects may be stigmatised media representations of individuals who sexually offend, which are argued to be more biased compared to those who commit non-sexual offences (Radley, 2001). As society gains much of its information from the media, it shapes the perceptions held by the general public in respect of those who commit sexual offences (Willis et al., 2010). Effects of this were noted when King and Roberts (2017) asked a general public sample to think about an individual who sexually offends. It was reported that participants described that of the media reinforced images of a predatory male paedophile. This raises the question as to how females who sexually offend are perceived, if there is a typical belief that those who offend are male.

Motivations

Whilst there is more information in relation to the motivations of males who sexually offend against children, there are some studies that have explored motivations of females in the same context. In line with Gannon and Cortoni's (2010) questioning, it is important to

consider how similar motivations are between males and females who sexually offend against children. This is even more important given that understanding the psychology of sexual violence is salient in reducing victimisation and improving treatment efficacy (Pullman et al., 2016). Pullman et al. (2016) describe motivational factors in offending as those that evoke a desire or provide intent to offend. Furthermore, they argue that treatment aims to reduce motivations and teach strategies and skills to moderate individual facilitators for offending (i.e. factors that increase the likelihood of offending). However, it is of note that much research into the motivations of those who sexually offend focuses on males and, as such, less is known in relation to females' motivations, their offence cycles, and treatment needs (Gannon et al., 2012; Nathan & Ward, 2001). More specifically, there are motivations that are distinct to females, such as offending in partnership with a male, in the context of a co-offending dynamic, where females typically report being coerced by a male partner. This is of concern in terms of treatment efficacy – current treatment programmes need to take into account individual differences between males and females, and be tailored to the treatment needs of individuals and the population of female offenders (Nathan & Ward, 2001). Consequently, to promote evidence-based practice for treatment and intervention programmes, one must have a better understanding of female-specific factors that play a contributing role in the aetiology and rehabilitation of female offenders (Levenson et al., 2015).

There is therefore a need to continue to contribute to the current knowledge base in relation to sexual offending by females in order to further build the existing evidence base. This will not only promote evidence-based practice, but also enable a greater understanding of this phenomenon among academics and practitioners. Whilst this area has been attracting more research over recent years, those who engage in sexual offending are not a homogenous

group (Levenson et al., 2007). This likely extends to females, and as such the exploration of specific offences (i.e. sexual offences against children) will begin to identify nuances amongst this population.

Thesis Aims

The present thesis therefore aims to build on our current knowledge and understanding of female sexual offending against children through the exploration of motivations that are specific to this population, as well as the attitudes towards and perceptions of females who engage in such offending behaviour in a sample of students (representing the general public) and professionals who work with this population in a therapeutic capacity. Specifically, the thesis aims to:

1. Explore the motivations of females who have sexual offended against children;
2. Compare attitudes towards and perceptions of females who have sexually offended against children between students and professionals; and
3. Critique the most widely utilised psychometric to assess attitudes towards those who sexually offend, namely the Attitude Towards Sex Offenders Scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993).

Structure of Thesis

In order to achieve these aims, the thesis begins by providing an overview of current knowledge and understanding of the underlying motivations in females who have sexually offended against children. This is presented in Chapter 1 in the form of a systematic literature review. The review is concerned with identifying similarities and differences in the goal-based motivations and offence-supportive cognitions that facilitate offending in females. Chapter 2 explores attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children. Specifically, the aim of the empirical study was to compare attitudes and perceptions

between students and professionals. Additionally, factors that are believed to influence attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children were explored. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the development and psychometric properties of the most commonly used scale to measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend – The Attitude Towards Sex Offenders Scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993). To conclude, the general discussion summarises the key findings, discusses limitations, suggests directions for future research and compiles the overall conclusion.

Chapter 1:

Systematic Literature Review

The Motivations of Female Child Sexual Offenders: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Chapter 1 was published in *Aggression & Violent Behavior* in 2020. This journal requires manuscripts to be submitted with U.S. word spelling. The manuscript is authored by Kelly Brown and Juliane Kloess.

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The motivations of female child sexual offenders: A systematic review of the literature

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the literature review presented here was to identify goals and offense-supportive cognitions that act as motivational factors in the sexual offending against children committed by females. A scoping search revealed that there was currently no review in this area. A systematic search of empirical research that examined motivations in female child sexual offenders (FCSOs) was initiated based upon an inclusion and exclusion criteria. Identified studies were screened and reference lists were hand searched. A quality assessment tool reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the final 13 articles. A data extraction form established for the current review enabled the extraction of standardized information. The review identified support for many motivational factors in FCSOs, which have previously been referred to in the literature. The review has categorized these into motivations and offense-supportive cognitions. There was strong support for the following motivations and goals: offending under coercion of an abusive co-offender, offending to meet one's own needs and offending to feel power and control over another. The strongest offense-supportive cognitions were entitlement and uncontrollability. There was an apparent overlap between the two categories, with some offense-supportive cognitions and functions amalgamating to facilitate females to engage in offending behavior. Limitations of the present literature and suggestions for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse encompasses diverse sexual acts committed by adults towards children. This includes contact offenses, such as rape and sexual touching, and non-contact offenses, such as viewing child sexual abuse material. It is of note that the definitions and classifications of the various offenses vary across countries.

In the United Kingdom, the Sexual Offenses Act (2003) defines sexual activity with a child as being perpetrated by "a person aged 18 or over" who "intentionally touches a person under 16 years", whereby the "touching is sexual" or "involves penetration". There are also specific sections relating to victims under the age of 13 years old and As such, Female Child Sexual Offending (FCSO) would be defined as any sexual offense against a child under 16 years old, which is perpetrated by a female over the age of 18 years old. Conversely, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define a child as a person under 8 years, and 'sexual abuse' as "any completed or attempted (non-completed) sexual act, sexual contact with, or exploitation (i.e., non-contact sexual interaction) of a child by a caregiver[1] (Leeb, Paulozzi, Melanson, Simon, & Arias, 2008).

Whilst the phenomenon of sexual offending by females is becoming more widely recognized empirically, it is critically under-researched in

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[1] *Sexual acts* include contact via penetration, however slight, between the mouth, penis, vulva, or anus of the child and another individual, and penetration, however slight, of the anal or genital opening by a hand, finger, or other object; *abusive sexual contact* includes intentional touching (not involving penetration), either directly or through the clothing, of the following: genitalia (penis or vulva), anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks; *non-contact sexual abuse* does not include physical contact of a sexual nature between the caregiver and the child, but can include the following: (i) acts which expose a child to sexual activity, (ii) filming of a child in a sexual manner, (iii) sexual harassment of a child, and (iv) prostitution of a child.

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comparison to sexual offending by males (Gannon & Rose, 2008). It has been suggested that research into female child sexual offending has been neglected due to the social construction of women as caregivers and nurturers (Denov, 2004; Saradjian, 2010). More specifically, women are perceived to be unable to commit such crimes against children.

Over recent years, interest and exploration in this area has been growing. It is estimated that females comprise 5% of all sexual offenders in Canada, the UK, New Zealand and Australia (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005). Whilst the population of females convicted of sexual offenses against children is considerably smaller than that of males (Nathan & Ward, 2001; Williams & Bierie, 2015), there is an important need to understand their motivations and the function their offending behavior serves. Especially in light of their apparent differences, and the fact that interventions and treatment programs are predominantly based on empirical research, conducted with males who committed sexual offenses against children (Gannon & Rose, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2001).

This review therefore aims to provide an overview of current knowledge and understanding of the motivations of adult females who have committed sexual offenses against children. For the purpose of the review, motivations encompasses: (i) the goal of perpetration of these offenses, such as the function of offending behavior being to elicit, or avoid a feeling or emotion as means of gaining a desired attribute, and (ii) offense-supportive cognitions, such as implicit theories and cognitive distortions. These are included as motivations in the present review as they are regarded to be types of motivational schemas in child sexual offending, given that they produce distorted evaluations of behavior (Baumeister, 1998; Ward, 2000; Ward & Keenan, 1999). Seto's (2017) Motivation-Facilitation Model also notes that offense-supportive cognitions act as a facilitator in child sexual offending.

Cognitive distortions, which are believed to justify the offending, arise from Implicit Theories (Ward, 2000). Implicit theories proposed by Ward and Keenan (1999) were derived from male samples, and have been influential in the area of explaining motivations in child sexual offending by males. They include: (i) viewing children as sexual objects, (ii) entitlement, (iii) dangerous world, (iv) uncontrollability, and (v) nature of harm, and draw upon cognitive appraisals and rationalizations to explain the initiation and maintenance of offending, including how one interprets the behavior of the child, one's own views of the self, others and the world.

A further theory that attempts to explain motivations in FCSOs is Gannon, Rose and Ward's (2008) Descriptive Offense Process Model of Female Sexual Offenders. Two stages, namely 'goal establishment' and 'motivations and goal relevant distal planning', within the model identifies key motivations that are found in females who commit sexual offenses. They are suggested to include the offender gaining sexual gratification and intimacy from engaging in different types of offending behavior, as well as for the purpose of revenge. However, this model does not exclusively examine FCSO.

Female typologies have been tentatively proposed based upon characteristics of the perpetrator and the offense, with the aim of identifying patterns and the relevant pathways to offending, as well as classifying 'types' within a heterogeneous population. However, there is no consensus within the literature in relation to the typologies. Due to the diversity within this population, it is recognized that women do not always fit into a distinct category. Mathews, Mathews, and Speltz (1989) developed a typology which drew upon motivational factors for the offense. Five categories were identified: (i) the teacher/lover, (ii) predisposed molester, (iii) male-coerced molester, (iv) experimenter, and (v) psychologically disturbed. Some of these refer to the way women cognitively appraise and rationalize situations and behaviors, such as the teacher/lover believing that the victim was willing to engage in sexual contact, and that this was an act of love or kindness. The 'male-coerced offender' was also noted to be fearful of men which acted as a pathway to offending under coercion.

More recently, Vandiver and Kercher (2004) developed a typology based on the characteristics of the offender and the offense, namely: (i) heterosexual nurturers, (ii) non-criminal homosexual offenders, (iii) female sexual predators, (iv) young adult child exploiters, (v) homosexual criminals, and (vi) aggressive homosexual criminals. However, they did not distinguish between those women who engaged in sexual offending against a child with a co-offender, which is an area that attracts research in terms of exploring co-offending among females, typically under the coercion of a male.

Research in the area of child sexual offending has primarily focused on male perpetrators. To date, researchers have primarily explored FCSOs in the context of making comparisons with male child sexual offenders. This has been beneficial in terms of identifying the similarities present in the motivational factors between males and females (Nathan & Ward, 2001). However, differences in motivations have also been demonstrated (Gannon, Hoare, Rose, & Parrett, 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015). This is problematic, as presently treatment for FCSOs relies upon male-derived theories. This would suggest that interventions and treatment programs designed to rehabilitate FCSOs are of limited validity and efficacy, because they crucially overlook potential female-specific motivations and experiences (Gannon et al., 2014). This has led to researchers exploring this area further to recognize the need for a gender-responsive approach, and therefore develop models specific to FCSO (e.g. Eldridge, Elliot, Gillespie, Bailey, & Beech, 2018) in order to effectively address the shortfalls present.

Given the increasing interest in FCSO, it is necessary to review the findings in this area. This will enable identification of the key motivations from the existing literature, and inform researchers and clinicians of current knowledge and understanding. This will have the potential to inform clinical practice with females who have sexually offended against children, thereby contributing to the existing evidence base, and furthering programs' efficacy in terms of reducing females' risk of reoffending. A review of this area will also identify gaps in the existing literature and evidence base.

1.1. Aims

The aims of this review were therefore (i) to explore the goals reported by FCSOs as motivations in the perpetration of their sexual offending, and (ii) to explore their offense-supportive cognitions that may act as facilitators in the current literature base.

2. Method

2.1. Scoping search

Prior to undertaking the systematic literature review, a scoping search was conducted to identify any potentially relevant literature in the area. Additionally, attempting to identify any existing reviews on the topic area. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and The Campbell Collaboration were used to conduct the scoping search in November 2017 and March 2018, with both searches yielding no results directly linked to motivations in female child sexual offending.

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria used for the current review.

SPIDER category	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sample	Female offenders Offender over 18 years of age at time of offense Solo and group/co-offender	Male offenders Juvenile/adolescent offenders
Phenomenon of Interest	Contact child sexual offenses Victim is under 18 years of age Male or female victim	Non-contact offenses – e.g. online, grooming. Victim older than 18 years old.
Design	Case study Interview Questionnaire/survey Mixed design	
Evaluation	Motivation Belief of motivation Experience Attribution Influences Offense-supportive cognition(s)	
Methodological approach	Qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods	

2.2. Search strategy

The present review is based on the results from three databases, namely Web of Science, ProQuest and PsychINFO. The search took place on 22/03/18 and included reviews and studies, dated from 1900 to present in ProQuest and from 1967 to present in PsychINFO. The computer-based systematic literature search of databases was conducted using the following search strings: (((female* or wom?n) near/1 (((baby or babies or child* or infan* or “school age*” or *pubescent*) near/2 (rape or “sex* abus*” or “Sex* assault*” or “sex* offen*” or molest*)) or p?edophil*))) (Web of Science); (((female* or wom?n) near/1 (((baby or babies or child* or infan* or “school age*” or prepubescent* or pubescent) near/2 (rape or “sex* abus*” or “Sex* assault*” or “sex* offen*” or molest*)) or p?edophil*))) (ProQuest); ((female* or wom?n) adj2 (((baby or babies or child* or infan* or “school age*” or prepubescent or pubescent*) adj2 (rape or “sex* abus*” or “Sex* assault*” or “sex* offen*” or molest*)) or p?edophil*)) (PsychINFO).

It was decided to not include motivations, or synonyms of this, in the search string, in order not to limit the search strategy by relevant articles not being identified. To further encompass the identification of articles using an open search strategy, subject headings were implemented when using the database PsychINFO. These comprised of: human females; pedophilia; child abuse; sex offenses.

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

For inclusion to the present systematic literature review, the search tool SPIDER was implemented and the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used (see Table 1). These were developed by reviewing the existing literature to gain a scope of the key papers in order to ensure that these would be included in the review. Thereby creating a clear topic of interest. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to all articles that were generated from the search, after duplicates were removed.

Due to anticipated limited articles in this area, it was decided that the inclusion criteria would be kept broad in relation to design and research methodology. The initial criteria intended to focus on prepubescent victims (i.e. under 13 years). However, due to limited literature focusing on this, the criteria was extended. As such, the inclusion criteria was amended to reflect the age in key articles, namely under the age of 18 years. This is a limitation due to an individual not being deemed an adult until they are 18 years of age, yet the legal age of sexual consent is 16 years in England and Wales. A further complication in establishing the age of a child is the variation in age of consent across countries all over the world.

2.4. Identification process

Web of Science, ProQuest (Criminology and Sociology collection) and PsychINFO identified 10,717 articles using the aforementioned search strategy. These were sorted for relevance and duplications were removed (n = 67). Following this, screening of titles and abstracts for relevance (n = 10,650) was carried out utilizing the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Those that were ambiguous and had the potential to meet the inclusion criteria were accepted at this stage. A total of 156 articles made it through the screening process, to which a full-text screen was applied. The full text of each article was obtained from the e-library at The University of Birmingham, Research Gate and directly contacting authors. However, six articles were not obtainable. All authors were contacted, however, only one responded providing the full text. This article was excluded upon review due to not meeting the inclusion criteria. In addition to this, the other five articles were subsequently excluded due to not being available in full-text. After reviewing the full texts of the remaining articles, three were discounted as they were not written in English, and five were excluded due to comprising of a male perpetrator sample. Finally, 136 were excluded due to either not being relevant in terms of not having investigated motivations in FCSOs, or the sample comprising of females who sexually offended against both adults and children, where the data could not be disentangled. An example of the latter is an article by Gannon, Rose, and Ward (2008).

A brief search of Google Scholar and Research Gate was completed utilizing key terms (i.e. female child sexual offenders, motivations of female child sexual offender, and cognitions of female child sexual offenders). However, no articles were identified as meeting the criteria. Furthermore, the reference lists of the final 12 articles were hand-searched, although no additional articles were identified. Finally, four experts in the area were contacted via email, requesting unpublished literature in an attempt to reduce publication bias. This also allowed for certainty that the search had not missed any key articles. One expert replied to this request and sent an electronic copy of a dissertation, which met the inclusion criteria Fig. 1.

The final analysis therefore comprised of 13 articles.

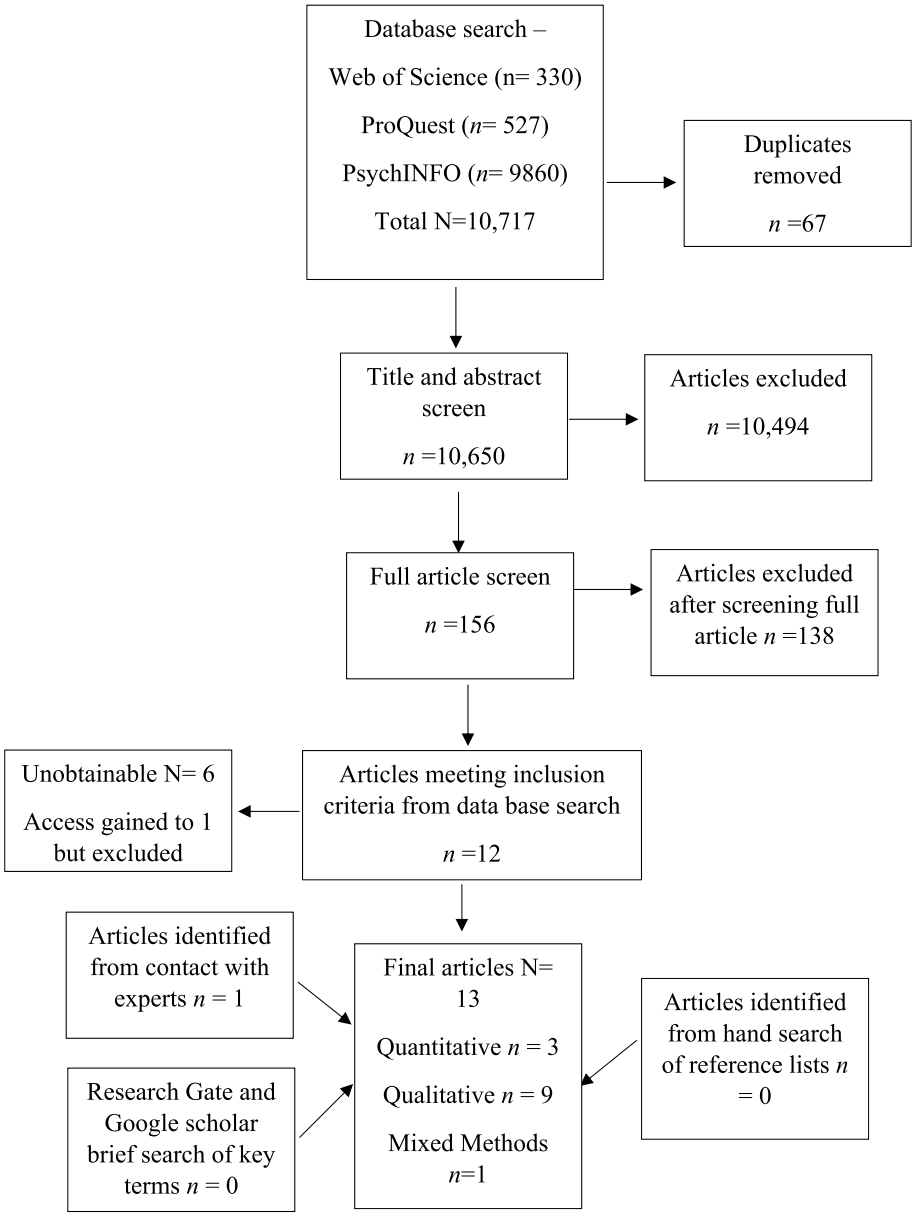

Fig. 1. Flow chart depicting the search results, and the exclusion of studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria at each stage of the screening process.

2.5. Quality assessment

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT (Pluye et al., 2011) (Appendix B) was used to complete a rigorous assessment of the methodological quality for each article. The MMAT was developed for this purpose, and in order to facilitate reviews of the empirical research literature employing varying methodologies. A summary of coding supplied by the authors guides users through the scoring process. To assess each article, it was first necessary to determine their methodology by reading the abstract and methods section of each article. From this, it was determined that the final set of articles comprised of nine qualitative studies, three quantitative studies and one mixed-methods design.

As the MMAT allows for the quality assessment of all methodologies, the relevant section and questions were answered through the review of each article. Initially, all studies were screened by two questions, assessing clarity of research questions and if the data collected is sufficient in answering the stated research questions. Following this, the nine qualitative and three quantitative studies were assessed by four questions covering methodological rigor. For the mixed-methods design, there were 11 questions which probed for information relevant to assessing potential biases when employing each methodological approach.

Assessment of qualitative methodology included determining if consideration was given to the context in which participants reported information and also in relation to the researcher influence. Quantitative methodologies were assessed independently, based on whether the design used randomization of participants, a non-randomized design, or if the quantitative method was descriptive. This allowed for each sub-section to be assessed by focusing on salient aspects of the design. The three quantitative designs both reported non-randomized designs, and were therefore assessed in respect of recruitment, the comparability between groups and appropriate measurements for interventions/groups and outcomes. Finally, the mixed-methods design was assessed based on the suitability of utilizing qualitative and quantitative designs, as well as the limitations of utilizing this design, whilst also assessing the article in respect of qualitative questions and the appropriate quantitative questions.

In accordance with the scoring guide of the MMAT, those studies that employed a single methodological approach were scored 25% for each criteria evidenced in the article. The higher the percentage, the

higher the quality score for the study's methodology. For the mixed-methods design article, the premise of the overall quality not exceeding the quality of the weakest component was applied. This meant that if the weakest component met only one condition, the overall quality would be 25%. Whilst quality scores will be discussed, all studies regardless of their quality assessment score were included in the present review due to the limited number of articles in this area.

In addition to the MMAT, which assessed the quality of the methodology, the data extraction form considered factors in relation to ethics, data collection, recruitment and limitations reported by the researcher (s). This was deemed appropriate as the MMAT overlooked factors that extended from methodology. Structured judgement was used when critically appraising articles for considerations in the aforementioned areas. Factors identified on the data extraction form, that extended from the MMAT, were not numerically scored in relation to meeting these factors. However, they were considered when reviewing the quality of the article and factors were referred to where appropriate.

2.6. Data extraction

A data extraction form (Appendix A) was used to extract data from the articles meeting the inclusion criteria. Extracted data related to: year of publication, research aims, context and participants, study design and methods, findings in respect of motivations and offense-supportive cognitions, and qualitative data in the form of participants' responses. The extracted data was limited to the focus of the review. Therefore, if articles also explored other areas, this information was not extracted. The data extraction form was used to extract salient data from each article, regardless of methodology. Therefore, pertinent information from all articles was captured in a standardized way. The data extraction form also recorded information in relation to limitations and conclusions of the research, and each article's quality score which was taken from the MMAT.

During data extraction, it was necessary to exclude specific participants' data who did not meet the inclusion criteria. This was required for a total of five participants who had been convicted of non-contact offenses in research by Crawford (2013) and Matthews, Mathews, and Speltz (1991). It was also necessary to exclude the data in relation to non-contact offending for one participant, whose offenses were both contact and non-contact, in a study by Collins and Duff (2016). This was pertinent to allow for validity and consistency of the inclusion criteria in the review.

3. Results

3.1. Methodology and characteristics of articles

13 articles met the review's inclusion criteria. These comprised of nine qualitative studies, three quantitative studies and one study that employed a mixed-method design. Although it was decided that each article would be included, regardless of the quality score, it is of note that all received a quality score of above 50%. Pluye et al. (2011) did not comment or advise on the overall quality of studies or cut-off scores for good-quality articles, in relation to methodological rigor when using the MMAT. However, at least two of the four criteria were met in all articles that were quality assessed. Table 2 presents a description of the salient characteristics form each study. This information was gained from both the quality assessment and data extraction form.

3.2. Population

Table 2 presents a summary of the characteristics of all articles. The majority of the studies were from the United Kingdom (n = 6; Beech et al., 2009; Collins & Duff, 2016; Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015) and the United States (n = 6; Crawford, 2013; Jennings, 2000; Patel, 2015; Matthews et al., 1991; Sardina, 2017; Strickland, 2008). One study was from Australia (Nathan & Ward, 2002), and another one included participants from Canada and the United States (Jennings, 2000).

Sample sizes were small across most studies and many utilized qualitative methodologies, where a smaller sample size is appropriate. However, power calculations were not reported in studies that were quantitative, with the exception of Strickland (2008). Sample sizes varied between studies, ranging from 1 to 130 participants, but typically did not exceed 45 participants with the exception of one study.

Participants in qualitative studies ranged from one (Collins & Duff, 2016) to 30 (Nathan & Ward, 2002), with quantitative studies ranging from 34 (Gannon et al., 2009) to 130 (Strickland, 2008). The mixed-methods study comprised of 40 participants (Gillespie et al., 2015). The overall sample size across articles was 427 participants (M = 32.85, SD = 32.83), of which 290 were convicted of sexual offenses against children under 18 years of age. The remaining 137 participants being controls.[2]

Participants' demographics were described sufficiently in many articles, enabling quantitative synthesis of some demographic information. Participants' ages were explicitly stated in some articles, with others opting to report the mean. The mean average age across all articles included in the present review, with the exception of four, was 35.16 years (SD = 5.86). This calculation did not include Matthews et al.'s (1991) sample, as they did not report information in relation to participants' age. Three other articles only reported a range of ages (Collins & Duff, 2016; Gannon et al., 2012; Patel, 2015), and as such a mean could not be calculated.

Ethnicity of the samples varied, and categories were not used consistently throughout. A further mitigating factor was that some authors did not report on ethnicity (Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 1991; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Strickland, 2008). In those articles that reported ethnicity, the sample comprised of the following ethnicities: White, Black, European, American, Hispanic, African American, White British, Italian, and Native American.

3.3. Recruitment and offense

Sources of recruitment were relatively consistent, with most recruiting samples from the Criminal Justice System. Many participants were recruited from prisons or correctional facilities, including probation (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Jennings, 2000; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Patel, 2015; Sardina, 2017; Strickland, 2008). One author used secondary data from prisons/correctional facilities (Crawford, 2013). Some participants were recruited from therapeutic treatment interventions (Matthews et al., 1991; Collins & Duff,

[2] We attempted to disentangle the descriptive information in relation to each participant's offense and report this in percentages accordingly. However, eight of the studies did not explicitly report this information (Crawford, 2013; Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015; Patel, 2015; Sardina, 2017; Strickland, 2008); five studies reported this information (Beech et al., 2009; Collins & Duff, 2016; Jennings, 2000; Matthews et al., 1991; Nathan & Ward, 2002), with some offering more detail than others. As such, it was not possible to provide a comprehensive overview of this information, which is also partly due to the varying legal definitions across countries, and participants engaging in more than one type of offending behavior. We attempted to extract this information, where possible, and recorded it within Tables 1-3 (see Appendix D), in order to illustrate the diversity of offending behavior. This included, but was not limited to, offenses involving penetration (e.g., rape, sodomy, digital penetration, penetration with an object), sexual assaults (e.g., masturbating the child, oral sex, touching, grabbing and fondling), inciting a child to engage in sexual activity (e.g., sexual performance, participating in strip poker, spin the bottle and other sexual games), aiding and abetting (e.g., facilitating the sexual abuse of the child by another, failing to protect the child from sexual abuse by another), child sexual abuse material (making, possessing and distributing), and purposefully engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child. In order to classify these in an unambiguous way, offenses were categorized according to the UK's Sexual Offences Act 2003.

2016), with two studies utilizing secondary records (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015).

Age of the victim was an issue of definition, dependent on country and laws. Most countries defined a child as being under the age of 16 years (Beech et al., 2009; Collins & Duff, 2016; Crawford, 2013; Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015; Jennings, 2000; Nathan & Ward, 2002). However, others defined a child as under the age of 18 years (Matthews et al., 1991; Sardina, 2017; Strickland, 2008), with Patel (2015) not including a definition of age.

Convictions in the review, where possible, only included contact sexual offenses. Where identifiable, data relating to non-contact offending behavior were excluded (Collins & Duff, 2016; Crawford, 2013; Matthews et al., 1991). The range of contact offenses varied between articles, with some articles including more offense-related detail than others. Contact offenses involved sexual activity with a child, ranging from rape or digital penetration to indecent assault. In some instances, joint offending was present in the sample and included the co-offending partnership between females and males.

3.4. Original data collection methods and diagnostic

Goal and offense-supportive cognition diagnostics can be viewed independently. In relation to the goals of FCSOs, this primarily comprised of interviews probing for information in relation to the research questions posed by the researchers of each study. One study used focused interviews (Sardina, 2017), allowing participants to tell the story of their experience. One study used two types of interviews: a structured interview and a clinical interview (Nathan & Ward, 2002). It was reported that both assessed information in relation to demographics, offense and clinical data. The difference between the two interviews was reported to be that the structured interview was a formalized, structured version of the clinical interview. Another study also used a structured interview (Jennings, 2000) which encompassed two sections – one of these schedules was specifically designed by the author and explored Finkelhor's (1984) Four Preconditions Model of Sexual Abuse. A further schedule exploring cognitions was also used. Collins and Duff (2016) also used Finkelhor's model to code data after using multiple interviews, which also comprised a therapeutic intervention. Semi-structured interviews were also used (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012) as a clinical interview to capture information. However, other methods were used, including reviewing secondary case files and reports (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015); which contained information from therapeutic reports, psychometrics and other professionals, where available. One article drew data from secondary questionnaires and interviews (Crawford, 2013). Another article also used comprehensive secondary data (Matthews et al., 1991) which coded data from an intake interview, a questionnaire in relation to family history, case notes, progress notes, and psychometrics including a personality assessment and self-concept scale.

In relation to offense-supportive cognitions diagnostics, some studies coded data from interviews (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Sardina, 2017) or secondary reports (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015). Others did this quantitatively, such as utilizing an Implicit Association Task (Gannon et al., 2009). This study employed a comparison group of offenders convicted of non-child sexual offenses, to determine any significant difference between the two groups in implicitly associating children with sex. Strickland (2008) opted for a battery of psychometrics to measure variables (personality disorder, substance abuse, trauma history, social and/or sexual competence, emotional neediness, and cognitive distortions). For the purpose of this review the relevant variable of cognitive distortions was measure by the female version of The Multiphasic Sex Inventor-II and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire.

During the analytical process Finkelhor's Four Preconditions Model (1984) was used as a guiding theory in two studies (Collins & Duff, 2016; Jennings, 2000). This was the first multifactorial model to explain child sexual offending in males. It encompasses a number of innate needs, and contextual and situational factors, including that of sexual motivation. Ward and Keenan's (1999) Implicit Theories and Ward and Beech (2004) Risk Factors for Child Sexual Offending were also drawn upon by other studies. One study modified an existing framework devised by Elliott et al. (2010) when coding for the presence of factors in relation child sexual abuse. The original framework by Elliott et al. (2010) provides static and dynamic risk factors, as well as vulnerability factors in child sexual offending perpetrated by females.

3.5. Quality of articles

Whilst the quality of articles varied, no study scored under 50%. When utilizing the scoring system of the MMAT, five articles met 100% of the considerations (Gannon et al., 2009; Patel, 2015; Sardina, 2017; Strickland, 2008), two met 75% (Collins & Duff, 2016; Crawford, 2013), and seven met 50% (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015; Elliott et al., 2010; Jennings, 2000; Matthews et al., 1991; Nathan & Ward, 2002). Whilst this allowed for methodological rigor to be assessed, it was decided that further considerations were needed when assessing the quality of articles, including considerations in relation ethical considerations and data analysis. As such, a data extraction form drawn up for this purpose was utilized to consider additional factors. An overview of the quality assessment analysis can be seen in Appendix C.

All articles produced a good rationale for conducting the research described, with appropriate data collection methods being used. There were clear research questions and aims detailed, and the data collected sufficiently enabled these questions to be answered. This led to a strong statement of findings in each study.

It was positive that most of the quantitative articles matched the groups on factors, such as demographics, to alleviate the impact of confounding variables (Gannon et al., 2009; Strickland, 2008), with Patel (2015) reporting the *t*-test and chi-square analyses used to explore the degree to which participants were matched in relation to demographics. The method sections were relatively well explained, including matched characteristics. Additionally, all variables were clearly defined in articles that employed a quantitative methodology. The comparison groups were clearly defined, such as solo and co-offending females (Gillespie et al., 2015), FCSOs and non-sexual offending offenders (Gannon et al., 2009). or four varying groups of FCSOs Elliott et al. (2010) sample were divided into four groups: (1) Lone offender, victim over 12 years; (2) Lone offender, victim under 12 years; (3) Males associated; and (4) Male coerced.

Power analyses were not reported in some articles (Gannon et al., 2009; Gillespie et al., 2015; Patel, 2015). This information would have allowed for more reliability in results reported. Sample sizes were small in some groups, making it difficult to conclude if a true effect was detected. However, it is important to note that the FCSO population is small, and as such small sample sizes may be meaningfully justified even if this is not highlighted in the articles. Power analysis was reported to be 0.86 in Strickland's (2008) sample with a medium effect size, which allows results to be viewed reliably.

Many of the qualitative articles (Beech et al., 2009; Crawford, 2013; Elliott et al., 2010; Jennings, 2000; Matthews et al., 1991; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015) did not report how findings may relate to the researcher's influence sufficiently. The researchers' role is salient in qualitative research, especially during coding and interpretation of the findings. It is important for researchers to be aware of how their experiences or opinions can influence every stage of the study (Berger, 2015). One author did acknowledge the unconscious researcher bias and explained how she would be flexible when viewing the data (Sardina, 2017). Jennings (2000) also reflected on how the construction of the interview schedule may have impacted on participants responding, yet did not relate researcher influence to interpretation of data. Many articles used second coders to measure inter-rater reliability of coding and

the identification of themes or coding (Beech et al., 2009; Collins & Duff, 2016; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015; Sardina, 2017). The inter-rater reliability analyses used were typically a Cohen's kappa and results ranged from fair (between 0.4 and 0.6) to good (between 0.6 and 0.75). However, others did not report inter-rater reliability or reported not using this (Crawford, 2013; Elliott et al., 2010; Jennings, 2000; Nathan & Ward, 2002). Nonetheless, with exception of Sardina (2017), the role of the researcher in the analytical process was not clearly defined in the articles that used a qualitative methodology.

A further overlooked factor was that of considering how findings may relate to the context. Whilst some researchers (Jennings, 2000) considered the impact of participants' environment on generalizability and ecological validity, others did not report this (Crawford, 2013; Matthews et al., 1991; Sardina, 2017). Whilst research on FCSOs who are convicted allows the phenomenon to be studied in women who are more likely to admit to their offense, thereby increasing the likelihood of participants talking in detail about their offending as they do not fear reprisals for disclosing undetected offenses, it does not consider the motivational factors of those that remain at large or are undetected. It is important to bear in mind that there may be differences in those who are able to conceal their offending in comparison to those who are detained, and again those who are willing to participate in research.

A further impact of context is the willingness to openly and honestly disclose information. The offense being studied is viewed negatively by many, and therefore implicates social desirability and impression management. This is especially important as all studies, with the exception of Gannon et al. (2009) relied on self-report. Crawford (2013) reported that those detained whilst completing forms reported less information. The author suggests that this could be due to participants being concerned of the information being obtained by officers, supporting the need for contextual considerations. Some researchers noted taking steps to ensure rooms were private (Jennings, 2000; Sardina, 2017) and rapport was built (Beech et al., 2009; Jennings, 2000; Sardina, 2017) prior to asking participants to disclose sensitive information. Rapport with the researcher is likely to increase reliability and content of what is disclosed due to feelings of trust (McNamara, 2009).

Data collection was generally clear in all articles. Methods used to collect data were explicitly stated, and if a schedule was used to guide interviews this was explained. One article had two data collection methods, in the form of a structured interview and a clinical assessment (Nathan & Ward, 2002). However, it was explained that this was due to the structured interview being implemented by the organization from January 2000, although recruitment preceded this. It was acknowledged by the researchers that there was little difference in the aims of the two methods, and that one method is a formalized version of the other. Limitations of data collection methods include details on data saturation only being reported by one article (Crawford, 2013). Three articles relied on secondary case files (Crawford, 2013; Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015) which placed heavy reliance on detail and quality of information being reported by the original author. Elliott et al. (2010) also failed to detail the randomization process for the selection of the initial 13 case files, which informed the construction of the risk factor coding framework.

In relation to the analytical process of the articles that featured a qualitative methodology, it was positive that some articles included anonymized extracts in the results section which enabled the reader to follow the emergence/presence of themes (Beech et al., 2009; Crawford, 2013; Gannon et al., 2012; Sardina, 2017). However, there were exceptions with others not providing a detailed description, and merely reported themes without supporting extracts from participants. This affected clarity of the themes at times.

3.6. Characteristics of articles

Table 2 depicts the characteristics of the articles based upon the data extracted from 13 studies.

Table 2
Characteristics of articles included in the review.

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
E. Crawford (2013)	Qualitative	Archival reports from the Florida department of corrections research department. Participants were living/or serving a sentence in the state of Florida.	32 female participants over 18 years old. All convicted of a sexual crime against a child under 16 years old. Age Mean = 36.25 years Ethnicity European American = 20 African American = 8 Mixed race = 3 No Race disclosed = 1 *3 participants (participant 19, 29 and 31) were excluded from the review due to committing non-contact Offenses.*	Data was drawn from pre-existing completed questionnaires and interviews completed by participants. Information was coded and sorted to uncover central themes.	Goals Force by another individual/coercion through fear and threats made by male co-offender. Coercion was also related to feeling their role as a woman was to please their male partner. Feeling in control of another individual, thing or situation. Being respected by victims and teaching them something new. Feeling uncomfortable with men their own age. A desire to meet own needs – love and attention. Offense supportive cognitions Emotional Reasoning; using own emotions to dictate what is right or true rather than the	Strengths The researcher considered own biases in relation to coding of the data and reported being mindful of these to remain objective. Clear methodology section and results give quotes to support the motivations. Considers contextual limitations in responding. Data saturation point is considered. Limitations Richer information may have been elicited if the researcher interviewed the participants directly for the purpose of the	75%

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
					facts, such as participants getting their own needs met and feeling good sexually being more salient than being law abiding. Blame; was placed on drugs and alcohol, co-offenders, and victims.	research. No inter-rater reliability carried out on the coding of data.	
A. sardina (2017)	Qualitative	The correctional centre for women in Indiana.	7 female participants detained in the correctional centre for women in Indiana for child sexual Offenses against children under 18 years old. Age Mean = 27.57 years Ethnicity White = 6 African American = 1	Data was collected through focused interviews with participants. Transcripts were coded using content analysis.	Goals To please a male partner. Perception of personal inadequacy and attempting to feel good; including being submissive personality, immaturity and low self-esteem. Coercion – a fear of physical violence. Offense supportive cognitions Diminishing responsibility; including blaming the victim, the victim being willing, the out of control child influenced the Offense, denial and the victim being the aggressor. To escape reality; likened to the world as a dangerous place and uncontrollable cognitive distortions.	Strengths The need for rapport and trust is considered to enable the participants to feel comfortable reporting their experience. Secondary coding was utilised, which typically promotes reliability. However, the details of this are not reported other than stating that once transcripts were coded by the main researcher they were given to an experienced researcher to code. Limitations Small sample size, however content analysis is concerned with the individual experience. Reliance on self-reported data may be inaccurate due to unconscious memory distortions, self-deception, and conscious impression management strategies.	100%
Gannon, Rose, and Williams (2009)	Quantitative. Quasi-experimental study.	Participants were recruited from 5 prisons and 1 probation service in England.	34 female participants – 17 had committed a sexual Offense against a child under 16 years, and 17 had committed range of non-child sexual Offenses. Age Mean = 40.2 year (SD = 12.8) Ethnicity Not reported	Implicit association task (IAT) used to determine if those who offended against children implicitly associate children with sex. Control IAT categories depicting flower and insect words were associated as pleasant or unpleasant by participants. The experimental IAT were children and adult words and were associated with sex or non-sex. Individual effect size differences (*D* scores) obtained from IAT's were used as dependent variables and two-way analysis of variances were conducted on the control and experimental IAT.	Offense supportive cognitions Results did not support the evidence to suggest that FCSOs sexualise children cognitively.	Strengths Participants were matched on demographics to make groups comparable. Implicit association tasks were counterbalanced. Limitations No power calculation reported and the study utilised a small sample size. However, the potential participant pool was limited to 45.	100%
Nathan and Ward (2002)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited from within the correctional system in Victoria, Australia. Participants were referred between 1996 and 2000 for forensic evaluation to the Victorian Institute of	12 female child sexual offenders convicted of Offenses against children under the age of 16 years. Age Mean = 30 years	Half of the participants completed structured interviews developed by Forensicare, the other half of the sample completed a detailed clinical interview which assessed demographic, Offense and clinical data. The authors reported that the	Goals A variety of motives were reported, some women attributed more than one motivation including: coercion/being threatened with physical abuse, rejection, jealousy or a desire to seek revenge against a partner, teaching the	Strengths Rationale of two interviews explained - structured interview developed by Forensicare did not commence being administered to until January 2000.	50%

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
		Forensic Health, pre-release or post-release.	Ethnicity Not reported	difference between the two interviews is that the Structured interview is a formalised and structured version of the clinical interview.	victim a lesson, wanting to please a partner, deviant sexual arousal, power, and affection.	Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inter-rater reliability agreement score reported as 88.4%. However, no details in relation to the measure used or interpretation were reported. Limitations It is not reported if the researchers considered the context or their own biases and interactions may have influenced results.	
Jennings (2000)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited from prisons or probation in Canada and the United States.	30 female participants were serving prison sentences or were on probation for child sexual Offenses. Victims were all under the age of 16 years old. Age Mean = 31 years Ethnicity White = 22 Black = 4 Native = 1 Hispanic = 1 Other = 2	Structured interviews. There were two interview schedules, one of these was specifically designed for the study, assessing Finkelhor's Four Preconditions Model of Sexual Abuse on female sexual offenders. A further schedule designed by Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Rouleau, Kaplan and Reich (1984) was used to explore cognitions.	Goals Emotional congruence; including not feeling like they had power or control over their lives, not feeling comfortable around children emotionally or physically, victims remind the offender of themselves when they were children, intimacy and closeness. Sexual arousal; including fantasizing about children and viewing them sexually. Blockage; including feeling intimidated by sexual relationships with an adult, not being in an affectionate or loving relationship and not having available sexual outlets at the time of the Offense. Coercion by a male partner to offend. Offense supportive cognitions There was no great support for cognitive distortions but there was evidence of unconventional beliefs including: an adult being able to tell if sex with a young child would be emotionally damaging to the victim in the future, the victim knowing that the offender still loves them if the victim refuses to have sex with the offender. Questions in relation to who is responsible if coerced by a male revealed mixed results, but some attributed only the male as responsible.	Strengths The researcher considers how they may influence findings, as may the context of where the interviews are held. This is reported to be acknowledged in the study design. Biases in the sample are considered e.g. not being representative of those who go undetected in the general population. Limitations Small sample size, but this is in part due to limited access of potential participants. Only one coder, no inter-rater reliability score computed.	50%
Matthews et al. (1991)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited after being referred to the Genesis II Female Sexual Offenders Treatment Program, in America from May 1985 to December 1987	16 female participants who had been convicted of sexually offending against children under the age of 18 years. Age and Ethnicity Not reported	Data was taken from case studies which comprised of interview data and case records. This included an Intake Interview, Confidential Family History Questionnaire, case notes, assignments, progress reports, and testing (MMPI, Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and FACES).	Goals Coercion; including feelings of dependency, fearing abuse or abandonment and being forced by partners. However, it was also reported that although some participants were initially coerced they also reported solo offending after the initial coercion.	Strengths The need to be open to what may emerge from the data is considered and implemented by the researcher by taking a holistic-inductive approach. Limitations	50%

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
			2 participants were excluded due to being convicted of non-contact sexual Offenses.	Themes and patterns were then assessed.	Sexual arousal; including fantasizing. Arousal was also linked to feelings of power, which was lacking form adult relationships. A desire for acceptance, attention, and closeness; Having unmet needs or low self-esteem; And feeling isolated. Feelings of anger, revenge, power, jealousy, and rejection (but not by or of the victims) was also reported. Offense supportive cognitions Blaming others, including the victim, were not found to be supported by the data.	The researchers do not discuss any limitations of their research. The researchers do not consider the influence of the context in which participants are being interviewed. No mention of inter-rater reliability score or the use of a secondary coder.	
Collins and Duff (2016)	Qualitative	The participant was recruited from a community forensic psychology service, who was engaging in a therapeutic intervention in the United Kingdom	1 female participant who had sexually assaulted a child under the age of 13 years old, the participant had also been convicted of making indecent images of a child and possession of indecent images. Age 40–50 years Ethnicity White *Data in relation to non-contact offending was excluded.*	The single case design comprised of an assessment interview, followed by 22 50 min sessions. Therapeutic sessions were used to gain information in relation to motivations. The information disclosed in sessions was coded using content analysis in relation to Finklehor's Precondition Model. The amount of disclosures that represented each motivation was provided quantitatively (in percentage). Contact and non-contact offending were reported independently of each other. An anxiety and depression scale was also administered during the course of the therapy.	Goals Multiple motivations reported including: arousal, escape and fantasy, pleasing a partners (co-offender) desires, sexual gratification, and finally as distraction form feelings of grief and isolation. Offense supportive cognitions Removing own responsibility and putting responsibility on the victim, minimising the harm to the victim, justifying the abuse as an act of love, and projection of enjoyment to the victim.	Strengths Analysis was collaborative with the participant who was able to agree with the researchers' themes. The researcher considers the biases and influence of both the participant and the researchers. An independent coder was used to rate a random selection of 25% of the data to minimise bias which was reported to be in excess of 90% which they reported indicted 'good inter-rater reliability'. However, no information in relation to the analysis or measure of this is reported. Limitations Small sample size, even in comparison to typical research in this area which is noted to be small. This has implication for external validity.	75%
Gannon et al. (2012)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited from 5 female prisons and 1 probation service in England.	16 female participants who had sexually offended against children 16 years or younger. Age Ranged from 21 to 78 years Ethnicity Not reported	Data was gained from semi-structured interviews. This data was reviewed against Ward and Keenan's (1999) descriptions and examples of each male-derived implicit theories (ITs) for the presence or absence. The presence of any additional ITs were noted.	Offense supportive cognitions Uncontrollability and nature of harm. The Dangerous world IT was amended to reflect the data, as such it was renamed 'dangerous men/males'. There was no evidence from suggesting the sample viewed all children as sexual beings. However, there was evidence to suggest that some participants viewed their victim as sexual beings.	Strengths Inter-coder reliability was calculated using a Cohens Kappa score to assess reliability and reduce bias in coding for each IT – scores were 100% for all ITs, except nature of harm (88%) and Entitlement (63%). Scores of 60–80% are regarded as having good agreement and excess of 80% is viewed as very good agreement.	50%

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
					Additionally, no evidence of the IT of entitlement in the sample.	Limitations The researchers do not consider the context of where interviews took place, or their influence in relation to interviewing. The methodology to obtain information in relation to ITs was alluded to being unable to distinguish between authentic underlying beliefs or impression management strategies.	
Beech, Parrett, Ward, and Fisher (2009)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited from prisons within England and Wales.	15 female participants who had sexually offended against children under 16 years. Age Mean = 47.3 years (SD = 13.8) Ethnicity White	Data was gained through semi-structured clinical interviews with participants. This was then assessed against Ward and Keenan's IT coding categories for presence or absence. There was also a miscellaneous category that allowed for the identification of new ITs.	Offense supportive cognitions Uncontrollability, dangerous world, and children as sexual beings. There was also evidence for nature of harm, however evidence suggested that this was the least supported IT. The miscellaneous category identified tentative evidence for schemas related to self-sacrifice and subjugation.	Strengths Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa scores to rate agreement in coding – scores were: entitlement 100%, children as sexual being 87%, dangerous world 80%, uncontrollability and nature of harm 73%. Scores between 40 and 60% are regarded as fair agreement, 60–75% as good and excess of 75% reflect excellent agreement. Limitations Limited ability to generalise findings due to small sample size. Contextual implications on participants responding are not considered.	50%
Gillespie et al. (2015)	Mixed methods – qualitative and quantitative (quasi-experimental)	Archival data was used from women who had been referred to the Lucy Faithful Foundation (LFF) in the United Kingdom, between 1998 and 2009.	40 female child sexual offenders – 20 solo offenders and 20 co-offenders. All had offended against children under the age of 16 years old. Age Co-offenders Mean = 38.83 (SD = 5.80) Solo offenders mean = 33.24 (SD = 6.83) Ethnicity 9 Co-offenders known = White British 11 Solo offenders known = 9 White British, 1 Italian and 1 White American.	Data was gained from case files. This comprised of a clinical report written by a LFF therapist for each participant – this included a semi-structured interview and a psychometric report where available, and contained information in relation to cognitive distortions, self-esteem, emotional loneliness, personal difficulties, victim empathy and emotion regulation. If other professional report were available, they were also included in case files. A modified version (Version 2.0) of the Assessment Guidance Framework for use with Women Who Sexually Abuse Children (Elliott, Eldridge, Ashfield, & Beech, 2010, was used to code for presence or absence of developmental	Goals Psychological and/or physical coercion by their co-offender. Offense supportive cognitions Children as sexual beings, nature of harm, entitlement, dangerous world, uncontrollability, and other directedness. There were differences in ITs between solo and co-offenders.	Strengths A framework was used to code for an array of factors. This ensured that each case file was coded for the same information. 20% of the papers were coded by a second examiner to measure inter-rater reliability, although no score is given. Limitations Archival data is limited to the reliance on reliability by the author. It is also reliant on records being of quality detail and data. Some case files were more detailed than others due to the	50%

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
				factors, psychological dispositions, environmental niche factors, offense preceding factors, and factors which may support the offender in making positive changes. The presence or absence of offense-supportive cognitions were also coded for in both solo and co-offenders.		availability of additional reports. This may have led to factors being unrecognised in the data.	
Elliott et al. (2010)	Qualitative	Participants were recruited from the LFF in the United Kingdom. They were referred between 1998 and 2007 due to their criminal conviction, or from family court.	43 females who had sexually offended against children under 16 years old. Participants were divided into 4 categories: lone offender with a victim under 12, lone offender with a victim over 12, male associated offender and male coerced offender. Distinction between male associated and male coerced was based upon case file information for the level of coercion. If it was explicitly stated that the female had been forced into abusive situations by a violent, often sadistic partner they were placed into the male coerced group. Age Average = 31.2 years Ethnicity Not reported	Data was collected from case files including a clinical report from a LFF therapist based upon a structured interview, a psychometric report, emotional loneliness, emotional self-management, general empathy, victim empathy, and cognitive distortion. Additionally, relevant reports from professionals such as probation were also used, where available. A random selection of 13 case files were used to inform the configuration of a preliminary risk factor coding framework, risk factors were outlined by Ward and Beech (2004) in their etiological model of risk. Each file was then rigorously coded for the presence of risk factors.	Goals A need or desire for intimacy, a need for power and control. Offense supportive cognitions Low empathetic concern for the victim, and emotional congruence with children. Viewing children as sexual beings, viewing the nature of harm as low, and having entitlement. The dangerous world distortion was present in some participants and uncontrollability, but these distortions had less support.	Strengths A standard framework was used to guide coding in each case file which allowed for consistency. The research allowed for the differences between the four categories to be explored. Limitations No information is given in relation to how the initial 13 papers were randomly selected. The categorisation of male coercion relied upon explicit statement of this which relies upon the quality of the report. No mention of a secondary coder or inter-rater reliability score.	50%
Strickland (2008)	Quantitative – Quasi-experimental design.	Participants were recruited from 3 state prisons in Georgia.	130 female participants: 60 had been convicted of sexually offending against a child under the age of 18 years old and 70 non-sexual offenders who had committed any serious crime against a person that was not sexual in nature. Age Mean for both groups = 36 years Ethnicity Only 67 disclosed ethnicity of these 45 were white, 17 African American and 3 self-identified as other	Data was gained from administering The Multiphasic Sex Inventory–II Female version and The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire–Brief Version to all participants. These measured the variables of interest: presence and type of personality disorders, substance abuse, trauma history, social and/or sexual competence, emotional neediness, and cognitive distortions. Chi-Square analyses conducted to determine significant differences between groups on the demographics variables. Independent samples *t*-tests tested for significant relationships between the presence and type of personality disorders, substance abuse, trauma history, social and/or sexual competence, emotional neediness, and cognitive distortions.	Offense supportive cognitions No significant differences found between groups on Cognitive Distortions, both groups scored in the highest category of "marked lack of accountability and a blaming outlook".	Strengths Participants were matched on demographics. Limitations Using participants detained in prisons means results are not able to be generalised to the wider population. Cognitive distortions are reported collectively rather than being explored independently. The different cognitive distortions being explored are not stated.	100%

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

Author/year of publication	Methodology	Recruitment	Participant demographics	Data collection strategy	Main findings	Strengths and limitations	MMAT Quality Assessment Score
Patel (2015)	Quantitative	Participants were recruited from prisons in Arizona	51 female participants – 21 who had been convicted of child sexual Offenses and 30 who had been convicted of other non-child sexual Offenses. Age 22–60 (M = 35.08, SD = 7.76) Ethnicity 20 White American 9 Native American No other data was provided in relation to other participants.	Participants were divided into small groups to complete measures, with a maximum of eight participants at a time. All participants completed questionnaires that were created for the study; all participants completed a questionnaire assessing auditory cues which measured 10 ambiguous voice clips that could be interpreted in various ways. Following this a standard written vignette questionnaire was administered which comprised of 20 vignettes describing everyday situations involving a man and a woman. Participants then completed a pictorial cues measure which comprised of 20 ambiguous photos of a man and a women interacting. These portrayed each interaction in three specific ways; the woman as the aggressor, a neutral description, and the man as the aggressor. Lastly, The Social Desirability Scale-17 (Stöber, 2001).	Offense supportive cognitions Auditory cues measure - FCSO feelings of fearfulness were not significantly different from controls. FCSO feelings of anxiousness was significantly different from controls (controls higher). FCSO and controls interpretation of the auditory cues as threatening or as pleasant did not significantly differ from each other, they were just as likely to interpret the neutral male voice as threatening and pleasant. Pictorial cue measure - results do not support the hypothesis, as FCSO and controls were just as likely to select negative interpretations of the pictorial cues. Standard written vignettes measure - FCSO and controls did not significantly differ in their reports of how fearful they felt, or upon how they would react to the written vignettes. FCSO significantly differed in reports of how anxious they felt (controls higher).	Strengths Novel measures used that were reported to have more ecologically validity. Social desirability considered and measured. Results indicated that they did not significantly correlate with cues. Matched demographics and the results of these were reported. Weaknesses Power calculations are not reported and the sample size is small.	100%

3.7. Data synthesis

The articles included in this review differed in terms of their primary aims. As such, the focus of their studies represented this. It can be seen from Table 2 that not all studies covered the two elements of motivations that are the focus in this review (i.e. goals and offense-supportive cognitions). Therefore, data will be synthesized in respect of each of the present review's aims. This is possible as all studies analyzed the attributional goal in participants' offending, offense-supportive cognitions, or both.

3.7.1. Goals

There appeared to be similarities in regards to the goals that were identified as motivational to FCSOs throughout the articles exploring this. These were typically identified through coding for the emergence of themes from self-reported data recorded through interviewing, with some using secondary reports. Exact calculations of the number of women disclosing each motivation, from a summed total from all articles which equated to 310 women, was attempted. However, vague reporting of the data, in some articles, did not allow for the true total to be determined. The true total of women meeting each motivation is likely to be higher. Subsequently, calculations should be viewed with this in mind.

3.7.2. Male coercion

Seven articles found that females attributed their offending to be a consequence of fearing abuse from a male partner, often referred to as male coercion in the literature. Although Crawford (2013) did not report the explicit amount of participants who attributed coercion, data extracts from seven women out of 32 were included for this theme. Nathan and Ward (2002) reported four women out of 12 disclosed threats of violence and a self-expectation to follow the commands of their male partner as motivating their offending. Matthews et al. (1991) found eight women out of 16 reported a male partner initiated the offending prior to forcing them to participate. However, four of these women reported independently engaging in sexual offending of children after the initial coercion. Gillespie et al. (2015) reported that 45% of women who co-offended (n = 20) described being coerced. Elliott et al.'s (2010) sample of 43 women comprised of five women who were categorized as coerced by a male. Two articles are noted to report small evidence of male coercion in their data, both only identified one participant (Jennings, 2000; Sardina, 2017) out of a total sample size of 30, and seven respectively.

Based upon the available data it appears that 35 women, out of a summed total of 310, reported being coerced.

3.7.3. Pleasing a male partner

Participants were found to report offending to please a male partner. Although similar to the aforementioned coercion motivation, it is distinguishable due to threats being absent. Some women reported offending to please their partner, to avoid abandonment. This is often the case for women who are emotionally dependent on their partner. Three women in Sardina's (2017) sample of seven described being motivated to please a partner. Collins and Duff (2016)'s participant reported on the motivational factors in their offending. Statements that reflected pleasing her partner produced a score of 42% of the overall motivational factors reported. This primarily linked to a belief that offending maintained their relationship. Additionally, Nathan and Ward (2002) reported two women out of 12 describing this motivation.

Based upon the available data across all articles, six women out of 310 reported pleasing a male as a factor in their offending.

3.7.4. Sexual arousal

Deviant sexual arousal was described as a motivating factor in four articles. Eleven women in Matthews et al.'s (1991) sample of 16 reported being sexually aroused during the offending or fantasizing. It was reported

that sexual arousal was gained by the majority of women as they imagined their victims were adults. Arousal was gained through feeling they had power in a relationship. However, the authors do not report explicitly how many were motivated through sexual arousal. Sexually fantasizing about children was found to be low across studies (Jennings, 2000; Sardina, 2017). Nathan and Ward (2002) reported that five women out of their sample of 12 women, three being solo offenders, reported being partly motivated to offend due to sexual arousal. Collins and Duff (2016) reported that sexual arousal, gained through dialogue with the co-offender planning acts, comprised 29% of the statements disclosed by their participant to explain motivation. Jennings (2000) reported that sexual arousal demonstrated low support as a motivator. However, seven women out of 30 reported offending as they needed genital satisfaction and five women were aroused sexually by naked children.

Based upon the data scores provided, 24 women out of 310 reported being motivated by deviant sexual arousal. It appeared that many researchers held this motivation in low regard when compared to other motivations.

3.7.5. Own needs

This motivation is broad and encompassed many factors. However, they all related to the perpetrators' own needs being met, including love and attention. In Crawford's (2013) sample of 32 women, 12 women reported offending to meet such needs. They described feeling lonely and that offending made them feel wanted and loved. Feeling wanted was reported by one participant in Sardina's (2017) study of seven women. A further four women reported being motivated by a need for love, attention or being lonely in a sample of 16 women (Matthews et al., 1991). Ten out of 30 women in Jennings' (2000) study reported being motivated by a desire for intimacy, with 67% of the sample reporting that they were not in an affectionate relationship at the time of their offending. Gillespie et al. (2015) reported that solo offenders had a greater need for intimacy than co-offenders in their sample. However, no descriptive figures are reported. Seven of Elliott et al.'s (2010) lone-offending sample, whose victims were older than twelve (n = 11), reported a need for intimacy. Additionally, it was reported that a desire for affection motivated three women, two of whom were solo offenders (Nathan & Ward, 2002).

Overall, it appears that 36 women out of 310 were motivated to meet their own emotional needs.

3.7.6. Power and control

Feeling powerful or in control of someone was found to be a motivational factor. Many reported that they often felt powerless. Jennings (2000) reported that 90% of the women in their sample (n = 30) did not feel that they had any power or control in their lives at the time of their offending. An extract from one participant described feeling a strong sense of power whilst offending, and explained that she liked the control. Gillespie et al. (2015) reported finding that solo offenders had a greater need to dominate or feel powerful, compared to co-offending females. Crawford (2013) detailed extracts from a female who reported that offending fed her ego. This was not an exception, as three women, two who were solo-offenders, reported that feelings of power motivated their offending in Nathan and Ward's (2002) sample (n = 12). Matthews et al. (1991) reported that two out of 16 participants met this motivation. Elliott et al. (2010) found that seven out of 11 solo offenders whose victims were older than 12 years, and six of nine lone offenders whose victims were under 12 years, were motivated by feelings of power and control.

Overall, it appears that 20 women out of 310 were motivated by the desire to feel powerful and in control.

3.7.7. Jealousy and revenge

Jealousy and revenge was reported to be a motivation in two studies. Nathan and Ward (2002) reported that seven out of 12 women were motivated by this. Four of these women were in co-offending relationships and felt rejected, and three women reported pathological jealousy. Jealousy typically evoked a desire to gain revenge. Matthews et al.'s (1991) sample (n = 16) reported being motivated by jealousy. However, not by or for the victim but of their partner cheating. Additionally, one acted out of revenge and another acted out of anger. They reported that their victims were safe targets to act out elicited feelings.

Overall, 10 out of 310 women were motivated by revenge or jealousy.

3.7.8. Teaching

Teaching as a motivation was reported by five women. However, the context of the lesson was different in two articles. Four out of 32 women reported feeling respected and that their offending taught the victim something new (Crawford, 2013). A further female in a sample of 12 women reported that offending taught their victim a lesson about "being boy mad" (Nathan & Ward, 2002). This motivation appeared less prevalent across all articles.

3.7.9. Other

Other motivations that were not found in more than one article were escape and fantasy, which was described by one female as offending to escape feelings of isolation (Collins & Duff, 2016). In addition to this, feeling uncomfortable around children (Jennings, 2000) was reported by 18 women, and five women reported feeling uncomfortable around men of their own age, preferring to be around younger boys (Crawford, 2013). Finally, the victim reminding the offender of herself as a child was another motivation reported by 16 women (Jennings, 2000).

3.7.10. Offense-supportive cognitions

All articles either explored offense-supportive cognitions explicitly or made reference to them during data analytical processes, with the exception of Nathan and Ward (2002). The cognitions in the studies reviewed were referred to as Implicit Theories or Cognitive Distortions. Ward (2000) explains that Cognitive Distortions emerge from Implicit Theories and both explain the automatic influences on behaviors based upon our cognitions. Subsequently, they are grouped together under offense-supportive cognitions for the purpose of this review, with sub-categories reflecting the Implicit Theories proposed by Ward and Keenan (1999).

Four studies explored offense-supportive cognitions directly (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015; Elliott et al., 2010), with others making reference to these when explaining findings. Elliott et al. (2010) found 93% of participants held some kind of supportive cognition. Although there are differing degrees of support for each.

3.7.11. Uncontrollability

This implicit theory is based on the premise that the world is ultimately uncontrollable and offending occurs as perpetrators are unable to control their abusive behaviors. Beech et al. (2009) reported that this theory was the most common within their sample (87%). It was categorized by reports of being characteristically weak and unable to stop the occurrence of abuse. Many abdicated responsibility, positing that their co-perpetrator led the abuse. Some reported they had not learnt the appropriate ways to behave with children, due to their own historical abuse. It was found that the inter-rater reliability for this implicit theory was 'fair'. However, Gannon et al. (2012) found great support for 'uncontrollability', with 100% of their sample evidencing this through disclosures. Three themes of uncontrollability were identified from coding which explained uncontrollability through: substance abuse, not being able to control the victim, and uncontrollability due to their co-perpetrator. One of Sardina's (2017) seven participants attributed her co-offender drugging her as the reason for offending, which supports Gannon et al.'s (2012) theme of substance abuse. Gillespie et al. (2015) found evidence of 'uncontrollability' in lone and co-offenders. 75% of both groups blamed external factors, and 35% of lone offenders and 30% of co-offenders believed their abuse was uncontrollable. Crawford

(2013) reported that 44% externalized blame. Although there is support for distorted blame, Strickland (2008) reported no significant difference between FCSOs and non-child sexual offending females on blaming outlook. Elliott et al. (2010) reported that this implicit theory was less common within their sample, except lone offenders whose victims were over 12 years, where eight participants saw themselves as a victim.

3.7.12. Dangerous world

This implicit theory is related to the world being a dangerous place and people, sometimes children, being harmful. The offending is believed to occur as retribution or because children are viewed as safer intimately, than adults. This implicit theory was found in 53% of Beech et al.'s (2009) participants, although the 'dangerousness' reflected the family environment as opposed to the external world. This encompassed co-offenders who were abusive and instilled fear of defying orders to engage in sexually abusive acts. Gannon et al. (2012) did not find relative support for FSCOs endorsing this implicit theory in their sample. They did however find that 100% of their participants noted that men were dangerous, with a 100% inter-rater reliability. This led the authors to refer to this implicit theory as representing the gender specific dangerousness, renaming it dangerousness of men/males. Despite this finding, Patel (2015) did not find support for this in their sample. Data from Crawford's (2013) sample would show support, as 57% were intimidated by male relationships. Gillespie et al. (2015) posited mixed support for this implicit theory between lone and co-offending females, 0% of lone offenders and only 10% of co-offenders viewed children as a sexual threat to the mother. Although 45% of lone offenders viewed children as safer than adults, this was only found in 5% of co-offenders. Interestingly, only 30% of the sample viewed males as threatening. Elliott et al. (2010) only found support for this implicit theory in lone-offending females with victims over 12 years, but even then it was only reflected in five out of eleven participants.

3.7.13. Children as sexual beings

This implicit theory is based upon the belief that children have a capability of sexual enjoyment and desire sexual gratification. Beech et al. (2009) found evidence of this in 47% of their participants and posited that there were three themes: offenders saw their victims as more mature/adult-like, sexual arousal or attraction to or by children, and offenders believed that children enjoyed the sexually abusive acts and attempted to seek repeat encounters. Gannon et al. (2012) supported this implicit theory, with 63% of their sample viewing children as advanced sexually or enjoying the abuse. Elliott et al. (2010) found that 72% of their sample held these beliefs. This was especially high in lone offenders, with all eleven lone offenders with victims over 12 and seven out of nine lone offending females with victims under 12 demonstrating these beliefs. Of the offenders with victims over 12, nine believed that they were able to consent and five blamed the child. The belief of consent was reflected by disclosures by 60% of lone and 40% of co-offending females in Gillespie et al.'s (2015) sample, with 50% of the sample also giving the child adult characteristics. A participant in Matthews et al.'s (1991) sample believed that the abuse was voluntary and that they were mutual partners in sexual acts. Sardina (2017) found that 57% of the sample viewed the victim as a willing participant, with one participant believing the victim flirted with them and pulled her closer to initiate further contact. This was also found by Jennings (2000) who reported 60% of participants did not believe the victim attempted to stop the abuse. Despite the support, Gannon et al. (2009) reported no significant findings in relation to FCSOs cognitively sexualizing children, when using an implicit association task.

3.7.14. Entitlement

This implicit theory is based on the belief that some people are entitled to have their needs met when they wish, and however they choose. Gillespie et al. (2015) found support for this, with 55% of lone and 35% of co-offending females believing their needs are greater than their victims. Entitlement was greater in co-offenders, who believed that their partners' needs were greater than their victims (70%). Elliott et al. (2010) found this distortion in 67% of the sample, with lone-offending females placing their needs greater than their victims – this comprised of eleven females whose victims were above the age of 12 years and five of the nine participants with victims under 12 years. Gannon et al. (2012) found support for males being entitled, which represented 44% of their sample. Despite these findings, Beech et al. (2009) and Gannon et al. (2012) did not find support for this implicit theory within their sample.

3.7.15. Nature of harm

This implicit theory is based upon the premise that harm is on a continuum and that sexually abusive acts are not so harmful to children. The degree of harm is moderated by certain factors, such as the use of force against the victim, the victim being aware of the offense taking place, and the social meaning placed on the offense in terms of its nature (i.e., considerable distress is more likely if the victim was conscious throughout the experience, and the person inflicting the abuse was in a position of trust and responsibility; less serious impact is more likely if the victim was not physically harmed/asleep, and the person inflicting the abuse was a stranger). As a result, according to this theory, the less intrusive the act, the less harmful it is perceived to be, and the more likely the offender is viewed as having due regard for the victim's wellbeing (Ward & Kennan, 1999). This was present in 20% of Beech et al.'s (2009) participants, and was categorized by the belief that if they carried out the acts she would be protecting the victim from more harm from the co-offender, who may not then abuse the victim. However, this was greater in Gannon et al.'s (2012) sample, with 81% believing that their abuse was less harmful compared to abuse by a male. The authors believed that females weighed up harmfulness against how harmful it would be if perpetrated by a male. 53% of Gillespie et al.'s (2015) participants did not view their offending as harmful. Moreover, 40% of lone offenders viewed the abuse as acts of love. This was lower in co-offenders, as only 25% of participants endorsed this.

3.7.16. Other offense-supportive cognitions

A further category was used by Beech et al. (2009) to assess for evidence of other offense-supportive cognitions within their sample. Although it was debated by the two coders, there was tentative evidence to support a schema representing self-sacrifice and subjugation. Subjugation represented offending after greater subjugation due to coercion and fearing consequences. Abandonment was represented by 15% of lone and 25% of co-offending females in Gillespie et al.'s (2015) sample. Self-sacrifice was the cognition that the offender would meet the needs of others despite her own needs and desire for gratification.

4. Discussion

The current review aimed to explore the motivations in FCSOs, including the goals attributed to the offending and offense-supportive cognitions facilitating this. Research into this complex phenomenon is expanding, however, no literature review to date has synthesized the existing evidence base of the key motivations in a systematic way.

4.1. Varying motivations

This review found support for a range of motivations in relation to FCSO, across populations and sub-groups of FCSOs in different countries. Many of the motivations were consistent across participants, including being coerced by a male and the offense-supportive cognition 'uncontrollability'. However, some motivations have greater support than others, with females being motivated by different factors (rather than one exclusively). Additionally, there was evidence of female-exclusive motivations, which appeared to be related to personal situational factors, such as offending to please a male and being coerced by a male partner.

In the male literature, it is often noted that males tend to offend independently and do not typically offend in partnership, as appears to be the case in some females (Burgess-Proctor, Comartin, & Kubiak, 2017).

There was evidence of other situational factors that are also present in the male literature, including offending to meet one's own needs. The presence of personal situational factors, such as being with an abusive partner and feeling the need to offend to please him or being coerced by him, and feeling isolated, may be a factor in these motivations not being as consistent across samples. The varying strength of support for the different motivations and identified differences, highlight the need for further development of female-exclusive models of FCSO, and raising awareness of females who offend not being a homogeneous group.

4.2. Identification of further goals in FCSO

Gannon, Rose, and Ward's (2008) Descriptive Offense Process Model for FSOs highlighted three key goals: intimacy, sexual gratification and revenge. However, this review has also identified support for further/other goals, which may be explained by some females attributing more than one factor as motivational in their offending(Collins & Duff, 2016; Nathan & Ward, 2002). The link between cognitive distortions and motivations is established by the research base (Baumeister, 1998; Seto, 2017), and it is therefore important to consider how offense-supportive cognitions may link to goals as a driving force to offend.

4.3. Coercion

Of the goals attributed to motivate FCSOs, coercion by a male co-offender was a salient factor in many females studied. This was categorized by fear of abuse to themselves by their co-offender, motivating females to offend in an attempt to guard against this. This motivational factor was demonstrated in most articles, including those rated with a higher quality assessment score. Elliott et al. (2010) explored environmental factors in relation to coercion and found that violence within the relationship was a risk factor. Additionally, those who were categorized as male-associated were often in romantic relationships with males who had been reported to offend sexually against children. The fear of violence or abuse from a co-perpetrating male is also reflected in a tentative offense-supportive cognition. Although there was debate among the coders for 'subjugation'(reflecting coercion), there was some support. These findings may suggest a vulnerability in females, who may be targeted by males with the purpose to coerce or include them in their offending. However, there was also evidence to suggest that once females had been coerced to offend, they went on to offend independently (Matthews et al., 1991). This would potentially indicate that there may be another underlying motivation that is established during the initial offending, or a curiosity prior to this that is exacerbated after being coerced. A further explanation may be that females reported coercion in their offending as a strategy for impression management.

4.4. Power and control

Some women reported being motivated to gain power and control. This may be explained through many FCSOs reporting they did not feel that they had power or control in their lives at the time of offending (Jennings, 2000). They subsequently attempted to regain power by having control through offending. This motivation is found in the wider sexual offending literature, which suggests that most rapists were motivated to regain power and control (Robertiello & Terry, 2007). The prevalence of this motivation was noted to differ between lone and co-offending females (Gillespie et al., 2015). It is possible that the higher attribution of power as a motivational factors in lone offenders may be due to co-offending females attributing external motivators, such as coercion as influential in their offending.

This motivation requires more exploration to understand how those attributing power and control as motivational, initially determine that this will be gained through offending. Many extracts reported that women felt that they felt that they had power during the offense, but it is not explained how they determined that gaining power in this way would be effective. The question therefore arises as to what function it serves FCSOs to offend in order to gain power? It may be that once the individual has offended and felt power or control, it further reinforces the desire to offend to re-gain the feeling. However, at present this is merely speculative, and research would be required to build on this.

4.5. Meeting own needs

Meeting one's own needs was attributed to offending and may be linked to the offense-supportive cognition of 'entitlement'. It includes the desire to gain affection or love, and suggests that some offenders believe that they are entitled to meet their needs when and how they desire. It could be suggested that this implicit theory is likely to be present in females who offend to meet the goal of feeling affection. Viewing their needs as more important therefore rationalizes their sexually abusive behavior, and thereby avoids cognitive dissonance (a function of implicit theories; Mihailides, Devilly, & Ward, 2004). According to Gillespie et al. (2015), there was stronger evidence in lone offenders for this implicit theory. This would appear to be consistent with literature suggesting that many co-offending females are coerced by a partner or offend to please them – they do not need to use this distortion to protect themselves or their self-concept. Subsequently, there may be potential evidence for other distortions to serve this function, such as the tentative self-sacrifice implicit theory noted by Beech et al. (2009), as the women are essentially sacrificing their own desires and needs for that of a partner.

4.6. Least supported motivations

The least supported motivations were pleasing a male partner and deviant sexual arousal. Females did not typically report fantasizing about children. However, the merely moderate support for deviant sexual arousal as a motivational factor may be explained by socially desirable responding, given that it is not socially acceptable to be aroused by children. This appears to be contradictory to the finding that the implicit theory of 'children as sexual beings' was found in over half of the articles on offense-supportive cognitions (Beech et al., 2009; Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2015), which may suggest that FCSOs view children as being sexually competent. As such, they believe children have a desire for sexual gratification. However, offending may not meet the perpetrators sexual needs. In line with the male literature, one would expect that viewing children as sexually competent and able to initiate sexual activity would also elicit sexual arousal in the perpetrator, highlighting another difference between male and female perpetrators.

4.7. Other motivational goals

There were additional motivations reported by some studies that were not reflected across samples. This included offending that served a teaching purpose (Crawford, 2013; Nathan & Ward, 2002), and feeling uncomfortable around adult men (Crawford, 2013) and children (Jennings, 2000). This may suggest that there are indeed motivational factors that have not previously been identified.

4.8. Offense-supportive cognitions

There appears to be mixed support for offense-supportive cognitions when viewing these in relation to the five implicit theories, identified by Ward and Keenan (1999) in relation to male sexual offenders (Table 3).

4.9. Entitlement and uncontrollability

The implicit theory of entitlement appears to be supported across studies, as was that of uncontrollability. Extracts from participants' disclosures revealed that many attributed uncontrollability to being coerced to offend (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012), and therefore not being able to control the situation or their actions as they feared abuse themselves. This implicit theory therefore seems to be linked to coercion. However, whilst some females may feel that they are unable to have control due to fear, the implicit theory of uncontrollability may be used by females as a self-serving bias to allow them to make sense of their offending. Attributing blame due to fear or victimization therefore allows women to rationalize their abusive actions and abdicate themselves.

4.10. Dangerous world

The implicit theory of 'dangerous world' appeared to be predominantly related to men being dangerous, as opposed to the world, which is found in male child sexual offending literature (Beech et al., 2009; Crawford, 2013; Gannon et al., 2012). This led Gannon et al. (2012) to tentatively re-name this as 'men being dangerous'. This illustrates disparities in the cognitions female and males hold. The review found mixed support for this implicit theory, with little evidence across the sample of studies (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015). As such, other implicit theories may be more prominent in FCSOs, especially in those who are in more abusive relationships.

4.11. Children as sexual beings

There were fluctuations in strength of this implicit theory across samples. Elliott et al. (2010) found that this was more likely to be present in females whose victims were older than 12 years. This may be due to prepubescent children not being considered as 'adult-like', which may be related to the belief that children are able to consent to sexual activity (Elliott et al., 2010; Gannon et al., 2012; Sardina, 2017). Interestingly though, Gannon et al. (2009) failed to find support for FCSOs cognitively sexualizing children using an implicit theory association task. This would appear to fit with participants across studies reporting low levels of sexually fantasizing about children (Jennings, 2000; Sardina, 2017).

4.12. Nature of harm

The review found nature of harm to have the least support across studies. This reflects offending women protecting the victim from more severe harm by a male perpetrator (Beech et al., 2009; Gannon et al., 2012). It is more prominent in those FCSOs who offend in partnership with a male. Although Gillespie et al. (2015) provided evidence for this implicit theory in lone-offending females, the rationale differed in that it was more related to abusive acts that demonstrated love.

4.13. Variations of motivations

There are a number of factors that could explain the variation across studies identified in this review, including the differences in study design and methods used to explore this area of enquiry, which are likely to impact on the information disclosed by participants. Additionally, information revealed by participants is dependent on their motivation for taking part, as well as how comfortable they feel in the context of research interviews. This highlights the importance for building rapport between researcher and participant.

4.14. Suggestions for future research/clinical implications

Since clinical practice should be grounded in the scientist practitioner model, whereby practice is informed by empirical research, interventions and treatments for females who offend sexually should draw upon literature concerning this phenomenon. This includes literature concerning motivations and facilitators to sexual offending. It appears that there are links between offense-supportive cognitions and motivations, which have previously been highlighted in (Ward & Beech, 2006) Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending and Gannon et al.'s (2008) Descriptive Model of the Offense Process for Female Sexual Offenders. As such, it would be interesting to explore their connection in future research, and how possessing both may increase vulnerability to offend in FCSOs exclusively.

Additionally, Beech et al. (2009) and Gillespie et al. (2015) have referred to further offense-supportive cognitions that have not previously been identified in males. As such, further exploration of the offense-supportive cognitions that motivate women to sexually offend against children would enable a deeper understanding of this and potentially uncover additional ones that have not yet been identified, or have tentatively been proposed.

It is acknowledged that treatment should address distorted thinking (Blumenthal, Gudjonsson, & Burns, 1999), with this forming the core aims of CBT interventions (Gannon, 2006). Therefore, identifying female-only motivations and cognitions would strengthen treatment efficacy, and have the potential to reduce recidivism rates. The emergence of further motivational factors in women that have not been previously identified in males reflect a need for female-specific models, as these would otherwise be overlooked when applying male models to females who have committed a sexual offense against a child.

The review has noted that there are situational factors that may increase the vulnerability for women to sexually offend against children. Although this is recognized in Gannon et al.'s (2008) Descriptive Model of the Offense Process for Female Sexual Offenders, research into this area would increase awareness and knowledge into these factors, which could be used to provide additional support to women who present with the relevant vulnerability factors in order to intervene early, prior to offending taking place.

Due to the varying motivations identified, risk reduction interventions need be innovative and adapted to meet the unique motivations underlying offending. This approach has been recognized by clinicians and researchers to increase efficacy (Levenson, 2014). In regards to treating the motivation of power, reported frequently by females, following a Good Lives (GL) framework could be beneficial. This would allow the exploration of alternative, adaptive and prosocial ways to gain power and control. Harkins, Flak, Beech, and Woodhams (2012) found that incorporating the GL framework to treatment of male child sexual offenders demonstrated positive evaluations in relation to a change in thinking and behaviour. Although there is concern that the GL framework takes the emphasis from risk, using it as a framework to guide treatment, whilst incorporating risk, may enable understanding of adaptive ways to meet their needs and meet risk reduction needs.

4.15. Limitations

Most studies heavily relied upon self-report, which is to be expected given the number of studies using a qualitative design. Consequently, it is important to consider the implications of social desirability and impression management. Women may disclose other motives to abdicate responsibility. Some argue that offense-supportive cognitions are post-offense rationalizations for their behavior to alleviate the internal struggle (Pollock & Hashmall, 1991). The use of external blame attribution in male child sexual offenders has been demonstrated by Gudjonsson (1990). It has previously been acknowledged that there is a correlation between cognitive distortions and social desirability in those who have committed sexual offenses against children when responding to questionnaires (Gannon, 2006), who are also more likely to impression-manage post-treatment (Mathie & Wakeling, 2011).

Additionally, six participants (38%) in Beech et al.'s (2009) study also participated in Gannon et al.'s (2012) study. Whilst this may be

Table 3
Ward and Kennan's (1999) Offense-supportive cognitions.

Offense-supportive cognition	Description
Dangerous world	The world is dangerous and people are abusive or rejecting. As such, children are safer than adults, or offending asserts the need to punish.
Children as sexual beings	Children are motivated by and enjoy sex.
Nature of harm	There are degrees of harm and sexual activity is not harmful as it is beneficial.
Uncontrollability	The world in uncontrollable and offending is external to the person as such they are not responsible for the abuse.
Entitlement	Viewing the self as superior in some way and deserve to assert their needs above the needs of others.

inevitable in light of the limited and difficult access to this population, it does have implications for findings as some women may alter disclosures based upon their prior experience.

A further limitation in relation to the sample population is that all studies recruited at least some participants from prisons, whilst others also used case files from those referred from family court proceedings, in addition to known convicted females (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015). As such, the literature review has limited ecological validity outside of the convicted population. Whilst it is unlikely that FCSOs that are not convicted would volunteer information in relation to their offending, due to evading detection, there are likely to be differences between those who have been convicted and those who remain undetected. A study by Neutze, Grundmann, Scherner, and Beier (2012) examined the generalizability of findings from detected male child sexual offenders to undetected male child sexual offenders, and found that there was no differences in the cognitive distortions they held. However, the authors noted a difference in social functioning, which was higher in the undetected males than in the detected males. This finding may be relevant to females who reported coercion, offending to please a male partner and feeling uncomfortable around men as motivational in their offending.

Due to the broad inclusion criteria, some articles were included in the review that was less detailed in the area of motivational factors that play a role in FSCO. This predominantly applies to those studies that were examining the efficacy of models (Elliott et al., 2010; Gillespie et al., 2015). As such, the number of studies specifically examining motivational factors, including goals of offending and offense-supportive cognitions was limited.

To the authors' knowledge, the broad inclusion criteria allowed for all relevant literature available on this topic to be included in the present review. However, due to the limited research in this area, only 13 studies were identified. While participants in the included studies represented a varied heritage, the research predominantly originated from Western countries (i.e., Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States), and may therefore not be characteristic of countries *across the world*. Subsequently, additional motivations for females who sexually offend against children may exist, but have not been identified here. Further research in non-Western countries, where cultural norms, beliefs and values are different, is therefore encouraged.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the review has highlighted support across studies for a number of key motivations among FCSOs, including coercion, pleasing a male partner, meeting one's own needs, jealousy, and gaining power and/or control, as well as revenge. Some of these are different to those found in the male literature (i.e. coercion, pleasing a male partner).

Additionally, there was support for all of the five implicit theories, namely uncontrollability, children as sexual beings, entitlement, nature of harm, and dangerous world, although evidence to support these varied in strength. However, the implicit theory of 'dangerous world' was suggested to be more reflective of men being dangerous (Gannon et al., 2012), which tentatively demonstrates a difference in implicit theories held between females and males. Less support was found for the following motivations/implicit theories: (i) being motivated by a deviant sexual arousal, (ii) teaching the victim a lesson, (iii) escapism, (iv) fantasy-driven, and (v) feeling uncomfortable around adults and preferring the company of children. In addition to these, self-sacrifice, subjugation and abandonment have also been previously reported (Beech et al., 2009; Gillespie et al., 2015).

Despite its limitations, the present review is the first to provide an overview and summarize motivational factors in FCSO. Research in this area is growing and it is necessary to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon. It is recognized that females who commit sexual offenses are not a homogenous group (Nathan & Ward, 2002; O'Connor, 1987). Consequently, different women will be motivated by different factors. It is paramount for treatment and interventions to be evidence-based, and they should therefore be based on female-exclusive models and theories of child sexual offending. They should encompass the different motivations that are found in females, such as coercion, offending to please a male partner and the tentative finding of women viewing men as dangerous rather than holding the implicit theory of 'dangerous world'. As such, this review has amalgamated the current evidence base from existing literature in this area. It encompasses published research articles and dissertations from countries across the world in order to explore the key motivations of FCSOs, and highlights the need for further research.

Finally, the review's conclusion are in line with existing research suggesting that multiple motivational factors may be at play in the lead up to a female committing a sexual offense, and that an amalgamation of these is likely responsible for sexual offending in this population (Collins & Duff, 2016; Matthews et al., 1991; Nathan & Ward, 2002).

Appendix A. Data extraction form

Title
Author(s)
Year of publication
Location of study (e.g. country)
Study aim(s)
Context and participants
Sample size
Age of sample
Ethnicity of sample
Offense
Offense disclosure (e.g. self-disclosure, criminal record)

Context of data collection (e.g. prison, community)
Study design and methods
Methodological approach
Data collection method (e.g. interview, case study)
Data analysis method (e.g. thematic analysis, IPA)
Theoretical method to guide interpretation
Findings
Key motivations identified
Data extracts related to key themes
Offense supportive cognitions identified
Data extracts related to key Offense supportive cognitions
Recommendations made by author
Quality of study – based upon information in the quality assessment
Appropriateness of methodology
Appropriateness of recruitment process
Data collection considerations
Researcher-participant relationship consideration
Ethical considerations
Data analysis considerations
Statement of findings considerations
Overall quality assessment score
Additional factors
Limitations of study
Conclusion
Further notes

Appendix B. Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) used to quality assess publications

Types of mixed methods study components or primary studies	Methodological quality criteria	Responses			
		Yes	No	Can't tell	Comments
Screening Questions (for all types)	Are there clear qualitative and quantitative research questions (or objectives), or a clear mixed methods question (or objective)? Do the collected data allow address the research question (objective)? E.g. consider whether the follow-up period is long enough for the outcome to occur (for longitudinal studies or study components). Further appraisal may be not feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.				
Qualitative	1.1. Are the sources of qualitative data (archives, documents, informants, observations) relevant to address the research question (objective)? Is the process for analysing the qualitative data relevant to address the research question (objective)? Is appropriate consideration given to how findings relate to the context, e.g. the setting in which the data were collected? Is appropriate consideration given to how findings relate to researchers' influence, e.g. through their interactions with participants?				
Quantitative randomised controlled (trials)	2.1. Is there a clear description of the randomization (or appropriate sequence generation)? Is there a clear description of the allocation concealment (or blinding when applicable)? Are there complete outcome data (80% or above)? Is there low withdrawal/drop-out (below 20%)?				
Quantitative non-randomised	3.1. Are participants (organisations) recruited in a way that minimises selection bias? Are measurements appropriate (clear origin, or validity known, or standard instrument; and absence of contamination between groups when appropriate) regarding the exposure/intervention and outcomes? In the groups being compared (exposed vs. non-exposed; with intervention vs. without; cases vs. controls), are the participants comparable, or do researcher take into account (control for) the difference between these groups? Are there complete outcome data (80% or above), and, when applicable, an acceptable response rate (60% or above), or an acceptable follow-up rate for cohort studies (depending on the duration of follow up)?				
Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the quantitative research question (or objectives), or the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the mixed methods question (or objective)? Is the sample representative of the population understudy? Are measurements appropriate (clear origin, or validity known, or standard instrument)? 4.4. Is there an acceptable response rate (60% or above)?				
Mixed methods	5.1. Is the mixed methods research design relevant to address the qualitative and quantitative research questions (or objectives), or the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the mixed methods research question (or objective)? Is the integration of qualitative and quantitative data (or results*) relevant to address the research question (or objective)? Is appropriate consideration given to the limitations associated with this integration, e.g., the divergence of qualitative and quantitative data (or results*) in the triangulation design? Criteria for the qualitative component (1.1 to 1.4) and appropriate criteria for the quantitative component (2.1 to 2.4, or 3.1 to 3.4, or 4.1 to 4.4), must be also applied				

Appendix C. Overview of quality assessment scores. Below are the scores for quantitative methodologies. Y = Yes, N = No, U = Cannot tell/Unsure

Authors	Questions from the MMAT					Additional questions			
	Recruited to reduce bias	Appropriate measures	Comparable groups	Complete outcome data	Score	Ethical considerations	Strong rationale	Strong statement of findings	Data collection considerations
Gannon et al. (2009)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Strickland (2008)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Y	Y	Y	U
Patel (2015)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Y	Y	Y	Y

Below are the scores for qualitative methodologies.

Authors	Questions from the MMAT					Additional questions			
	Relevant sources of information	Relevant analysis	Context consideration	Researchers influence	Score	Ethical considerations	Strong rationale	Strong statement of findings	Data collection considerations
Crawford (2013)	Y	Y	N	U	75%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sardina (2017)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Nathan and Ward (2002)	Y	Y	N	N	50%	Y	Y	Y	U
Jennings (2000)	Y	Y	Y	U	50%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Matthews et al. (1991)	Y	Y	N	U	50%	N	Y	Y	N
Collins and Duff (2016)	Y	Y	Y	N	75%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gannon et al. (2012)	Y	Y	N	N	50%	Y	Y	Y	U
Beech et al. (2009)	Y	Y	N	N	50%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Elliott et al. (2010)	Y	Y	N	N	50%	N	Y	Y	Y

Y = Yes, N = No, U = Cannot tell/Unsure.

Below are the scores of the mixed methods methodology.

Y = Yes, N = No, U = Cannot tell/Unsure.

Authors	Questions from the MMAT												Additional Questions			
	Relevant sources of information	Relevant analysis	Context considerations	Researchers influence	Recruited to reduce bias	Appropriate measures	Comparable groups	Complete outcome data	Appropriateness of mixed methods	Qualitative and quantitative integration appropriate	Considerations of integrations	Score	Ethical considerations	Strong rationale	Strong statement of findings	Data collection considerations
Gillespie et al. (2015)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	N	50%	Y	Y	Y	Y

Appendix D. Frequency data in relation to offenses committed by participants in the included studies and classified using the Sexual Offences Act (2003)

Conviction data were used from studies (with the exception of Matthews et al. (1991), as they do not state whether they are reporting convictions or self-report) to report offense frequencies. A limitation of this is that it may underrepresent the frequency of types of offending behavior engaged in by participants. However, it was felt that as a majority of studies predominantly report conviction data, it was appropriate to keep the source of data consistent. We also attempted to tally up self-report data in Nathan and Ward's (2002) study, and it became apparent that self-report frequency data underrepresented the conviction frequency data. Please note that some studies were more detailed in relation to their reporting of this data (e.g., Beech et al. (2009), by reporting the number of convictions per offense per person – i.e., nine counts of indecent assault for Participant 1). As a result, frequency data is likely to be skewed.

Table 1
Total number of participants included in the classification

Studies	Participants
Nathan and Ward (2002)	12
Jennings (2000)	30
Matthews, Matthews and Speltz (1991)	16
Collins and Duff (2016)	1
Beech, Parrett, Ward and Fisher (2009)	15
	Total 74

Table 2
Categories of offending behavior according to the Sexual Offences Act (2003)

Offenses involving…	Frequency
Penetration	66
Sexual assault/touching	50
Child sexual abuse material	25
Aiding and abetting	9
Inciting a child to engage in sexual activity	9
Intentionally causing a child to watch/view sexual activity	2
Attempted rape	3
Incest	10

Table 3
Ambiguous offenses not possible to classify according to the above categories of offending behavior according to the Sexual Offences Act (2003)

Offense description	Frequency	Study
Gross indecency	1	Jennings (2000)
Child endangerment	2	Jennings (2000)
Corrupting a child	1	Jennings (2000)
Sexual immorality	1	Jennings (2000)
Multiple abusive acts	1	Collins & Duff (2016)
Indecency with a child	18	Beech et al. (2009)
Child cruelty	2	Beech et al. (2009)
Intimidation of witness	1	Beech et al. (2009)
Child neglect/failure to protect	3	Beech et al. (2009)
Grievous bodily harm	1	Beech et al. (2009)
Offences against the person	9	Beech et al. (2009)
Sexual offences	4	Beech et al. (2009)
Sexual activity with child	8	Beech et al. (2009)
Manslaughter	1	Beech et al. (2009)
Cruelty to child	5	Beech et al. (2009)

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* Indicates those publications that have been included in the present review.

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Chapter 2:

Critique of a Psychometric Measure

Is the Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders Scale (ATS) Suitable to Elicit Attitudes Towards Those Who Sexually Offend?

Introduction

In this chapter, the Attitude Towards Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS) (Hogue, 1993) will be introduced and appraised in respect of its psychometric properties. The ATS was designed to measure affective and evaluative judgements held by respondents in relation to those who sexually offend and has been used predominantly to measure attitudes towards males who sexually offend (Gakhal & Brown, 2011). The chapter will first provide an overview of existing attitudinal measures towards sexual offenders, followed by a detailed description of the ATS.

Measures of Attitudes

There are four scales designed to measure attitudes towards and perceptions of sexual offenders: (i) ATS (Hogue, 1993); (ii) Community Attitude To Sex Offenders (CATSO) (Church et al., 2008); (iii) Perceptions of Sex Offenders (Harper & Hogue, 2015); and (iv) ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019). The rationale for exclusive attitudinal scales for those who sexually offend is built on the premise that this offending population are viewed more negatively than any other (Craig, 2015). Attitudes are formed on the basis of misconceptions which impact the efficacy of legislation and decision making (Church et al., 2008).

Until the development of the CATSO (Church et al., 2008), the ATS (Hogue, 1993), was the only scale designed to elicit attitudinal beliefs towards sexual offenders. Following this came the ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019), a brief version of Hogue's (1993) ATS, and then the PSO (Harper & Hogue, 2015). The CATSO (Church et al., 2008) was designed as an alternative to Hogue's (1993) ATS, as it was argued that the ATS had not been validated adequately or designed to measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend due to it being adapted from a scale to measure attitudes towards prisoners (see p. 14) (Wnuk et al., 2006). All measures are self-report and assess responses to attitudinal statements on a Likert scale,

with the ATS (Hogue, 1993) and ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019) using a 5-point Likert scale, and the CATSO (Church et al., 2008) and the PSO (Harper & Hogue, 2015) using a 6-point Likert scale. At present, there appears to be no published studies utilising the PSO or ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019) beyond that of its development.

The CATSO (Church et al., 2008) has been used as an attitudinal measure in published studies comprising samples of probation and parole officers (Conley et al., 2011), prison officers (Connor, 2012), law enforcement workers (Tewksbury et al., 2012), and the general public (Klein, 2015b; Shackley et al., 2013). However, the ATS (Hogue, 1993) appears to be the most popular attitudinal measure, primarily utilised with professionals working in forensic settings, although it has been utilised with other samples (see p. 12).

Background of the ATS

The ATS (Hogue, 1993) is a 36-item self-report measure assessing respondents' attitudes towards males who sexually offend, based upon three factors: (i) Trust, (ii) Intent, and (iii) Social Distance. The ATS is argued to represent all three components of an attitude (see Table 1).

Table 1

How the ATS Measures Factors of an Attitude

Factor on the ATS	Component being measured
Trust	Affective-based judgements held by the respondent towards those who sexually offend
Intent	Cognitions/stereotypical appraisals of those who sexually offend
Social distance	Behaviour-related reactions to those who sexually offend

The ATS (Hogue, 1993) was designed to measure attitudes as a stable construct. However, some studies have used it as an outcome measure, whereby the scale is used as a pre- and post-measure of attitudes following a manipulation, such as a training course (e.g. Craig, 2005). Hogue (2015) advises against the ATS being used in this way, as it does not fit with the conceptualisation of it being a global measure of attitudes. Subsequently, he argues that any observable changes in attitudinal data is likely due to demand characteristics e.g. being aware of how they should respond or responding to support the perceived hypotheses. This is somewhat contradictory, as Hogue used the ATS in this way in 1994.

Labels to refer to different groups of individuals have also been modified on the scale, with the question topic remaining the same (e.g. "'*sex offenders*' never change" being replaced with "'*female sex offenders*' never change"), in order to explore respondents' attitudes towards different groups of individuals who sexually offend, such as females (Gakhal & Brown, 2011) and juveniles (Harper, 2012). Table 2 provides an overview of the published studies that have used the ATS with a range of different populations.

Table 2

Published Studies Using the ATS Broken Down by Sample Populations

Sample population	Authors
Police officers	Hogue and Peebles (1997)
	Johnson et al. (2007)
	Lea et al. (1999)
	Hogue (1993)
Psychologists	Ferguson and Ireland (2006)
	Hogue (1993)
	Hogue (1994)

	Higgins and Ireland (2009)
	Lea et al. (1999)
	Radley (2011)
	Sanghara and Wilson (2006)
Probation officers	Craig (2005)
	Ferguson and Ireland (2006)
	Gakhal and Brown (2011)
	Hogue (1994)
	Hogue and Peebles (1997)
	Higgins and Ireland (2009)
	Lea et al. (1999)
	Radley (2011)
	Sanghara and Wilson (2006)
Prison officers	Ferguson and Ireland (2006)
	Hogue (1993)
	Hogue (1994)
	Higgins and Ireland (2009)
	Lea et al. (1999)
	Radley (2011)
	Sanghara and Wilson (2006)
Prison staff (e.g. administrative staff,	Ferguson and Ireland (2006)
education staff)	Hogue (1994)
	Higgins and Ireland (2009)
	Kjelsberg and Loos (2008)

	Sanghara and Wilson (2006)
Social workers	Hogue and Peebles (1997)
Professionals in secure care	Challinor (2015)
Hostel workers	Craig (2005)
Mental health workers	Hogue and Peebles (1997)
	Nelson et al. (2002)
	Sanghara and Wilson (2006)
General public	Challinor (2015)
	Gakhal and Brown (2011)
	Higgins and Ireland (2009)
	Johnson et al. (2007)
Students	Ferguson and Ireland (2006)
	Gakhal and Brown (2011)
	Kjelsberg and Loos (2008)

In the original study by Hogue (1993), police officers were found to have the most negative attitudes towards those who sexually offend, with professionals who have frequent interactions with sexual offenders presenting with more positive attitudes than sample populations with less frequent interactions with those who sexually offend. This effect has been replicated by studies using Hogue's (1993) ATS as an attitudinal scale (e.g. Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Ferguson & Ireland, 2006; Hogue & Peebles, 1997; Radley, 2011).

Scale Development

The ATS was adapted from the Attitude Towards Prisoner Scale (ATP) (Melvin et al., 1985). Hogue (1993) adapted the ATP by substituting *'prisoners'* with *'sex offenders'*. It was

suggested that measuring attitudes towards prisoners as a homogenous group was important, as positive attitudes have the potential to influence regime adherence, treatment efficacy in clients, and risk judgements in professionals. However, it is known that attitudes towards some subgroups of prisoners are less favourable than others, such as those who sexually offend, who are often ostracised and considered part of the out-group in the prison and general population (Akerstrom, 1986). Hogue (1993) developed the ATS as he recognised that attitudes towards this subgroup were not likely to be reflected in general attitudes towards prisoners. This hypothesis was rationalised by anecdotal evidence that suggested that those with positive attitudes towards prisoners more broadly have negative attitudes towards those who sexually offend.

The first validation of the ATS was undertaken by Hogue (1993). The sample population comprised 33 police officers, 21 prison officers not involved in treatment, 50 prison officers involved in treatment, 32 probation officers/prison psychologists, and 28 individuals convicted of sexual offences. It was expected that the ATS would produce a general pattern of scores similar to those produced by the ATP, and the pattern of scores previously reported in research (i.e. prison officers having the most negative attitudes and probation officers/psychologist having the most positive attitudes). The ATP and ATS were completed by participants sequentially, with the ATP presented first. Hogue (1993) reported that results on the ATS were as expected, as they reflected results of the ATP, with police officers having the most negative attitudes, followed by prison officers not involved in treatment. Prison officers who were involved in treatment were next, and then probation officers/psychologists. Individuals convicted of sexual offences had the most positive attitudes. Consequently, Hogue (1993) concluded that the ATS was a valid measure for measuring attitudes towards sexual offenders (see p. 23). It is important to note that order

effects can impact on internal validity (Howitt & Cramer, 2007), occurring when participants become fatigued, uninterested, or less motivated. In this case, due to merely replacing the label of *'prisoner'* with *'sex offender'*, the items may have been too similar. Consequently, participants could have been aware of how they responded to the ATP and replicated this pattern of responding on the ATS. This is known as a carryover effect, whereby the effects of one trial, in this instance the ATP scale, carry over to another (Howitt & Cramer, 2007).

Administration and Scoring

Respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement for each of the 36 items on a 5-point Likert scale, with 0 representing 'strongly disagree' and 4 representing 'strongly agree'. Administration takes approximately 10 minutes. Upon completion, the ATS is scored by calculating the total score of all items (19 items are reverse-scored). A constant of 36 is removed to make the possible scale score range between 0-144, with higher scores being reflective of more positive attitudes.

A criticism noted by Harper and Hogue (2019) is that some studies (e.g. Johnson et al., 2007; Radley, 2011; Sanghara & Willson, 2006) either do or do not make it clear if the constant of 36 has been subtracted, resulting in inflated scores, and thereby inaccurately depicting more positive attitudes. Furthermore, Harper and Hogue (2019) highlight that Kleban and Jeglic (2012) scored the ATS wrongly, as they reported that lower scores were indicative of more positive attitudes. However, it is the case that lower scores represent more negative attitudes. As such, this demonstrates the potential for inaccurate scoring across studies using the ATS.

As noted, the scores on the ATS range between 0-144, meaning that a score of 72 would reflect attitudes that neither agree nor disagree. This is important to consider when interpreting scores. It appears that some studies using the ATS have reported scores around

the mid-point (e.g. 72.54 (Hogue & Peebles, 1997); 74 (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008); 76.44 (Craig, 2005), with authors interpreting these as reflecting negative attitudes. However, it would be more accurate to conclude that these scores represent neither negative nor positive attitudes. Studies that report that lower scores were indicative of more negative attitudes may therefore not actually represent negative attitudes.

Characteristics of the Psychometric Measure

Kline (1986) reports that a psychological test is good if it fulfils several criteria, namely: being reliable, having validity, at least measured on an interval scale, and having good norms or be tailored to subjects. The following section will therefore explore the extent to which the ATS (Hogue, 1993) meets these properties.

Type of Scale

The ATS (Hogue, 1993) is measured at the interval level, with the scale points representing equal differences/distances. There is no true zero point, even though 0 is a possible response – it attributes strong disagreement and not complete absence. Kline (1986) argues that ratio level data is optimal in psychometric tests. However, interval level data is reportedly sufficient for analysing responses (Field, 2009).

Likert scales have been noted to be vulnerable to biases. This includes central tendency bias (Subedi, 2016), where the respondent avoids making extreme responses. Consequently, responses lie within the middle of the scale resulting in more extreme responses, or attitudes, being lost from the data. Thus, results would not accurately reflect true responses to attitudinal statements. However, this may not be apparent in all studies, as some report a range of higher and lower scores, demonstrated by the range of mean scores reported (e.g. 17-118; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). However, it is also difficult to disentangle the

variation in scores across studies as ranges are not always presented, and nor are individual scores. In light of this, it is problematic that studies do not report on this.

Another bias is social desirability (Subedi, 2016), where respondents minimise undesirable views and respond in a way that is perceived to be more desirable. This is an important consideration in the area of attitudinal measurements, as social desirability can impact on validity in two ways: (i) not gaining factual information and thus not being a true reflection of attitudes; and (ii) discriminant validity is impacted as the scale will correlate too highly with social desirability in turn limiting the strength of the correlation (Streiner & Norman, 2008). This could explain the general pattern of findings where attitudes in those who work in a rehabilitative or therapeutic capacity are found to hold less negative attitudes compared to those who do not (see p. 15). However, this is not demonstrated explicitly within studies.

Self-Report

Like all self-report measures, the ATS (Hogue, 1993) relies upon a number of assumptions in respect of the respondent: (i) they have self-knowledge about their attitudes; (ii) they can make a reliable observation about themselves, which remains consistent over time and place; and (iii) they will be open and answer truthfully (Chan, 2009). Paulhus and Vazire (2007) note that there are constraints to self-knowledge in respondents. It is argued that when responding, the self-assessor can overlook self-knowledge as information may be unavailable or ignored. This is due to the inability to recall all information in relation to the question being asked, or introspection being overwhelming as a result of the amount of information (Dunning et al., 2005). As such, the ATS is likely to be vulnerable to constraints in self-knowledge.

The ATS has been used with a range of populations. It is possible that under some circumstances, there may be a response bias. Chan (2009) posits that some constructs are not susceptible to desirable responding. Those that are of low susceptibility are thought to be demographics or those that can be verified. However, high stakes constructs, such as disclosing punitive attitudes in occupations where this will be undesirable (e.g. therapeutic roles), may elicit a response style in the direction of overly positive responding (i.e. socially desirability).

The ATS uses clear and direct statements to measure attitudes, ensuring that items are accessible and understood (Streiner & Norman, 2008). However, in some situations (e.g. working in a therapeutic capacity), there may be insight into how endorsing the attitude may be overly harsh or contradictory to therapeutic models. This could influence the respondent to purposefully responding in one direction or another – overly positive or negative. One way this may be negated is through the anonymity of responses. Whilst impression management may be present in all contexts, it is more likely to occur when the ATS is being used as an outcome measure. However, the ATS is a multi-item composite, which is argued to make it easier to control certain response styles, as there are multiple items assessing each construct. This is noted to, at times, make it less ambiguous as to what is being assessed. Conversely, it is also reported that respondents attempt to make sense of what is being assessed and their interpretations gain more confidence with more items (Paulhus & Vaazire, 2007). Taking this into account, along with the transparency of items, it is likely that respondents will be able to work out the constructs under assessment.

The weaknesses of self-report measures have not been accounted for in the ATS. Embedding reliability and validity indices within the battery of questions may overcome this

(e.g. scales used to identify a faking good or faking bad profile). This would allow for patterns in responding to be identified, and recognition of defensive and guarded responding.

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with measuring random and systematic errors in the measure (Streiner & Norman, 2008). The adequacy of the scale is determined based on how free it is from error. Kline (1986) reports that without good reliability, a test cannot have validity. Two common indicators of error are test re-test reliability and internal consistency.

Test Re-Test Reliability

Test re-test reliability is assessed when administering the same scale to the same set of participants at two different points. Responses are correlated between the two points and the calculation gives a reliability co-efficient. The higher the reliability coefficient the more reliable the scale. A coefficient of .7 is considered acceptable Kline, 1986).

Whilst the ATS (Hogue, 1993) was not designed to be administered at two points, it has been used as an outcome measure to assess change in attitudes over time. Craig (2005) and Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) administered the ATS before and after a two-day workshop, and both reported no significant differences in test scores indicating test-retest reliability and/or stable attitudes despite an intervention. Kjeslberg and Loos (2008) reported that mean ATS pre-scores for prison officers were 83 and mean post-scores were 84 (out of 144). Similarly, Craig (2005) reported mean ATS pre-scores of 76.44 and mean post-scores of 76.05. In contrast, Hogue (1994), who later argued that the ATS should not be used as a pre- and post-measure (Hogue, 2015), reported higher ATS scores following a three-week training course for facilitators in British prisons (81.98 vs. 86.91). Temporal length of programmes was suggested to explain the inconsistency between Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) and Craig's (2005) results with Hogue's (1994).

There does not appear to be any reported information on the ATS's test re-test reliability correlations. Studies referring to test re-test reliability scores (e.g. Higgins & Ireland, 2009) report Melvin et al.'s (1985) original ATP test re-test reliability of $r = .82$, which is in relation to attitude change towards prisoners. The ATP is a different scale to the ATS as it has been amended. Consequently, the stability of the ATS may differ.

Currently, the test-retest reliability of the ATS is unclear and research is needed to determine this. Replication with different samples would also be encouraged, as literature has found fluctuations of attitudes across samples (e.g. Hogue, 1993). As Hogue (1994) reported different scores on the ATS after training it may be that attitudes towards sex offenders are malleable under certain conditions.

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency refers to the extent to which items on the scale measure the same construct. It is typically measured using Cronbach's alpha (α), a statistic reflecting the average correlation of items. Cronbach's alpha scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores being indicative of greater reliability. The minimum cut off score for a scale to have internal consistency is *.7* (Kline, 2000).

The ATS (Hogue, 1993) reportedly has good levels of internal consistency, ranging between *.86* and *.95*. Craig (2005) reported a score of $\alpha = .86$ with a sample of 63 male and female hostel workers and 11 probation officers in the UK. Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) reported the same score ($\alpha = .86$) with a college student sample ($n = 412$), comprising those studying engineering, teaching, and art, and an additional sample of prison employees (pre-training $n = 105$; post-training $n = 90$) in Oslo. Kleban and Jeglic (2012) reported higher Cronbach's alpha scores ($\alpha = .91$ and $.94$) within their sample of male and female students taking introductory psychology classes. Similarly, Ferguson and Ireland (2006) reported a

score of α = *.95* in a sample of students and professionals working in a forensic setting. Hogue and Harper (2019) reported a score of α = *.94* using a general population sample. Finally, Higgins and Ireland (2009) adjusted the ATS to focus on attitudes towards females who sexually offend and reported a score of α = *.93* in a sample of probation staff and students. All studies reporting on the internal consistency of the ATS suggest that it has high internal consistency, all exceeding the minimum cut off score of *.7*. Consequently, it would suggest that all items on the ATS measure the same construct.

Whilst the scores reported suggest high reliability, Kline (2015) notes that this can preclude validity as items can be too specific. Termed 'bloated specifics' by Cattell (1982), reliability scores are inflated when items are too narrow, meaning validity is low (Kline, 2015). This should be considered with the ATS, as the potential low validity could mean that attitudes towards sex offenders may not be measured sufficiently, thus limiting the scale's efficacy.

The available information, taken from published studies, suggests that the ATS adequately meets the reliability criteria of internal consistency. However, there is no reported evidence to assess its test re-test reliability. As such, it is not possible to determine if it meets all the criteria that Kline (1986) identifies as being characteristic of a good psychometric test.

Validity

Test validity refers to whether the test measures what it intends to measure. Consequently, it is a further criterion for determining good psychometric properties (Kline, 1999). The different ways of determining the validity of the ATS (Hogue, 1993) will be explored.

Face Validity

Face validity assesses if the test appears to measure what it claims to measure. This is a subjective assessment as there is no statistical analysis to determine this. Face validity is useful as it promotes test completion in the respondent with having questions that are relevant to what the test claims it is measuring (Kline, 2015). As previously mentioned, the ATS uses transparent and direct statements, such as *"sex offenders never change"* and *"sex offenders are different to most people"*. Consequently, it seems that the ATS has strong face validity.

Concurrent Validity

Concurrent validity is a test to measure how well a new test compares with a well-established test. It is established by correlating results of the new measure (the ATS; Hogue, 1993) and another which is designed to measure a similar construct (the ATP; Melvin et al., 1985). The same group of participants needs to be used, with both tests administered at the same time (Kline, 1986).

When Hogue (1993) developed the ATS, he reported that it was a valid attitudinal test. It seems that he was basing this on the ATS having concurrent validity. This was assessed when he administered the ATP and the newly developed ATS consecutively to the same 164 participants, and found a similar pattern of scores. However, to determine concurrent validity, a correlation coefficient calculation is needed. Exploring this would require specifically testing the concurrent validity by calculating the correlation co-efficient between the ATP and ATS. Determining concurrent validity was therefore not possible as there is limited research reporting on this, and the appropriate data is not available. It is also of note that these types of validity tests should be carried out by other researchers, in addition to the test author.

Predictive Validity

The ATS (Hogue, 1993) would meet the criterion of predictive validity if it was able to predict future behaviours that relate to having negative or more favourable attitudes toward

sexual offenders. Howitt and Cramer (2011) note that many psychological tests are not designed to be predictive measures. This would apply to the ATS, as it does not attempt to make predictions based on outcomes. Nevertheless, if a test that was not designed to predict events has predictive validity it is considered a bonus.

Some researchers have used scores on the ATS to predict behaviours and decisions. For example, Hogue (2015) reported a negative correlation between ATS scores and risk judgements (r = -.*32*) in forensic professionals. Hogue and Peebles (1997) reported that recommendations for prison sentences are negatively correlated with ATS scores (r = *.44*). Their sample comprised forensic professionals and individuals who had been victims of sexual violence. This suggests that the ATS may have utility in predicting harsh decision making. However, to provide further evidence of predictive validity in the ATS, more research is needed.

Content Validity

Content validity is concerned with the test being able to measure all aspects of the construct that it was designed to measure (Kline, 1993). Typically, a domain specification is created, and content validity will be judged using a rating scale. Those determined as being weakly related to the construct will not form an item on the test. However, the ATS (Hogue, 1993) was developed by simply changing the wording of the ATP (Melvin et al., 1985) without reviewing the items. This has led to criticism with some researchers arguing that the ATS had not been validated correctly or designed to specifically measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend (Church et al., 2008; Wnuk et al., 2006). We know that offenders are not a homogenous group. As such, concepts in relation to attitudes toward sexual offenders are likely to differ from those that measure attitudes towards offenders.

Consequently, facets may be overlooked, such as gender-specific attitudes or specific offence-related attitudes. On this basis, it does not appear that the ATS has good content validity.

Construct Validity

Construct validity is concerned with how well the test measures the construct. Construct validity is measured against theoretical hypotheses in relation to the variable in its entirety. Therefore, all that is known about the variable is considered. Pallant (2013) reports that construct validity is determined by exploring the relationship with unrelated constructs (e.g. discriminant validity), where the relationship should be weak. In contrast, related constructs (e.g. convergent validity) should have a strong relationship.

Harper et al. (2017) report that the ATS (Hogue, 1993) has good construct validity as it measures the construct of attitudes using theoretical knowledge of what comprises an attitude. Namely, Breckler's (1984) three components of an attitude (cognition, affect, and behaviour) are met.

Hogue and Harper (2019) sought to develop a shorter ATS scale and revalidate the ATS. This was facilitated through examining the factor structure of the original 36-item ATS using principle component analysis. This procedure transforms variables into distinct sets of principal components, meaning variables are not correlated with other sets. The analysis revealed that the ATS has three factors whose eigenvalues exceeded the 95th percentile, which is the threshold of distinctiveness between sets. The question content was then examined to determine the focus of the factors. This led to the factors being named (i) trust, (ii) intent, and (iii) social distance. It was reported that the cumulative variance in ATS scores was 45.65%. This means that there is considerable random error in the measure (54.35%) accounting for ATS scores, suggesting that there are poorly loaded items that may not be performing as

predicted. Consequently, they may not be measuring the construct and have low construct validity.

In respect of discriminant validity, Harper and Hogue (2019) report that attitudes are distinct from perceptions and stereotype judgements of sexual offenders, as the constructs are conceptualised differently. The broader literature supports this, noting that perceptions and attitudes are discrete constructs (Pickens, 2005). It is argued that attitudinal judgements rely on affective evaluations, whereas knowledge-based evaluations are required for stereotype and perception judgements (Harper & Hogue, 2015). Harper and Hogue (2015) administered various attitude, perception, and stereotype endorsement scales to a general population sample (n = 400). They did not administer the original 36-item ATS, instead administering the ATS-21, which is a shorter version of the ATS. They found that the scales correlated significantly with each other, with the highest correlation being between the ATS-21 and the scale they developed to measure perceptions (PSO) ($r = -.84$). The authors then report that this demonstrates that generalised attitudes towards sexual offenders and perceptions of risk and stereotype endorsement are linked. Subsequently, they suggested that it is not possible to discriminate between attitudes and perceptions. Although the ATS-21 is derived from the ATS, it is not the same scale. As such, validation attempts using the ATS-21 may differ from the ATS. Whilst the ATS-21 may correlate with other similar scales, this would have to be tested separately for the ATS. Overall, this suggests that the ATS does not fully meet the criterion of discriminant validity.

Appropriate Norms

The final criterion is concerned with the test having good norms (Kline, 1986). This allows test-taker scores to be compared to a subgroup of the population in order to meaningfully determine performance. The ATS (Hogue, 1993) does not meet this criterion.

However, this is not problematic as the ATS was not developed to be a diagnostic test. It is therefore not necessary for there to be standardised scores to allow for the interpretation of the test-takers score against a normed group (Kline, 1986). Kline (1986) reports that in tests of individual differences, such as the ATS, norms are not useful, and that in these instances raw test scores are enough. As such, although the ATS has not been standardised, it can be argued that this criterion is less important when considering the robustness of the measure.

Limitations of the ATS

Following a review of the ATS's (Hogue, 1993) psychometric properties, there is some evidence to suggest that it fulfils criteria of a good psychometric test. Kline's (1986) criteria was used when reviewing the ATS, and this determines that a good test will be measured at the interval level, be reliable, be valid, and have appropriate norms. The ATS fulfils some criteria of reliability and validity, and is measured on an interval scale.

Some have argued that the ATS was not developed to measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend, subsequently criticising it as a valid measure (Wnuk et al., 2006; Church et al, 2008). Consequently, scales have been developed and authors have used tests of reliability and validity with the aim of producing a valid and reliable scale that has been specifically designed to measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend (e.g. The CATSO (Church et al., 2008). The critique presents some support for these claims. Particularly concerning is the way the ATS was developed, which highlights the potentially deficient content validity. Replacing the words to develop a new scale may cause oversight of items that would allow for analysis of this. There was no review process for items, and later research highlights that some items were poorly loaded (Hogue & Harper, 2019).

A further limitation is that no analysis of validity or reliability was really undertaken when Hogue (1993) developed the ATS. Additionally, since its development, there is limited

information published by researchers to allow for an examination of this. This has been problematic for the critique, as some criteria had insufficient information to be able to determine if the ATS meets the psychometric property (i.e. predictive validity and construct validity). Many researchers report statistics and validity information for the ATP in their research. However, the ATS is a different scale. Slaney et al. (2009) argues that good practice involves researchers establishing psychometric properties for the psychometrics they use in their research. Therefore, it would be advisable for researchers to further assess the psychometric properties of the ATS in respect of validity and reliability.

The ATS has not been used widely across a range of different populations. Whilst there is some published research utilising the ATS with general population samples (Higgins & Ireland, 2009), it is mostly used with professionals working in a forensic setting, who are typically found to have less punitive attitudes than other groups (Craig, 2005; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Higgins & Ireland, 2009; Hogue, 1993; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). Some researchers have used students (Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Kleban & Jeglic, 2012), however, students do not reflect the diverse characteristics of the general population. Using the ATS even more widely would therefore provide further insights into attitudinal differences across a range of different populations, beyond professional groups.

Furthermore, the ATS has only been used in western countries (i.e. United Kingdom, America). Attitudes are formed across the lifetime, and are influenced by factors such as cultural beliefs and religion (Pickens, 2005). For example, it is recognised that more punitive and negative attitudes can be reinforced at the societal and cultural level in relation to violence and rape myth acceptance (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). We know that some societies support marriage in children under 16 years, so there are likely going to be different views of those who engage in sexual acts with those under 16 years. Additionally, rape is more

common in some countries, such as South Africa, which was labelled the rape capital of the world (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002), or the phenomenon of war rape, where rates of rape are inflated in some countries experiencing conflict as it is used as a weapon (Wood, 2018). The differences in attitudes across different countries and cultures highlights the need for more research with diverse samples to explore attitudes towards those who sexually offend. The language used as part of the original ATS would not limit its use cross-culturally – using it cross-culturally (beyond the Western cultures it has been applied to so far) is therefore encouraged, and would only add to the scale's reliability and validity testing.

Conclusion

The review has highlighted validity and reliability criteria that the ATS (Hogue, 1993) performs poorly in (content validity), or does not have enough information to be able to determine if it meets the criterion (test re-test reliability, concurrent validity, and some areas of construct validity, namely discriminant validity). However, in respect of test re-test reliability, despite Hogue using the tool as an outcome measure in 1994, he reported in 2015 that the ATS was not conceptually designed for use in this way. The ATS appears to have tentative support for predictive validity. However, further research and replication is needed to strengthen this. The ATS appears to meet some criteria of a good psychometric test, specifically high internal consistency and face validity. However, as mentioned, there are limitations with this; namely, bloated specifics and demand characteristics respectively. The ATS has not been standardised, however, it was not designed as a diagnostic tool. Subsequently, this should not be viewed as a weakness. The ATS also meets the minimum level of measurement (i.e. interval).

Overall, the ATS appears to be a reliable measure, but does not adequately meet validity criteria, thus, requiring further empirical assessment of its psychometric properties.

This means that studies measuring attitudes towards those who sexually offend should employ analysis of the ATS in an attempt to validate the measure. Also, they should draw upon items from the ATS and other attitudinal scales, which have been subject to greater validity testing (i.e. PSO and CATSO).

Chapter 3:

Empirical Research

Attitudes Towards and Perceptions of Females Who Sexually Offend Against Children:

A Comparison Between Students and Professionals

Abstract

This study explores attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, and compares these between a sample of students and a sample of professionals who work with females in a therapeutic capacity. It aims to build upon the limited literature in this area by utilising a qualitative methodology to shed light on the underlying qualities of attitudes and perceptions. Ten students, who had not previously studied theories of sexual offending or the management of child sexual offenders, and ten professionals, who work with females in a therapeutic capacity, took part in semi-structured interviews which were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Four themes were identified, namely the 'facilitating role of women in society', 'why women offend', 'what should happen to women who offend', and 'factors impacting on attitudes and perceptions'. There was a tendency to minimise female sexual offending in terms of its perpetration, the context of offending, and the level of harm caused, with females generally being viewed more positively than male sexual offenders. Similarities across the two samples were revealed in terms of perceptions around why women offend, with key differences being noted in terms of attitudes towards what should happen to women who offend – student participants endorsed a much more punitive approach to offender management, whereas professional participants endorsed a more responsive and therapeutic approach. All participants identified factors they felt influenced their attitudes and perceptions, ranging from media exposure to personal and/or professional contexts. Findings will be discussed in relation to theoretical and practical implications, as well as directions for future research.

Introduction

Research exploring attitudes towards and perceptions of individuals who commit sexual offences has primarily focused on males, with few studies focusing specifically on female offenders. One explanation may be that existing scales that measure attitudes towards and perceptions of those who sexually offend depict a male offender, often using male pronouns. As such, when gender is not specified, Gakhal and Brown (2011) argue that one is likely to assume that the offender is male. This is suggested to be due to gender stereotypes in the context of offending, with those who are not experienced in working with sexual offenders more readily adopting the scenario of a male perpetrator and a female victim (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). Whilst Gakhal and Brown (2011) acknowledge that most sexual offending is accounted for by males, they raise the question as to whether sexual offences committed by females are rare or merely underreported. For example, recent statistics based upon official reports suggest prevalence rates of between 1.7%-12%, whereas prevalence rates based upon victimisation surveys range between 1.5%-26%, highlighting the variation in offences reported to the police, and those that may go undetected. However, it is important to note that prevalence rates are still likely to be higher, as many victims may not respond to victimisation surveys. According to Tozdan et al. (2019), victims of female-perpetrated child sexual abuse typically know their offender, who is often their caregiver, such as their mother, another relative, or babysitter.

What is known from studies that explore attitudes towards those who sexually offend, where there is an assumption of a male offender, is that they are viewed more negatively and regarded as morally inept, dangerous, and harmful (Weekes et al., 1995). However, the nature of such studies group those who sexually offend collectively where, in addition to gender, the offence type is not stipulated or defined. One criticism of this is that it communicates the

assumption that individuals who commit sexual offences are a homogenous group. Federoff and Moran (1997) argue that it is the heterogeneity of those who commit sexual offences that accounts for conflicting findings between studies. Furthermore, a study by Weekes et al. (1995) found that attitudes towards those who commit sexual offences against children are viewed even less favourably than sexual offenders overall, suggesting offence type is an important factor when considering attitudes and perceptions.

Attitudes Towards Individuals Who Sexually Offend

Studies exploring attitudes towards individuals who sexually offend have primarily adopted a quantitative design, using the Attitude Towards Sex Offender Scale (ATS) (Hogue, 1993), and focusing primarily upon assessing attitudes in forensic professionals (e.g. prison officers, police officers, probation officers and psychologists). However, studies have also explored attitudes in student and general public samples. In Hogue's (1993) original study, where attitudes towards those who sexually offend were assessed in different criminal justice professions, he found that police officers presented with the most punitive attitudes, followed by prison officers who are not involved in delivering treatment interventions, and those who are. These were followed by probation officers, with the most favourable attitudes held by prison psychologists. This effect has been replicated by various studies, with those working with individuals who have committed sexual offences holding more positive attitudes (Blagden et al., 2014; Hogue & Peebles, 1997). This is likely explained by those working with sexual offenders in a more therapeutic capacity having more of an awareness and understanding around pathways to offending. Studies have also examined attitudes towards individuals who sexually offend between lay people and professionals who work with this population. These studies highlight that the general public typically have more negative attitudes towards individuals who sexually offend when compared with students, and

professionals working with sexual offenders present with the most favourable attitudes (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006).

Gakhal and Brown (2011) adapted the ATS by substituting the label of *'sex offender'* with *'female sex offender'* in order to explore attitudes towards this population in the general public, students and probation officers. They found that professionals held more positive attitudes than students and the general public. However, they also identified a gender effect, whereby probation officers in their sample held more positive attitudes towards females who sexually offend in comparison to professional groups in Hogue's (1993) sample (i.e. police officers, prison officers involved and not involved in treatment, and probation officers/psychologists), where gender was not specified. Whilst this provided insights into the effect of gender, it did not make distinctions between the types of sexual offences committed by females.

Differences in Attitudes Towards Male and Female Offenders

Attitudes towards and perceptions of females who have committed sexual offences are more likely to be positive, given the idea that female offending is foreign and does not exist, which can partly be explained by a lack of knowledge (Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). The general public therefore endorses gender stereotypes and consequently minimises sexual offences against children by females. Furthermore, sexual offences committed by females are considered less harmful and, at times, are even glorified when involving underage male victims (Hetherton, 1999). However, in contrast to this is the 'double deviance hypothesis' proposed by Gakhal and Brown (2011), which suggests that female offending is viewed more negatively given that it is so incomprehensible to most people for a woman to offend, often evoking a much greater emotional response.

In the few studies that have explored the effect of gender on attitudes and perceptions, biases have been noted. Hetherton and Beardsall (1998) explored different professionals' decision-making in child protection cases, and their attitudes towards males and females who committed sexual offences against children. They found that both police officers and social workers believed that case registration and prison sentences, in hypothetical child protection cases, were more appropriate for males. The authors of the study suggest that this was due to females not being considered as serious as males. Furthermore, when Denov (2001) explored how professionals understood and framed sexual offences committed by females, they found that police officers and psychiatrists minimised the seriousness of such offences (in comparison to those committed by males), regarding them as less harmful, and suggesting that there was no malicious intent in their offending. A female who had offended sexually was also framed as not being a threat to society. In contrast, Higgins and Ireland (2009) found no differences in attitudes towards males and females who had committed sexual offences between forensic staff, prison officers and members of the public.

Despite differences in perceptions, research that has explored the long-term effects on victims who have suffered sexual abuse notes similar traumatic consequences for victims of male offenders and female offenders, including self-harm, relationship problems and depression (Denov, 2004). Furthermore, the minimisation of offending by females does not consider the greater impact on the victim's ability to trust women and form female-to-female friendships, as well as increased feelings of shame when the abuse has been committed by their mother (Peter, 2008). For example, one female victim in the Peter (2008) study noted that abuse by her father would have been easier to deal with, given the increased sense of betrayal following the abuse she had suffered at the hands of her mother. In addition, experiences post-offence may further contribute to psychological suffering due to victims of

female-perpetrated sexual abuse often not being believed (Hetherton, 1999), or the abuse being attributed to victims misinterpreting behaviours (Denov, 2004).

Explanations for Differences in Attitudes

Sexual offending by females is hard to comprehend as it goes against perceived gender roles in society, whereby females are assumed to be nurturing, caring, and have a motherly role. Consequently, people have difficulty understanding how women can perpetrate such offences, as it contrasts with the perceived incapability of women to act in this way (Denov, 2004). This creates dissonance and can lead to cognitive strategies to reduce this uncomfortable feeling, such as denial or attempting to rationalise and minimise offences (Denov, 2004). Gakhal and Brown (2011) further suggest that females who offend sexually can evoke an effect of 'double deviance'. This is explained through the offence being counter-stereotypical of females, and therefore elicits greater deviance than when a male commits a sexual offence. As such, attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend may either be more positive or overly harsh.

Other mediating factors have been proposed to explain the attitudinal differences between populations. For example, according to Gakhal and Brown (2011), the 'contact hypothesis' has been noted as influential, whereby experience of working with those who sexually offend promotes more favourable attitudes. However, in their study exploring attitudes towards females who sexually offend, their findings did not support this, as although professionals had more favourable attitudes than students, students had more favourable attitudes than the public. They argued that it is unlikely that students had contact with those who sexually offend which would suggest the presence of other mediating factors. Kjelsberg and Loo's (2008) study also noted that prison officers tended to have the most negative attitudes (Hogue, 1993; Hogue & Peebles, 1997), and it is therefore possible that working

with individuals who sexually offend on a day-to-day basis has an influential role in the opposite direction.

In relation to students who are found to have less hostile attitudes than the general public (e.g. Gakhal & Brown, 2011), Harper and Hogue (2015) suggest that a higher level of educational attainment may mediate more favourable attitudes. This is further supported by Willis et al. (2010) and Gakhal and Brown (2011) as a way of explaining differences in attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, Gakhal and Brown (2011) hypothesised that those with more positive views may be attracted to subjects such as psychology and professional roles that involve working with this population. If so, psychology students, who have been used in most studies in this area, are not representative of the wider student population, given the evidence that suggests that they are likely to hold fewer hostile attitudes (Gakhal & Brown, 2011). However, Harper (2012) found comparative attitudes between psychology and non-psychology students, suggesting that something other than education plays a mediating role, and knowledge in the area of forensic psychology is not enough to challenge stereotypes held at the societal level. He concluded that access and exposure to the national media may be partly responsible.

Media effects are implicated in influencing attitudes and perceptions as media sources are renowned for sensationalised headlines, stories and emotive language. Consequently, the general public is exposed to inaccuracies due to how this population is portrayed (Malinen et al., 2014), where there is often the focus upon more violent offences with multiple victims, which are actually less common (Chiet et al., 2003). Such inaccuracies are posited to influence and perpetuate ill-informed attitudes towards and perceptions of individuals who sexually offend when there is a reliance upon this to inform understanding. This is especially concerning given that students have been found to believe that the media presents accurate

and unbiased accounts (Corabian, 2012). In contrast, professionals, who work with sexual offenders, were found to hold opposing views, recognising that the media often portrays offenders in an overly negative light. Consequently, media biases and demonisations of those who sexually offend will be endorsed by lay people as they are unlikely to challenge how this population is portrayed.

Impact of Attitudes and Perceptions

Attitudes hold cognitive and affective attributions which can inform behaviour directed towards individuals who sexually offend/have sexually offended (Harper et al., 2017). Such behaviour may create barriers in the form of refusal to accept them re-entering and -integrating back into society (Willis et al., 2010). However, again, there appear to be differences depending on the gender of the individual in question. Gakhal and Brown (2011) suggest that in comparison to males, females who committed sexual offences in the past can reintegrate into society more easily. The authors argued that this was due to attitudes towards females who sexually offend not being firmly established by society. As a result, attitudes are more malleable when compared to the more stable negative attitudes found towards males who sexually offend. It was even reported that one participant was doubtful of the existence of females who sexually offend. This demonstrates the effects of common stereotypical beliefs held towards this population in society.

More specifically, Brown (1999) found that the general public was likely to engage in discriminative behaviours towards individuals who had been convicted of sexual offences and rehabilitated to return into the community, including refusing them housing. However, at the same time, participants were reportedly supportive of rehabilitation for those who had served their sentence. Levenson and Cotter (2005) surveyed individuals convicted of sexual offences residing in the community to understand their experiences and found that 33% reported being

harassed, 27% lost employment and 33% were subject to vigilantism. Such experiences can have detrimental effects and were reported to evoke feelings of hopelessness in 72% of the sample, both in general and for the future. It further has the potential to affect self-efficacy in terms of behavioural change, which may explain why nearly 50% felt that there was no point in trying to change, given that others did not believe that change was possible. This is referred to as the behavioural confirmation effect (Snyder & Swann, 1978). What is important to note is that employment, housing and support are well-established protective factors that support desistance from offending, thereby reducing someone's risk of reoffending (De Vries et al., 2015). For society as a whole and/or communities to create difficulties in these areas for those who are reintegrating into the community is therefore associated with an increased risk of recidivism (Scoones et al., 2012; Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009; Willis & Johnston, 2012).

One explanation for discriminatory behaviours is fear of those who have committed sexual offences – it correlates with support for severe punishment including life in prison or castration (Comartin et al., 2009). Geddes et al. (2013) found that enhanced anger and demand for harsh consequences were reported in teacher-student scenarios where the teacher was male and the student was female (as opposed to a female teacher and a male student). Again, this suggests that there is a bias in favour of female offenders. This is important to consider when those who are prosecuted for committing sexual offences have their guilt decided by a jury, which comprises members of the general public.

The influence attitudes and perceptions have on decision-making is important as negative attitudes held by the public towards individuals who have committed sexual offences has contributed to current legislation perceived to protect the public, including restrictions upon movement (e.g. not living within a specific distance from schools, traveling abroad) and community notifications, where the general public can access information on those convicted

of sexual offences in close proximity to them (Levenson & Cotter, 2005b). The public are of the view that such legislation is positive and reduces risk. However, research has found no support for these strategies in reducing recidivism (Nobles et al., 2012; Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010; Zgoba et al., 2010). As such, the public may be unintentionally increasing the risk they wish to reduce through calling for the implementation of strategies that are predominantly informed by attitudes and perceptions (Willis, et al., 2010). Considering the power the general public have in calling for and shaping strategies perceived to reduce risk, it is of interest that the area of understanding and changing public attitudes and perceptions has been largely overlooked (Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Willis et al., 2010).

Discriminatory behaviours have not only been noted in the public. Consequently, attitudes and perceptions are important to consider in professionals who work with individuals who have committed sexual offences as they have an influential effect on their therapeutic relationship, which promotes treatment efficacy and behavioural change (Hogue, 1993). Much of the research has tended to focus on the effects of attitudes and perceptions held by professionals where, in summary, they are noted to elicit a more confrontational style in interactions, and are more punitive (Willis et al., 2010). Therapeutic relationships and interactional styles, where displays of empathy, emotional warmth and encouragement are given, are salient in promoting behavioural change (Serran et al., 2003; Willis et al., 2010).

The Present Study

The relationship between how attitudes and perceptions develop and what type of attitudes people hold is multifaceted. Research has shown that many factors are influential in the formation of attitudes towards and perceptions of those who sexually offend. This includes the offender's gender, the type of offence committed, and personal factors of the observer, such as education and employment. There appears to be a belief that sexual

offending committed by females is less severe and deserves less restrictive sanctions. However, it is currently not known if this effect extends to those who sexually offend against children. While differences in attitudes and perceptions have been highlighted across various populations, such as students and professionals who work with sexual offenders, to date, limited research has explored these differences from a qualitative perspective, with most studies employing a quantitative methodology.

The present study will therefore expand on the current literature by exploring the attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, an area that has been overlooked to date, by conducting qualitative interviews with students and professionals who work with this population in a therapeutic capacity. Comparing these two groups will facilitate a more in-depth exploration of the differences in attitudes and perceptions they hold. Students with no experience of studying this topic are likely to hold similar attitudes to those previously observed in the general public. As such, the exclusion of students with a psychology background (or any other background that taught them about sexual offending) sought to mitigate the more favourable attitudes found in this population. Consequently, gaps will be filled, and new insights may be gained. The present study therefore aims to:

1. Examine the attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children held by students and professionals;
2. Explore the perceived motivations for why females may offend sexually against children; and
3. Identify the factors perceived to impact on attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children.

Method

Ethical Approval

Full ethical approval for the study was granted by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham (Appendix A) on June 20, 2019 (ERN_18-19-0540). The researcher adhered to the British Psychological Society's (2018) Code of Ethics and Conduct throughout the study. Additional approval was granted by the Research and Development Group of a private mental health care provider.

Participants

A total of 20 participants took part in the study. The sample in the present study comprised two groups of participants, one being students (n = 10) and one being professionals who work with females with a history of offending behaviour (n = 10). Participants were male (n = 3) and female (n = 17) adults aged between 19 and 58 years (M = 30.05; SD = 12.03). In the student sample, participants were of various nationalities, including British (n = 4), Chinese (n = 2), Sri-Lankan (n =1), Arab (n =1), Filipino (n =1), and British Pakistani (n =1), and were studying across undergraduate and postgraduate level. In the professional sample, participants were British (n = 9) and British Asian (n = 1). The sample represented a range of professional groups: (i) case worker (n = 3), (ii) occupational therapist (n = 2), (iii) senior mental health worker (n = 1), (iv) forensic psychologist (n = 1), (v) trainee forensic psychologist (n = 1), (vi) assistant psychologist (n = 1), and (vii) trainee nursing associate (n = 1). Professionals were recruited from three charitable organisations. Minimal demographic information was collected for each participant in light of the sensitive nature of the topic area, and in order to ensure anonymity for the participants. All participants were allocated a

pseudonym using a name generator (see Table 1 for an overview of participant demographics across the two samples and Table 2 for an overview of the inclusion criteria).

Table 1

Demographic Information for Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Level of Education/Profession
Lin	23	Female	Chinese	Masters
Louise	19	Female	British	Undergraduate
Lorraine	24	Female	Sri-Lankan	Masters
Labib	42	Male	Arab	PhD
Lisa	19	Female	British	Undergraduate
Lee	19	Male	British	Undergraduate
Lan	19	Female	Chinese	Undergraduate
Laia	19	Female	British Pakistani	Undergraduate
Lindsay	20	Female	British	Undergraduate
Lea	24	Female	Filipino	Masters
Angela	51	Female	British	Case Worker
Abigail	32	Female	British	Case Worker
Amanda	58	Female	British	Senior Mental Health Worker
Andrea	37	Female	British	Psychologist
Adele	28	Female	British	Assistant Psychologist
Aran	30	Male	British Asian	Trainee Nursing Associate
Alison	51	Female	British	Case Worker
Alix	23	Female	British	Occupational Therapist
Anna	33	Female	British	Occupational Therapist
Amelia	30	Female	British	Trainee Forensic Psychologist

Table 2

Inclusion Criteria for Student and Professional Participants

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Students	
Aged 18 years or over	Due to the sensitive nature of the topic area, it was deemed important that participants were aged 18 years or over.
No previous study or research of theories of sexual offending or management of child sexual offenders	Research has suggested that attitudes of students studying related topics can be more favourable. As such, the decision was made to exclude potential participants who were studying related topics in the past or present.
Professionals	
Working with females with offending histories. This did not have to include child victims specifically.	Due to the limited number of females convicted of sexual offences in the UK, it was decided that broadening the criteria to include professionals working with females with any offending history would increase the potential pool of participants. This rationale also reflected the decision to allow anybody working with females in a therapeutic capacity to meet the criteria.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by means of opportunity sampling. In order to recruit students, posters designed to advertise the research were put up across various locations on the campus at the University (Appendix B). For the purpose of recruiting professionals, an email flyer (Appendix C) was sent to charitable organisations on the ForenPsyD's mailing list

of placement contacts by the academic supervisor. Additional charitable organisations were contacted via email by the researcher, of which two responded and gave approval for the researcher to recruit their professional staff. Contacts at charitable organisations were asked to distribute the flyer among their colleagues, as well as display the flyer in staff areas at their sites. Recruitment took place between September 2019 and March 2020.

Potential participants (both students and professionals) who expressed an interest in taking part in the study were sent a participant information sheet (Appendix D) by the researcher. Once participants confirmed that they were indeed interested in taking part, the researcher arranged an interview with them. Interviews with the student participants took place in relevant focus group rooms in the School of Psychology, and interviews with the professional participants took place in a quiet room at their workplace.

Prior to the interviews taking place, participants were reminded that participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and up to four weeks post-interview (without having to give a reason) by contacting the researcher via email and quoting their participant number. Participants were then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix E), confirming that they were happy for the interviews to be audio recorded, and for their data to be used as part of a write-up of the study's findings. Due to COVID-19, the four remaining interviews with professionals that had been scheduled to take place in person were subsequently conducted via telephone. In this case, participants were sent the consent form via email, and asked to return a signed copy to the researcher prior to the interview.

Prior to the interview commencing, participants were also asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F). The questionnaire aimed to capture information about participants' age, ethnicity, professional status, level of highest academic qualification,

the source they tend to obtain information from about world and local affairs, as well as the newspaper they usually read. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix G) which was used flexibly to guide discussions, rather than explicitly asking every single question. On completion of the interview, the researcher thanked the participants for taking the time to take part in the study, did a debrief to check that they were okay, and handed them a debrief sheet (Appendix H). The debrief sheet included information about helplines and support organisations in case participants were affected by the content of the interviews, as well as contact details for the research team.

Data Collection

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic area, an engagement period was initiated prior to asking any questions on the interview schedule to help put the participant at ease and build rapport. This focused on exploring what interested participants in taking part, if they had taken part in any research previously, and normalising potential feelings of anxiety around the research interview. The interview schedule was informed by aspects covered in the Attitude Towards Sex Offender Scale (Hogue, 1993) and the Perception of Sex Offender Scale (Harper & Hogue, 2015), such as potential characteristics of female offenders and their offences, severity of offences, factors that influence views of severity of offending behaviour, and appropriate sentencing and management. In addition, questions surrounding participants' understanding of child sexual offending perpetrated by females, potential motivations, views in relation to where they believe attitudes and perceptions are formed and influenced, and any attitudinal shifts in professionals, were included in order to explore these in more depth. Throughout, follow-up questions and prompts were used for the purpose of clarification and further exploration. The average duration of student interviews was 66 minutes (ranging from 44 – 80 minutes), and 52 minutes for professional interviews (ranging from 41 – 75 minutes).

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded using an encrypted Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim by the researcher using Microsoft Word. The transcripts were subsequently imported into NVivo (Version 12), a qualitative data analysis software programme, to facilitate the process of data analysis and management. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach to Thematic Analysis (Reflexive Thematic Analysis). Reflexive Thematic Analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2019) which is theoretically flexible and follows six steps to identifying patterns using a diligent process of familiarisation, coding, developing and revising themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process allows for the identification of similarities and differences across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), without being driven by a pre-existing framework.

In light of the limited literature around female child sexual offending, this approach was chosen in order to generate new knowledge and not be constrained by our current understanding of this topic (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive Thematic Analysis was therefore deemed to be the most appropriate and suitable approach to exploring perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Furthermore, King (2004) argues that Thematic Analysis can also enable exploration of different perspectives among participants, and allows for the emergence of insights that are unanticipated. Thematic Analysis is therefore compatible with a range of research questions, and aligns with various epistemologies (Nowell et al., 2017).The sample size of 20 participants was informed by Braun and Clarke (2013) who recommend that studies that explore perceptions should strike a balance between a sample size that is too large to capture the full range of perspectives present in the data set, and one that is not large enough to be overwhelmed with data. Furthermore, a sample size of between 15-30 participants is common for studies employing the approach of Thematic Analysis.

An inductive, bottom-up approach to analysis was employed, thereby facilitating the analysis to be data-driven (rather than guided by pre-existing knowledge and/or theory). Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher referred to the study's research questions as a way of guiding the analysis, and for the purpose of developing a coding framework. The analysis further followed the recursive, six-phased approach to Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Table 3 provides an overview of the six phases, including the steps and processes that were undertaken as part of each phase (information in italics highlights additional steps taken by the researcher). Data analysis of the student interviews and the professional interviews was completed separately. Following this process, themes were identified and developed across both data sets. Content that was not directly relevant to the research questions was coded but may not form part of the themes presented here.

Table 3

Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phased Approach to Thematic Analysis

Phase	Process
1. Familiarising self with the data	Immersing self into the data by reading and re-reading transcribed data. Making notes on the data is part of this phase. Items of potential interest will be highlighted, and the transcript will be annotated.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding at the sematic (close to participants' meanings) and latent (interpretation of the content) level. Coding of each data item will be completed entirely prior to coding the next item. Anything of potential relevance will be coded at this stage. An inclusive approach will be used, where a little text surrounding the data will also be coded. Coded data will be presented under nodes using Nvivo (version 12) to establish meaningful groups. Codes may be modified to include new material.

	See Appendix I for examples of the code book, detailing codes and extracts.
3. Searching for themes	The coded data will be reviewed for similarities between codes. Themes and subthemes will describe patterns in the data. *A miscellaneous theme will capture codes which do not appear to fit in identified themes.* The relationship between themes will be considered, so that an overall story of the data is developed which answers the research questions. A table outlining the themes will be constructed in a word document. This will collate data extracts that are of relevance to each theme.
4. Reviewing potential themes	This will be a recursive process which reviews developing themes from data codes and the data set. Quality checking is the main feature of this phase. Step 1: Checking of themes against data extracts will be an initial step; does the theme work in respect of the data? Boundaries of the theme may be amended, and codes may be discarded of. Asking myself is this a theme or a code? What is the quality of the theme? What are the boundaries of the theme? Is there enough data to support the theme? Is the theme coherent? Step 2: Reviewing the themes in relation to the data set. The data will undergo a final reread to establish if the themes capture the important aspects of the data set, and coherently answer the research questions. If not, the data will be reviewed to meet these needs.

5. Defining and naming themes	Define themes by succinctly stating what is specific about each theme and how they are distinct from one another. These will be presented in narratives in a word document. Themes should: have a singular focus; be related but distinct; not repeat but may build upon other themes; answer the research questions; amalgamate and provide a narrative of the data. *Data extracts will be analysed to set out the story of each theme. These will provide transparency of the analytical points being made by drawing upon multiple items within the theme. The narrative will demonstrate my interpretation of the data through a story (see Appendix J).*
6. Producing the report	The report will provide a convincing story about the data based upon the analysis. It will provide an argument which coherently answers the research questions. Themes will be logically presented to demonstrate how they connect.

Reliability / Rigour

The researcher's academic supervisor reviewed 10% of the coding that had been completed on the transcript of the first participant interview, providing feedback and offering suggestions for improvement on the practice of coding, with a particular focus on the development of descriptive labels, and these staying close to the data. Both coding frameworks, the one developed on the data derived from the student interviews, and the one developed on the data derived from the professional interviews, were also reviewed by the researcher's academic supervisor. Particular attention was paid to the descriptive labels of codes, the hierarchical organisation of the coding framework, as well as the data extracts

codes represented. Feedback was provided in the form of suggestions where codes may benefit from merging, and clarification was sought on how some aspects and/or elements were similar and/or different. The thematic structures developed on the basis of the student interviews and the professional interviews were reviewed collaboratively, and discussion centred around further developing the identified themes by clearly distinguishing between aspects and concepts that were apparent within the data sets.

Epistemological Position

The present study adopted a critical realist approach/standpoint. In accordance with this, it is recognised that as researchers we cannot 'know' a fixed reality, but that we can assume, and that assumptions are gained through understanding participants' perspectives. This epistemology posits that we can partially access external reality (i.e. participants' attitudes and perceptions) to produce knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Reflexivity

For the duration of the study, the researcher continuously engaged in reflection, and kept a reflective log with relevant notes for each participant. Reflections were noted down following each participant interview, following transcription of each interview, as well as following analysis of each transcript, where further immersion into the data took place, capturing reflections across the data set. These reflections were of enormous benefit as part of the analytical process (see Appendix K for key points from reflective logs). Additionally, further reflections beyond those as part of the analytical process are captured within a reflective statement (see Appendix L).

Results

A total of four themes, together incorporating 11 subthemes, were identified. Figure 1 provides an overview of the thematic structure. An overview of frequencies in terms of

participants' contributions to each theme is presented in Table 4. An in-depth discussion of these themes follows thereafter, and verbatim quotes from participants are presented alongside. The four themes represent participants' reflections on (i) the role of women in society and how this may facilitate offending, as well as prevent detection; (ii) why they think women may engage in offending behaviour of a sexual nature against children; (iii) what should happen to them once they come to the attention of authorities; and (iv) the factors that impact on our attitudes and perceptions.

Figure 1

Overview of Thematic Structure

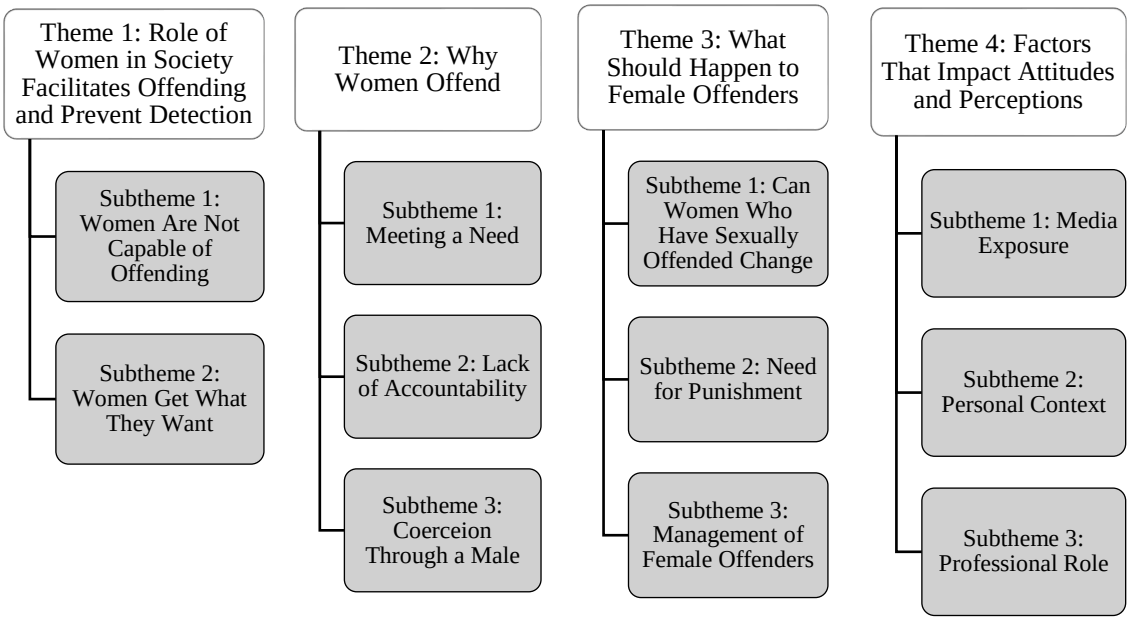

Table 4

Overview of Number of Participants per Theme (including illustrative quotes)

	Number of Participants Reporting Theme		
Theme	Students *n* =10	Professionals *n* =10	Total *n* = 20
Role of Women in Society Facilitates Offending and Prevents Detection	9	7	16
Women Are Not Capable of Offending	6	2	8

"Does that really happen like females offending sexually to children? Does it happen?" (Lan).			
Women Get What They Want "*They want to get into families. So they can present as quite likeable and trustworthy.*" (Angela).	4	2	6
Why Women Offend	10	10	20
Meeting a Need *"Feeling of needing control…about that control and having that power and feeling in control of things"* (Amelia)	7	8	15
Lack of Accountability "*Or they say 'I've got a mental health illness and I just don't know, I just don't understand'. I know people who have got Asperger's and erm…there's a high chance they will end up in prison because they just don't understand."* (Lea).	6	7	13
Coercion Through a Male *"Maybe influenced by a male to something like that as well, in some way…coercing the female."* (Abigail).	5	6	11
What Should Happen to Female Offenders	10	10	20
Can Women Who Have Sexually Offended Change? *So I think it is something even with rehabilitation, it's something that…that I mean it may reoccur*" (Labib).	10	10	20
Need for Punishment "*Yeah, yeah I do, I think all sex offenders should get treatment rather than punishment…erm but I just think surely we've got to help rather than punish"* (Adele).	10	10	20
Management of Female Offenders "*it's just about making sure that there is some sort of support (.) and safety structure to make sure that they are safe."* (Amelia).	10	10	20
Factors That Impact Attitudes and Perceptions	10	10	20
Media Exposure "*I think it's hugely influenced by media reporting.*" (Anna).	10	10	20
Personal Context	8	6	14

"*Say like if you've got children you would want any kind of punishment for something like that to be really severe. Because it makes you think about the safety of them."* (Lee).			
Professional Role	1	10	11
"*Yeah, I definitely think I have a lot more of a…understanding and kind of supportive attitude towards them rather than…like my partner for example, he doesn't work in this kind of a setting…"* (Adele).			

Theme 1: Role of Women in Society Facilitates Offending and Prevents Detection

Whilst most participants (*n = 16)* contributed to this theme, it was more prevalent among students than professionals (*n* = 9 vs. *n* = 7). The theme was predominantly related to the idea that the role women have in society provides access and/or opportunity to sexually offend against children. The narrative provided by some participants centred around women being able to conceal offending through generally holding more caring and nurturing roles, and that offending was overlooked because it did not fit with the conceptualisation of women.

Subtheme 1: Women Are Not Capable of Offending

This subtheme was more prevalent among students (*n* = 6) than professionals (*n* = 2). It represents the general perception that women are not capable of offending sexually against children. It seemed that for some participants it was hard to envisage women sexually offending against children, particularly their own children, as it was incongruent with how women are perceived in society more widely: *"It's like you know, a woman can never, never do that…erm or especially if it's their own child."* (Lea). Two student participants reported that prior to seeing the research project advertised they were not aware that women committed such offences and predominantly attributed these to males. This was raised as a question as

part of their interview: *"Does that really happen like females offending sexually to children. Does it happen? Because I feel like erm with males it does happen."* (Lan).

As noted in the extract from Lan above, there is the typical view that society attributes the commission of sexual violence to males rather than females: *"They don't associate that aggression and sexual violence…with a woman, it's more with a man."* (Lea). As a result, there was a tendency to associate a male to be involved in a woman's offence as a way of making sense of offending by a woman: *"The man, a man must have been involved, there's no way she could have done that on her own."* (Lea).

Furthermore, there was a common perception that offending fits with stereotypical views of men and their nature. Men were viewed as *"predators"* (Alison), *"sexual beings"* and *"creepy"* (Adele), and as such sexual offending against a child by men would not evoke *"shock"* (Alison). However, traits such as being *"vulnerable"* and *"maternal"* (Anna) were attributed to women and seen in direct contrast to males: *"Women are soft and lovely and nurturing…and then men are evil perverts."* (Lorraine). As such, a female sexually offending against children was at complete odds with perceptions and expectations of women. There was recognition among participants that this caused discomfort which may explain the shock and disbelief in wider society when females offend. In addition, male offending was thought to be more severe and include a wider range of *"horrific, sadistic, stranger crimes"* (Andrea) compared to female offending: *"I guess there is less things they could do…I think it's easier maybe for a male to…rape someone."* (Lisa). More specifically, some student participants appeared to minimise the severity of offending by women, outlining the perception that women mainly targeted *"borderline teen"* (Laia) boys who had given their consent.

Participants further suggested that predominantly attributing sexual violence to men in fact enabled female offending to be kept hidden and thereby prevent detection:

> …I wonder if it's, err…the, like the police's erm own kind of…like a bias, like an unconscious bias, maybe and that you kind of automatically assume that it would be a male or they are kind of looking for men. (Adele)

Most participants (*n* = 14) felt that traditional gender roles and stereotypes influenced their perceptions of why women were incapable of offending. Participants described how there is an expectation for women to be *"motherly"* and *"nurturing"* (Adele) which is at odds with harming children:

> Erm I think mainly, yeah, it doesn't fit with I guess my own kind of perception of a woman erm in that we are generally more kind of motherly and nurturing. Erm…and it just seems to jar with that kind of erm…that way you think a woman is. (Adele)

Overall, whilst students appeared to endorse the narrative that women are not capable of offending, professionals made sense of female offending being more hidden as a result of unconscious biases, suggesting that this may even lead to offending behaviour being overlooked. Some participants felt that a woman's role and caregiving practices inadvertently provide access to children without suspicion, as society is less sceptical about women's behaviours involving children (in comparison to those of men). Although female offenders were viewed more favourably than male offenders, students held more punitive views than professionals overall. Despite this, some participants acknowledged the need for equal sentencing and treatment (both for males and females). This acknowledgement was more prevalent in professionals who noted that any sexual offence against a child is severe irrespective of the gender of the offender.

Subtheme 2: Women Get What They Want

Participants perceived women to present with certain traits that enable them to get what they want. This theme was more prevalent in students (*n* = 4) than professionals (*n* = 2),

who referred to these traits as a way of making sense of why female offending may be more hidden. A common trait that was felt to be associated with women in general was being manipulative: *"Well as a woman myself I think it's…most women are able to manipulate and hide things well."* (Lea). Being manipulative was described as enabling women to conceal offending and gain access to victims: *"They want to get into families. So they can present as quite likeable and trustworthy."* (Angela).

Manipulation and grooming strategies were further discussed by professionals as being used by women as a way of avoiding detection, with one participant generalising these traits as being typical of all offences committed by women, suggesting that they were similar in this way: *"There's always a certain trait that I can see through…through, you know the manipulation, the grooming element, the erm…especially observing them with others and erm…so…I think there's something that makes them…similar."* (Angela). These traits were perceived to be particularly unique to women who were viewed to have greater *"social intellect"* which helped them to *"hide things well"* (Lea).

Overall, the traits used to describe female offenders within this subtheme read quite contradictory to the characteristics used to describe females in Subtheme 1. Whilst some participants struggled to reconcile the idea of women committing sexual offences against children, it became clear that, on reflection, participants felt that they may have had to be quite *'clever'* and *'manipulative'* in the process of committing an offence and avoiding detection.

Theme 2: Why Women Offend

When discussing motivations for why women may commit sexual offences against children, some participants struggled to comprehend this. All participants spoke about potential reasons why women may offend, identifying both internal and external factors. The

perceived contributing role of some of these factors differed between students and professionals.

Subtheme 1: Meeting a Need

This subtheme was the most prominent explanation for why women may offend (*n* = 15), and was perceived to meet internal needs of women, such as gaining or giving love and affection, as well as for the purpose of sexual gratification. Some participants thought that women were 'desperate' to be loved, in turn motivating them to seek out any source in order to gain this: *"…it's almost that desperation, you know I need to love something that's within reach…and it just so happens to be a child. It's a lot easier to love, and that love kind of overflows and becomes this horrible thing…in a horrible form."* (Lea).

Other participants thought that women were sexually attracted to children and thereby sought to gain sexual gratification through offending, describing it as a *"sexually motivated crime"* (Amanda); *"If that's their sexuality, if they are attracted to young children."* (Lindsay). However, other factors were also thought to explain offending, either in isolation or in combination with a sexual attraction: *"So are they attracted to children or do they just want to control and hurt, erm, perhaps there's an element of both. I'm not sure they would necessarily have to be attracted to them."* (Angela).

A prominent explanation among professionals for why women may offend was that offending was motivated by a desire to gain control and a sense of power: *"…about that control and having that power and feeling in control of things"* (Amelia). One participant thought that women either offended in order to feel in control or because they were being controlled. They further tended to attribute offending to an *"addiction to offending against a child"* (Aran), with the positive reinforcement/reward of the behaviour that seeks to meet their needs facilitating future engagement.

Overall, participants referred to various internal needs women who sexually offend against children may seek to meet. Whilst there were some differences between students and professionals, many participants thought that offending met a personal need and was therefore internally motivated.

Subtheme 2: Lack of Accountability

Explanations for why women may offend sexually against children also involved biological factors that would lead to disinhibition or a lack of awareness/understanding of someone's behaviour (n = 11). Mental illness was one of the prominent factors participants referred to in the context of contributing to someone acting and/or being out of control, and/or not of their usual character. This somewhat removed responsibility from female offenders, and they were viewed more neutrally than when offending was thought to be a choice: *"Like I know there are certain mental disorders where you know make you…I don't want to say less autonomous but maybe less in control of your actions"* (Laia).

However, at times when offending behaviour seemed incomprehensible, mental health issues were assumed as a possible explanation: *"I would assume that there's something not right...because I can't imagine that a sane person could do something like that."* (Lee); *"Well it is just such a horrible crime to commit, I cannot see how anybody would do it if they were in the right frame of mind."* (Aran). This would suggest that the only way participants were able to make sense of why women may offend sexually against children was at odds with reality, and as such they were not accountable for the behaviours they engaged in.

Furthermore, professionals also acknowledged that hormones and chemical imbalances may explain why some women sexually offend against children. As a result, women were viewed more compassionately: *"I would be more likely to be more compassionate with the woman because…and that's my own biases there, because of*

the…whatever happens to a woman's body and hormones and everything like that." (Abigail). This compassion appeared to extend to the explanation of women's own histories of abuse as playing a role in their offending behaviour. More specifically, students thought that traumatic experiences prevented women from really knowing what they were doing. In contrast, professionals described how for some women who had been victimised themselves, and who had grown up in an environment that was not safe, abuse had been normalised, and may therefore be viewed as "*what happens between adults."* (Andrea), and thought of as *"kind of all they've known. It might be a norm."* (Amelia).

Overall, it appears that through participants' conflict between the role of women in society and female offending they sought to explain offending behaviour by referring to biological and mental health-related factors they perceived to play a contributing role, thereby removing responsibility from women who sexually offending against children.

Subtheme 3: Coercion Through a Male

This subtheme was present across interviews with both students (n = 5) and professionals (n = 6). Women were perceived to be vulnerable, and therefore engaging in offending behaviour could be explained through being controlled by a male who *"dominates"* (Lorraine) and coerces them by using threats or implicit controls as a result of grooming:

> Where a male says, 'if you don't do these things', I've heard it here 'if you don't do these things I'm going to hurt your family'. So you have to obey this because otherwise the risk for you…is a lot more and that might be the same 'if you don't allow me to do this' or 'if you don't do this, then I'm going to be doing this to the children'. (Abigail)

Participants described how they thought women were groomed by men and shaped to offend, subordinating their needs, and engaging in offending behaviour to solely please their

partner rather than pursue any personal need. This was explained by referring to women's desire for affection and love, as well as having a dependent attachment style:

> Yeah, I think they are not trying to seek the affection from the children. I think it's that they are seeking the affection from these men that are abusive. Erm…but they don't, err they are so vulnerable themselves that they don't really see that they are being manipulated into doing things, because they just want that kind of care and affection from someone that they're willing to do whatever it takes to kind of keep that. (Adele)

The narrative of coercion by a man appears to be used to explain why some women may offend sexually against children, and enables people to make sense of how a woman engages in such behaviour. It was easier to view women who are coerced by a man as victims, and therefore not hold them responsible for their actions, than imagining a woman as the main offender or leader in a co-offending dynamic:

> If it's a matter of…do this or else then it would be, yeah, erm, I don't know about severity because it's still a severe act but maybe…it's a factor that might be…not quite as bad as if they were doing it because they wanted to. It could just be that they don't want to do it but they are being forced by someone. (Alix)

Overall, coercion or being controlled by a male and *"forced"* (Alix) to engage in offending behaviour is another way of explaining and rationalising why some women may offend sexually against children. It allows responsibility to be removed from the women and placed on the man, which may feel more comfortable for some people when thinking about the sexual offending against children.

Theme 3: What Should Happen to Female Offenders?

All participants spoke about the consequences of engaging in offending behaviour, and what should happen to women who committed sexual offences against children. Overall,

students held more punitive views, with professionals presenting as more understanding of the role of and need for rehabilitation and treatment (as opposed to punishment).

Subtheme 1: Can Females Who Have Sexually Offended Change?

All participants discussed whether it was possible for females who had sexually offended against children to change, with clear differences being revealed between students and professionals. In students, there was a sense of uncertainty as to whether change was possible, querying if they could ever be trusted again: *"I don't think I would be able to trust them…even after ten years they would still kinda be wary of that individual."* (Lorraine).

Related to this was the question around the need for therapy and whether rehabilitation was effective. This was accompanied by thoughts of behaviour change being internally motivated, with some students feeling that women *"probably wouldn't want to change"* (Lisa), and that behaviour change was particularly difficult for some subgroups of offenders, including child sexual offenders: *"…it would be difficult to rehabilitate them. I think. Just as much as it would be, just as much as it is difficult to rehabilitate…murderers."* (Lea).

> I think if people went in and they were prepared to change, I think it could be effective. But I think it would be wasted if people didn't, like there would be some sick people who wouldn't be able to change I'm sure…erm so it would probably be wasted on them. (Lisa)

However, there was a general assumption among professionals that people can change, and that this is the purpose of treatment. As such, there was an emphasis on treatment in order to reduce the risk of reoffending. This seemed to promote confidence that anybody released or discharged into the community would be deemed to be safe to be there, as they would have been able to evidence behaviour change: *"…I would say rehab is important, otherwise they could be just the same as when they went in."* (Alix); *"if they're being released from prison*

or hospital, wherever they've been, there must be some feeling that they're…safe to be in the community…" (Amelia). Supporting behaviour change and recognising that risk of reoffending can be reduced may be due to professional participants having worked in a therapeutic capacity where this is the underpinning principle of their role: *"In my line of work I need to be hopeful that it's possible. Erm, yeah I kind of have to be optimistic that…you know there is a chance that they can be rehabilitated and risk reduced and stuff."* (Amelia). Whilst students held more punitive views than professionals, and were unsure whether it was possible for people to change, most participants recognised that behaviour change required internal motivation, with professionals very much identifying this as being varied across individuals.

Subtheme 2: Need for Punishment

All participants discussed the consequences of engaging in offending behaviour. Whilst students appeared to minimise sexual offending by females, there was a strong sense that punishment was needed and justified, including being removed from the community for ten years or more: *"…the person to suffer yeah, yeah just get away from the community."* (Lan). Students endorsed for female offenders to suffer the consequences: *"definitely suffer the consequences of whatever they did."* (Lisa), and some even promoted violence as way of reducing offending, and felt that this was *"deserved"* and a *"good justification for it"* (Lee).

In contrast, most professionals communicated a strong need for treatment over punishment: *"Surely we've got to help rather than punish"* (Adele), emphasising that punishment does not reduce the risk of reoffending: *"I do think just sending people to prison without treatment is not going to be effective."* (Andrea). However, whilst some professionals (all of whom worked with victims of child sexual abuse) advocated for punishment and prison sentences, they still referred to the importance of rehabilitation. All professionals seemed to

feel that without treatment, punishment served no utility in promoting change, and reducing the risk of reoffending respectively.

> Don't think I agree with sending sex offenders, like child sex offenders to prison, because I don't think that actually solves the issue. Erm, unless they actually get some sort of treatment in prison, I think you are just kind of prolonging the problem…you've just kind of contained them in a place for a few years…potentially kind of made the issue worse, erm…and then kind of like sending them back out in the community and expecting them to suddenly change and never do it again. (Adele)

Participants therefore thought that the duration of an appropriate sentence for women ought to reflect an individual's treatment needs, as well as how long it would take to meaningfully engage in risk reduction work (as opposed to a set tariff):

> Appropriate sentencing…mm…I think it needs to involve treatment…so it comes down to I suppose a sentence that allows them to receive the support… I think the sentence needs to be responsive to the psychological needs of the offender. (Andrea)

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates the split views between students and professionals when it comes to what should happen to women who sexually offended against children. Students' desire for punishment and prison is not supported by professionals. Most professionals held a strong belief that rehabilitation efforts were thought to be more effective, whilst one professional supported a segregated community and the use of anti-libido medication. Interestingly, some professionals identified that society was in favour of and supported long-term prison sentences, which was reflected in students' more punitive views. However, professionals highlighted that this was in contrast to their own professional views of advocating for offender rehabilitation.

Subtheme 3: Management of Female Offenders

All participants discussed what they thought would be appropriate in terms of managing women who were released from prison back into the community. Most participants, across both students and professionals, felt that women should *"live life"* (Lin) following having served a prison sentence. However, there was a sense that offender management would have to involve certain conditions in order to promote safety. Both students and professionals talked about the need to restrict employment which would involve working with children: *"I don't think you should be allowed, like if it's a work environment with kids, I don't think you should be allowed back there"* (Lisa). However, professionals typically took a more responsive approach to management that was tailored to the individual and recognised their risk factors (as opposed to students who felt that blanket risk management plans were suitable): *"…I suppose what I'd want to see is more responsive treatment, responsive supervision, responsive monitoring, support"* (Andrea).

For students, there was a sense that the focus should be on protecting the community and children, and that additional measures should be put in place which would prevent women to have any contact with children. There was support for measures, such as exclusion zones (e.g. parks and playgrounds), in order to prevent women from being around or near children. This was rationalised as a protective strategy that appeared to be linked to the uncertainty around behaviour change:

> I think there should be, there should be no go zones for them because, like I said what's stopping them from doing it again? You've got to think about in the long term…you, you're rehabilitating them but… you want to protect the community. (Lea)

Students also felt that supervision and checks would ensure that women were compliant with restrictions, and that this would involve tracking or tagging them, with two students supporting direct supervision if other measures were not available. One participant

referred to women having to *"wear some GPS to find them or, or some umm or some signal to tell children or others err this person are very dangerous for children."* (Lin).

> …would be a good idea to track them for a good period of time. Maybe for like…a year or something. Yeah they could do tracking instead of having someone there and you would still be able to see where they were. (Lisa)

In contrast, whilst professionals typically acknowledged the need for safety, they recognised that risk management plans should also incorporate relevant support for the women re-integrating into the community: *"It's just about making sure that there is some sort of support…and safety structure to make sure that they are safe"* (Amelia). This included supervision, as well as treatment focusing on the women's protective factors, in order to help them build a pro-social life and promote desistance.

> If you get her to build up her life outside, get her to have the job, you know develop meaningful relationships, I think that will put her on a lot better…path than opening the doors and saying there you go, now just try and…live your new life. (Adele)

Overall, students thought that there was a need to control women's movements and enforce restrictions (e.g. exclusion zones and not working with children). There was little trust that they would be compliant, which is likely an extension of the perception that women would not want to change, and therefore explains why students suggested measures such as tracking. In contrast, professionals highlighted the importance of a tailored and responsive approach – they recognised the need for managing personal risk factors whilst at the same time supporting women to reintegrate into the community in order to build protective factors and thereby reduce the risk of reoffending. Some professionals noted society's resistance to rehabilitation efforts, stating that they represented a *"constant battle"* (Adele) when attempting to reintegrate women into the community.

Theme 4: Factors That Impact Attitudes and Perceptions

All participants discussed factors they felt influenced or informed attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children. There were both similarities and differences across students and professionals.

Subtheme 1: Media Exposure

All participants recognised that attitudes and perceptions are *"…hugely influenced by media reporting"* (Anna). Representations of female offenders in the media were noted to be biased and presented in such a way that evokes certain attitudes among society. Participants thought that stories about females who offended against children were dramatized, and that this contributed to negative attitudes towards this population. In addition, due to fewer cases of this nature being in the news, it increases fear when it is reported. The emotions elicited from sensationalised reports were recognised to influence attitudes on matters such as what should happen to offenders:

> Dramatized and heightened because of the fact that it is from a woman…which I think makes it portrayed…makes it feel like as if women do it less and when they do it it's that horrific. […] Sometimes err I'll read something really sensationalised and I'll be like I wouldn't like convicted rapists of children I would not care if something happened to them. (Louise)

Participants thought that stereotypes were partly created by the media, often motivated by what the media want to report to increase sales. As society gets most of its information from the media, especially in the area of child sexual offending, this was recognised by participants to be potentially dangerous. Stereotypes were thought to guide society's perceptions around guilt and whether someone was capable of committing offences. As such, society is thought to internalise stereotypes, with them becoming entrenched in the public's

minds. It was noted that a stereotypical narrative of female offenders presented in the media was that of a teacher-student relationship.

> Like with women it tends to be the stereotypical narrative and therefore the one that I kind of think about, is the one that's some lonely woman and some pretty like on the borderline teen, and then they get into a tangle and then yeah. But with men you hear about, like this might be very unfair to men, but with men you hear about then targeting very young children sometimes. (Laia)

Two professionals thought that there were positives to the media reporting on sexual abuse cases that involved females, including raising awareness of female offending and offering an insight into how women may offend, suggesting that society as a whole would be more aware and therefore able to take steps towards prevention:

> I mean positive to the fact that people are slightly more cautious. But I don't think, you know you think about kids in the seventies that were kind of free and easy, but then you find out about how many were abused by Catholic priests and whatever and they were all merrily going off to church…erm you know, I think a level of awareness is good. (Anna)

However, most participants talked about the negative implications of information being misrepresented, not only in terms of how women may be viewed as a result, but also in terms of generating fear among society: *"…in general, in society…a lot of negative things are said about them, the females because of all the negative things that are reported in the news."* (Aran).

> I think you know it's good to highlight that these offences are happening and it is something that needs to be managed in society. But I do think there's a lot of…erm like scare mongering I guess, and really negative views. (Amelia)

> I think it's the pictures they use to portray sex offenders in general and particularly…and it's the words that they, the language that's used as well I think. Like, well obviously, you know like it's meant to evoke certain feelings within you. (Adele)

Overall, participants perceived the media to be highly influential in terms of shaping and informing attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, mostly by misrepresenting information, sensationalising stories, and using language aimed at evoking emotional responses in their readers, thereby having detrimental effects on society's views and understanding of this topic.

Subtheme 2: Personal Context

Participants' personal context was mentioned by most students (n = 8) and professionals (n = 6) as playing a role and being influential in shaping their attitudes and perceptions, including being a parent and level of educational attainment. Being a parent was described to increase one's fear as a result of the heightened sense to protect one's own children, with participants presenting as more critical of or risk averse towards females who sexually offended against children: *"Is that very severe (laughs) it's just because I'm a parent so"* (Abigail); *"I feel like if I had children it would be very different (coughs) like I would be giving very different answers as well…"* (Lorraine).

In contrast, both students and professionals thought that higher education had an impact on attitudes and perceptions as well, generally making people more understanding by informing them and equipping them with an ability to think more critically: *"…probably makes you less likely to have any bias, you're less likely to be biased by those articles…or you recognise bias when you see it."* (Laia); *"I think if you were like more informed you could*

make those more educated judgements." (Lee); *"… the more education you have the more open you are to opening up ideas and to question the evidence."* (Andrea).

Among student participants, cultural norms, including religion and variations around the age of consent, were noted to inform attitudes and perceptions. They also led to some uncertainty around what constitutes child sexual abuse because behaviours such as "*getting a child married off so early"* (Lea) are thought to be *"normal in their culture"* (Lea), however conflict with westernised views of sexual offences. Variations across countries in relation to the age of consent were also thought to blur awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse: *"We're judging these crimes against a pretty subjective scale. Like in some countries, it's okay for an adult to have a relationship with a child."* (Laia); *"…yeah, sexual exploitation, erm, being a part of that. I know that many, being Asian myself, many Asian countries participate in that or getting a child married off so early to a family relative."* (Lea).

Furthermore, religion was perceived to guide attitudes and perceptions, and make people more tolerant and accepting of mistakes:

> I think the principles and religions would…would not let us look at those women as people who are evil and cannot err mix with society and need to be separated and segregated and…treat them badly. I don't think any source would allow that, even in Christianity. Jesus Christ encourages people to look at her as someone who has…like part of society and everyone can make that mistake. (Labib)

Overall, participants referred to different personal factors that can influence attitudes and perceptions in both directions. Having greater awareness, through education, allows individuals to think more critically about biases in the media, whilst emotional responses one experiences as a parent may lead to more critical and less understanding views. It is of

particular interest that different cultures have a varied understanding of what constitutes child sexual abuse, and this naturally impacts on someone's views of what may constitute offending behaviour.

Subtheme 3: Professional Role

This subtheme was predominantly apparent in interviews with professionals and centred around the sense that their professional role very much impacted on their attitudes and perceptions, making them more understanding and tolerant than lay people. Only one student reflected on this theme. Professionals thought that working with offenders protected them against biases in the media in light of their awareness, knowledge and understanding of the topic area: *"I think ability to…read the media and the bias that the media might have and be aware of that is important. Rather than just somebody reading the sun and thinking this is exactly how it is.* (Andrea); *"Yeah, they wouldn't rely on the media. I think the hang them and flog them brigade would in terms of the managing of them, it might change."* (Angela).

Naturally, this awareness, knowledge and understanding was also partly facilitated by professional training:

> Yeah, I definitely think I have a lot more of a…understanding and kind of supportive attitude towards them rather than…like my partner for example, he doesn't work in this kind of a setting. He is more of the lock 'em up, you know how could they do that? That angry kind of side. Which I completely understand. But I think we are just so trained to kind of figure out why they've done that, well let's help them and…erm go down that path. So yeah, I think it's definitely a big influence. (Adele)

However, two professionals who as part of their role work directly with victims of child sexual abuse highlighted that being exposed to the impact of victimisation may promote more critical, as opposed to more understanding, views. It therefore appears that type of client

group has an effect on professionals' attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children: *"It's just so damaging. Yeah, it's got to have affected…yeah, I imagine it does inform the way I now view offences, yeah…I imagine that now I do see them as more severe…because I know how damaging they are."* (Angela).

Overall, the role professionals have clearly influenced their attitudes and perceptions in both directions. When working with offenders, awareness of why people may offend appeared to reduce critical and punitive attitudes. However, when working with victims, awareness of the impact of victimisation appeared to lead to more critical views.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The present study explored attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children in a sample of students and a sample of professionals who work with this population in a therapeutic capacity. The qualitative analysis identified both positive and negative attitudes being expressed interchangeably by participants, as opposed to attitudes being represented by average scores when using quantitative methods. An example of this was the expression of empathy or compassion, but also anger, towards female offenders. This effect was also highlighted by Lea et al. (1999) when utilising qualitative interviews.

Using Thematic Analysis, four key themes were identified. The first theme of the 'role of women in society and how this may facilitate offending, as well as prevent detection' revealed participants' perceptions that traditional gender roles of women held within society enable offending to remain hidden. More specifically, a woman's role provides access and opportunity to offend where suspicion is not raised, and as such offending goes undetected. The second theme 'why women offend' identified participants' perceptions around both internal and external factors that may play a role in why women may sexually offend against

children. The third theme ‘what should happen to female offenders’ offers insight into participants’ perceptions around appropriate sentencing and offender management, where students and professionals differed substantially, with students adopting a more punitive approach, and professionals a more responsive approach. The final theme ‘factors impacting on attitudes and perceptions’ identified similarities and differences between students and professionals in their thinking around what may impact on our attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexual offend against children.

The findings indicate that professionals tend to hold more positive attitudes towards and perceptions of women who sexually offend against children (when compared to students). This is supported by related studies that have explored attitudes towards individuals who sexually offend, including females, among different group of professionals (Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). The differences in perceptions between professionals and students were particularly noticeable in the area of offender management and rehabilitation, with professionals recognising the need for responsive and individualised strategies. Conversely, students were typically doubtful of whether female offenders were able to change, and therefore expressed the need for more punitive offender management strategies. It appears that participants’ perceived threat of female offenders, and an intrinsic need to protect children, drives the enforcing of strategies that are believed to protect society from women who are unable or unwilling to change.

However, the strategies student participants endorsed as enhancing safety (e.g. tracking, restrictions on movement and announcing details) do not support community reintegration, and have not been shown to reduce risk (Willis et al., 2010). Professionals did not endorse such strategies, and very much recognised the implications such strategies can have on the individual, unless there was a justified need. Professionals’ positive views in this

regard are promising, as it is noted that a warm therapeutic alliance and supporting those re-entering society are important for behavioural change (Serran et al., 2003; Willis et al., 2010).

Gakhal and Brown (2011) termed this effect the 'contact hypothesis', where contact with the offending population leads to more positive views (Hogue, 1993; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). This was recognised by professional participants in the present study, whereby some noted that they felt that they held more positive views than those who did not work with women who offend/have offended sexually. However, another explanation is that having greater awareness, knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of sexual offending promotes more supportive attitudes, and reduces one's susceptibility to misrepresentations across a range of sources of information (Lea et al., 1999). In support of this, some professionals in the present study did draw upon theories of offending and therapeutic models, suggesting that their attitudes and perceptions were guided by the evidence base and the training they had received. Conversely, some students had very little knowledge of female child sexual offending, with two students questioning if women actually offended in this way. Others highlighted that their understanding of this phenomenon was influenced by media representations of a teacher-student dynamic, and again others reflected upon women being incapable of offending against their own children. This highlights some of the differences between the two samples, based upon external influences on their attitudes, such as training and/or media representations.

Some professionals acknowledged that negative attitudes were neutralised through being challenged in the course of their training and experience of working with this population. Interestingly, this was noted by Lea et al. (1999), who posited that training and length of experience related to reflexivity and critical thinking. For professionals, it would therefore appear that it is a combination of being in contact with the population, and being

more informed on the topic area, that contributes to the formation of attitudes and perceptions. In addition, there was a recognition among professionals that working in a profession of a therapeutic nature meant that a belief in behaviour change was almost a prerequisite. Some participants even expressed discomfort at attitudes and perceptions that were particularly harsh and/or incongruent with therapeutic models. This would also suggest that holding particular attitudes and perceptions may be necessary when working with this population.

Overall, awareness and understanding of theories of sexual offending and risk management seems to be present in those who hold more positive attitudes and perceptions. The question therefore arises as to whether understanding desistance and risk reduction mediates the fear response that seems to be elicited towards this population. This is important as fear is often expressed in line with the need for enhancing safety. However, whilst professional identity (working in a therapeutic capacity) may promote more positive attitudes and perceptions, in line with previous research (Blagden et al., 2014; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Hogue & Peebles, 1997), personal identity did seem to moderate this. Being a parent was reported to increase the perceived sense of threat and fear, and this was used by professionals as a way of rationalising what they considered harsher or more restrictive decision making (e.g. life-long exclusions on accessing areas where children are likely to be present). This was acknowledged by some professionals who questioned whether the strategies they endorsed were *"too severe"* (Abigail). Furthermore, working with victims of child sexual abuse appeared to foster more negative attitudes towards the population of female offenders, with some participants demonstrating greater emotional responses following their witnessing of the long-term effects of victimisation. As such, whilst the contact hypothesis and further education and/or training may explain the attitudinal differences between students and professionals, variations in attitudes and perceptions among professionals appear to be

influenced by both personal and professional contexts.

Despite students holding harsher attitudes and perceptions than professionals, mostly in relation to sentencing and offender management, females who committed sexual offences against children were generally viewed more positively than their male counterparts. Whilst more prominent in students, there was greater compassion expressed for females than males, which was also acknowledged by some professionals. As females were viewed more positively, and incapable of committing such offences, their offending behaviour was minimised, and they were not held accountable or responsible for their actions. More specifically, offences committed by females were thought to be less harmful and invasive (in comparison to those committed by males), and females were perceived to not engage in offending behaviour willingly and/or purposefully.

In the context of a teacher-student relationship, male teenage victims were argued to have given consent, with the scenario clearly being romanticised. These findings are supported by the existing literature, in that sexual offending by females is typically minimised (Denov, 2001; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Hetherton, 1999), and at times even glorified (Hetherton, 1999). Interestingly, participants did not take into account the relationship between the victim and the offender in any other context, such as intrafamilial offending, for example. As such, the severity of offending appeared to have been minimised based upon gender only.

Gender roles were commonly referred to in the context of suggesting that females were not capable of committing sexual offences against children. Professionals demonstrated an awareness around this, and explained that attitudes and perceptions around gender roles in society may mean that offending by females remains hidden and goes undetected. The general assumption that men are *"sexual beings"* (Adele) and aggressive suggests that offending is

congruent with stereotypical expectations of a male, and as a result males are more likely to be suspected. The tendency to neutralise women's guilt is noted in the wider literature when exploring attitudes towards sexual offenders (Denov, 2001). Despite stereotypes influencing students' perceptions of guilt, professionals identified that offence rates were probably higher than currently thought due to such biases being endorsed at a societal level.

The direct comparisons especially student participants made between males and females, where women are seen more favourably (compared to males), can be explained through the discomfort elicited when women act in ways that are counter-stereotypical. Women's offending does not fit with the female stereotype held in society (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006). Denov (2001, 2004) notes that such incongruence leads to unconscious cognitive strategies that try and justify, or remove, responsibility to ease discomfort. However, it is of interest that despite these attitudes and perceptions, students' views around sentencing and offender management remained harsher and more punitive.

One way responsibility was removed was to view female offenders as victims. This appeared to be achieved through participants attributing sexual scripts that depicted a coercive male forcing a subordinate and powerless woman to engage in offending behaviour. This scenario was often rationalised by the female needing and/or wanting to be loved, and thus engaging in behaviours unwillingly with the motivation of pleasing a coercive male. The use of such scripts is noted to be a barrier to being able to spot and identify offending by females (Gakhal & Brown, 2011). It is therefore concerning that such factors are endorsed, especially in some professionals. Lea et al. (1999) also raised that the removing of responsibility from female offenders has implications in terms of creating a distinct divide between 'normal' and offending populations, thereby suggesting that those who sexually offend are not normal. This is important to consider as the present study noted that rationalisations of female offending

included disinhibition or blurred boundaries due to biological abnormalities or their own sexual abuse histories. However, at the same time, the recognition of trauma histories to the extent that it does not classify women as being distinct from the 'normal' population is needed to promote a therapeutic approach that is supportive of behavioural change.

The perceived need to punish females who sexually offend against children (seen in both students and professionals who work with victims) elicited support for strategies built on the premise that harsh sanctioning will deter individuals from offending, including violence directed towards females. This finding is not only concerning but is also surprising given that evidence suggests that such strategies are ineffective in reducing risk (Comartin et al. 2009). It also makes it likely that the vigilantism and harassment experienced by some males in the process of reintegrating back into society due to negative perceptions (Levenson & Cotter, 2005) would be experienced by females. This is slightly contradictory to suggestions by Gakhal and Brown (2011) that women would resettle into the community easier than males. In line with Brown (1999), barriers to rehabilitation and resettlement are created, which has an opposite effect on the safety society wishes to create (Scoones et al., 2012; Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009; Willis & Johnston, 2012). It appears the immoral nature and severity, regardless of the gender of the offender, impacts on one's emotional responses and evokes the support for risk-averse strategies. As such, being a female only seems to influence more favourable attitudes up until a female has offended, after which point the severity of the offence and emotional response to this seems to negate biases.

In terms of what may contribute to some of the attitudes and perceptions that were revealed, media representations of female sexual offenders were suggested to perpetuate critical and hostile attitudes towards those who sexually offend. It is thought that the media creates stereotypes of offenders that become endorsed by society and guide expectations of

who offenders are, which is in line with previous research (Malinen et al., 2014; Willis et al., 2010). Participants typically portrayed two narratives they felt were informed by media reports, one being that of a male-coerced female offender who was seen as a victim and forced to offend, and the other being that of a teacher who offends against a male teenage student in the context of a consensual romantic relationship, where offending was not thought to be deliberate nor harmful, and more a case of *"not realising the boundaries"* (Louise). Despite the two narratives depicting different scenarios, both minimised the role of females as purposeful and willing offenders in comparison to the idea of the predatory male offender. It therefore seems that media representations of female offenders are framed differently, influencing attitudes and perceptions to be more favourable.

Having a certain level of awareness, knowledge and understanding of sexual offending against children, and working with this population, was identified as negating media biases. Education and extensive work experiences were suggested to promote critical thinking in regard to media reports, thereby reducing susceptibility to media biases (Harper & Hogue, 2015). Additionally, Craig (2005) reported effects of training on attitudes. This would suggest that both education and training is related to greater awareness which results in more positive attitudes and perceptions. However, it was also noted by some professionals that professions may attract people with attitudes that fit with the role, which provides some evidence for Gakhal and Brown's (2011) suggestion that people with positive attitudes are naturally drawn to such roles.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the present study which should be acknowledged. Firstly, it is of note that four professional participants were interviewed by telephone due to COVID-19 restrictions. The researcher felt that this led to a different dynamic in the context

of the research interview. More specifically, participants were less conversational and non-verbal cues were lost, which may have otherwise allowed for deeper exploration of some points. Typically, interviews via this modality were also shorter. Secondly, it became apparent that some professional participants were aware of what they thought they ought to say, and what would reflect core values of the profession. At times, this meant that they appeared less forthcoming up to the point of discussing what may influence attitudes and perceptions, which they may have felt to be a safer topic (rather than their own attitudes and perceptions). In addition, interviews with professionals took place at their work – scheduling interviews away from their work environment may have enabled them to feel more at ease. This was particularly noticeable in one professional who had previously worked with the researcher. This needs to be acknowledged as it naturally impacts on the generation of data in terms of the participant feeling less able to speak openly about their true attitudes and perceptions (see Appendix L for a more in-depth discussion of this).

It is also important to acknowledge cultural variation within the student sample. Whilst this identified some interesting findings in relation to the role of perceived cultural norms on attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, the sample is not representative of the general public in the UK. Consequently, results are likely to differ between countries and across cultures that are characterised by more varied norms and laws. This is also important to acknowledge in light of the fact that the professional sample was predominantly British, and as such the two samples were not directly comparable in terms of their ethnic background.

In addition, participants in the present study were predominantly female. Previous research has noted that there are differences between males and females in terms of their attitudes towards and perceptions of individuals who commit sexual offences. Such as female

participants viewing the severity of sexual offences, of varying natures, higher than male participants (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). The study's findings are therefore not representative of attitudes and perceptions in males.

Lastly, the present study has identified tentative evidence that the professional context one works in (i.e. working with victims of child sexual abuse) plays an important part in the nature of one's attitudes and perceptions. As such, a narrower approach to recruitment of professionals may have been helpful. It would be interesting to further explore this effect by directly comparing attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children between professionals of various contexts (i.e. those working with victims of child sexual abuse vs. those working with offenders).

Future Directions

The findings of the present study suggest that females are viewed more favourably than males who sexually offend against children. This is important as it suggests that there are biases held within society that could mean that offending by females is overlooked and minimised. It would be of interest to explore further and in more depth what information impacts and challenges attitudes and beliefs, and how training delivered to enhance a safe and supportive environment facilitates a shift in these. Findings in relation to cultural influences and variations across countries also require further exploration. The culturally diverse sample of students has highlighted an area that has so far received little attention.

The finding that some professionals who work with victims of child sexual abuse presented with harsher attitudes was interesting. As such, further exploration of how client group impacts on attitudes and perceptions in professionals would be worthy of exploring in more detail. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine whether there are shared

similarities between professionals who work with victims of child sexual abuse and those who work with offenders who have a history of child sexual abuse.

It was also noted that professionals responded emotionally when they realised that their personal attitudes conflicted with those of therapeutic models. It may therefore be possible that professionals compartmentalise their own attitudes which allows them to work therapeutically. However, this is a tentative hypothesis that would require further attention and exploration as part of future research. It would also be interesting to explore the impact of this on professionals' mental health and wellbeing, as well as whether they are aware of compartmentalising – it appeared that this conflict did not become obvious until professionals reflected on their personal (rather than professional) attitudes during the interviews .

A replication of the present study using a sample that is more representative of the general public is also recommended. One would expect to find more polarised attitudes and views similar in nature to the ones displayed by our student sample. The role media sources play in terms of influencing attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children may also highlight polarised. Different sources present stories in different ways, as such attitudes and perceptions will likely differ based upon the source one reads where the content has emotive language. This is an important area that requires further exploration in light of the general public's role in policy and rehabilitation strategies, such as the success of community reintegration. Here, it would also be useful to explore whether there are differences in attitudes and perceptions depending on the nature of the offence committed by females against children. Our findings tentatively suggest that some offences are more minimised than others based upon contextual and relational factors, such as the female teacher-male student scenario, and the female who is coerced by a male partner. Furthermore, some students presented with disbelief when discussions centred around a female sexually

offending against her own child – in line with the ‘double deviance hypothesis’, this may contribute to more negative attitudes and perceptions. One way of achieving this is through the use of vignettes.

Conclusion

Overall, females were viewed more positively than males who sexually offend against children, highlighting gender differences in attitudes and perceptions. There was a tendency to minimise offending by females and remove responsibility from them, which was influenced by gender roles and stereotypes attached to females. Although females were seen more favourably overall, when it came to what should happen to them students still adopted a more punitive and restrictive approach compared to professionals. This seemed to be informed by a need to protect society against women who they viewed as being unlikely to change. However, professionals took a more responsive approach that emphasised the need for rehabilitation and support, arguing that this was more effective than punishment. Personal factors appeared to negate favourable attitudes, whereby being a parent was used to justify the support of more risk-averse strategies. The media was thought to have a big influence on attitudes and perceptions, often portraying stereotypes and evoking reactions in society, with factors such as one’s professional role and insights into offending being viewed as protective against biases presented in the media. Finally, this study has highlighted the need for, and importance of, continued research into the area of female sexual offending, as attitudes of and perceptions towards females appear to differ from those held towards males. As such, existing literature on attitudes and perceptions towards male offenders does not adequately represent the findings found in literature exploring attitudes and perceptions towards females. This will have implications for policy, rehabilitation strategies in the community, and the identification and reporting of sexual offences committed by females.

General Discussion of the Thesis

The present thesis aimed to build upon the limited knowledge base in relation to females who sexually offend against children. The introduction to this thesis highlights the need to develop a better understanding of this phenomenon. It has been suggested that exploration of this area has been hindered due to public perceptions and responses towards sexual offending by females, where there is a tendency to minimise, deny, or neutralise offending (Ten Bensel et al., 2019). Attitudes towards and perceptions of women who sexually offend against children are recognised to influence behaviours due to affective responses elicited from sexual offences (see Introduction to Thesis). Media effects on society in relation to the construction of a 'male predatory child sex offender' (King & Roberts, 2017), and perceived gender roles, were also noted to influence perceptions of males being more likely to commit child sexual offences. Conversely, women were perceived to be unlikely to commit such offences by those with no experience in working with this population (i.e. students).

However, where sexual offending by females against children was discussed, participants often referred to traits, such as being manipulative, as a way of explaining why they may commit such incomprehensive offences. In addition, participants removed blame from women as a way of reducing discomfort due to the incongruence of perceived gender roles, whilst at the same time advocating for harsh punishment (Chapter 2). As such, attitudes and perceptions are, at times, conflictual, and further research is encouraged to explore this in more depth in order to shed light on how contextual and relational factors may play a role in the formation of attitudes and perceptions.

The introduction to the thesis also highlighted the need to understand why women may engage in sexual offences against children, as male-derived motivations may not be

representative of females or their treatment needs (Nathan & Ward, 2001). Furthermore, research is needed to support evidence-based practice (Levenson et al., 2015). This seems particularly important as research has highlighted tentative female-exclusive motivations (Chapter 1). There is a tendency for women to report that their offending was in partnership with a male (Nathan & Ward, 2001), which was also noted in participants' perceptions of females' sexual offending against children (Chapter 2). This seemed to be a way in which participants were trying to make sense of why a woman could, or would, offend sexually against a child.

Chapter 1 presented a systematic literature review of female child sexual offenders' motivations, comprising goals and offence-supportive cognitions. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first systematic literature review of this nature. A broad inclusion criteria was developed to enable all relevant published literature to be identified. Three databases were included in the search, and authors were contacted to request unpublished articles. In total, 13 studies were identified. Whilst a quality assessment was utilised, it was decided that due to the evidence base being limited, no studies would be removed even if their quality score was low. Findings were presented in respect of motivations and offence-supportive cognitions. This allowed for a review of motivations that were goal-based, and those that involved cognitive strategies acting as facilitators for offending. This is in line with Ward and Keenan's (1999) theory of Offense-Supportive Cognitions.

Overall, the systematic literature review provided support for a number of key goal-based motivations reported by females in their sexual offending against children. These were coercion, pleasing a male partner, meeting one's own needs, jealousy, gaining power and/or control, as well as revenge. In respect of offence-supportive cognitions, the review provided support for all cognitions proposed by Ward and Keenan (1999), namely uncontrollability,

children as sexual beings, entitlement, nature of harm, and dangerous world. However, it was noted that evidence for goal-based motivations and offence-supportive cognitions varied in strength. Participants in the original studies were more likely to have reported goal-based motivations of offending under coercion of a male and meeting one's own needs. In respect of offence-supportive cognitions, they were most likely to depict uncontrollability and entitlement. It is of note that there were differences in relation to goal-based motivations (i.e. coercion, pleasing a male partner) compared to those found in the male literature, and one of Ward and Keenan's (1999) Offense-Supportive Cognitions (i.e. dangerous world) was suggested to be more reflective of men being dangerous (Gannon et al., 2012). Differences tentatively demonstrate the need for female-specific theories and models, as male-derived models overlook clear differences and female-specific factors. This provided further support for those who sexually offend against children not being a homogenous group (Nathan & Ward, 2002; O'Connor, 1987). Consequently, different women will be motivated by different factors. It is therefore important for treatment and interventions to be evidence-based, and recognise female-exclusive models and theories of child sexual offending.

Chapter 2 presented an empirical study, which aimed to expand upon the limited research in the area of attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend, by exploring this in respect of females who sexually offend against children. The objectives of the study were to better understand attitudes and perceptions held by two different samples (i.e. students and professionals working with females with offending histories), and in doing so, explore the possibility of attitudinal differences towards females who sexually offend against children when compared with their male counterparts. As previous studies have typically utilised quantitative methods, the study employed a qualitative methodology in order

to allow for further insights to be gained through elaborations and reflections of participants that are not limited to rating items on quantitative scales (Lea et al., 1999).

A total of ten students and ten professionals were recruited and participated in qualitative interviews. Thematic Analysis identified four themes representing participants' reflections in relation to: (i) the role of women in society and how this may facilitate offending, as well as prevent detection; (ii) why they think women may engage in offending behaviour of a sexual nature against children; (iii) what should happen to them once they come to the attention of authorities; and (iv) the factors that impact on our attitudes and perceptions. In line with previous findings (Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006), professionals typically held more positive attitudes compared to students. This was especially prominent in the area of rehabilitation and management where students and professionals took opposing views. Interestingly, it was noted that despite societal support for harsh and punitive management strategies, as outlined in the introduction to the thesis, students minimised and denied offending by females, with some expressing disbelief of women being capable of sexually offending against children.

Typically, there was a tendency to view males who offend in direct contrast to women. As such, men were described as *"evil perverts"* (Lorraine), with invasive and harmful offences. Conversely, females' offences were viewed as less invasive, with some romanticising offending against teenage males. This extends Gakhal and Brown's (2011) finding of females who sexually offend being viewed more positively than males. Furthermore, perceived motivations for women tended to remove responsibility by presenting them as victims, and as such not accountable for their behaviour. The latter was also often made sense of in the context of external factors.

It was of interest that motivations noted by participants in the present study typically aligned with those that were revealed in the literature review (Chapter 1), in particular those around being coerced by a male, and meeting a need (e.g. gaining intimacy, power, control). Furthermore, 'uncontrollability', which is one of the offence-supportive cognitions presented in the literature review, was also reflected in participants' perceived motivations for why women may engage in offending behaviour. Factors that were typically referred to in this context related to mental health and wellbeing, childhood trauma, previous sexual abuse experiences (leading women to view abuse as 'normal'), and substance misuse. The romanticised teacher-student dynamic discussed by student participants shares similarities with the offence-supportive cognition of children being sexual beings, which draws upon beliefs that offending is mutual, and that victims are willing participants (Ward and Keenan, 1999). As such, it may be possible that offence-supportive cognitions are held within society as a way of explaining and/or rationalise offending behaviour.

The study also built upon the evidence base of other factors that appear to moderate favourable attitudes in professionals by providing tentative evidence that being a parent evokes fear, which was accompanied by a need to justify harsh attitudes. More specifically, it is possible that professionals who had children reflected on this in more detail, which undoubtedly enhanced their emotional responses, and influenced their attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, working with victims of sexual abuse evoked harsher attitudes, which participants reflected was due to being aware of the long-term effects of victimisation. This suggests that, despite there being a tendency to minimise female offending, personal factors can evoke an emotional response that promotes more risk-adverse strategies (e.g. life-long restrictions on where females can go, tagging, and one participant suggested a gated community for those who sexually offend to reside in indefinitely).

When exploring factors that influence attitudes and perceptions, it was identified that cultural variations between countries played a role in what constitutes a child sexual offence. This was due to cultural norms or behavioural practices, and a variation in the age of consent, blurring perceptions of abuse. This is a novel finding in the area, likely identified due to the culturally diverse sample and qualitative methodology. As noted in the introduction to the thesis, the media are key in influencing attitudes and perceptions based upon stereotypes and evoking emotional responses in readers. Other factors were also identified, such as personal experiences of working with the population of females who have sexually offended against children, and professional training challenging beliefs and attitudes. This lends support to previous findings in the area suggesting that training and critical thinking are helpful in promoting more favourable attitudes (Craig, 2005; Lea et al., 1999).

Finally, Chapter 3 examined the most popular quantitative scale used to measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend, namely Hogue's (1993) Attitude Towards Sex Offender Scale (ATS). Overall, the ATS met the reliability criteria of internal consistency and the validity criterion of face validity. However, it did not adequately meet the criteria of content validity. This was due to Hogue (1993) adapting Melvin's (1985) Attitude Towards Prisoner Scale by simply replacing 'prisoner' with 'sex offender', and constructs were subsequently not tested. Consequently, some researchers have argued that the ATS was not validated correctly or designed to specifically measure attitudes towards those who sexually offend (Church et al., 2008; Wnuk et al., 2006).

The critique of the ATS highlighted that there was not enough information available to determine if the ATS meets most reliability and validity criteria (i.e. test re-test reliability, concurrent validity, and discriminant validity). This is problematic considering it is the most widely used measure. Being aware of this meant that when designing the interview protocol

for the empirical study, areas of interest were not limited to those identified on the ATS, but additional ones could be explored through the use of a qualitative design.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Whilst the present thesis contributes to the limited research in the area of sexual offending against children by females, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the systematic literature review presented in Chapter 1 heavily relies upon self-report data from women in prisons. As such, it has limited ecological validity beyond a convicted population and the self-report methodology raises questions around social desirability, and post-offence rationalisations. Furthermore, it was noted that 38% of Beech et al.'s (2009) study also participated in Gannon et al.'s (2012) study. Whilst this reflects the limited and difficult-to-access population that are female sexual offenders, it raises implications for findings in respect of altered disclosures based upon their prior experience.

Furthermore, it was of note that participants in the study reported in Chapter 2 may have felt self-conscious about opening up about their true attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children. This is a sensitive topic, and especially the sample of professionals may have felt more aware of speaking to someone who is a trainee forensic psychologist. As such, their comfort to speak openly on attitudes and perceptions that may be incongruent with their professional values may have led to desirable responding. This was particularly evident in one participant who seemed aware of how they thought they ought to respond in light of their role.

Data collection was also impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, which meant that face-to-face interviews were prevented. As such, four interviews took place via the telephone, which was noted to change the dynamic of the interviews. More specifically, the duration of the interviews was typically shorter and non-verbal communication cues were lost, which

normally may have led to further exploration. Additionally, comfort to discuss attitudes and perceptions may have been impacted due to the telephone modality which made rapport building more difficult.

A final factor worth considering is that of cultural variation that was present in the student sample. Interestingly, culture was raised as being an important factor in relation to attitudes and perceptions in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The ATS (Hogue, 1993) has primarily been used in western cultures (i.e. UK and US). However, it is noted that attitudes can be developed from cultural beliefs and religion (Pickens, 2005), and this was also highlighted in participants' reflections in Chapter 2. As such, it seems that further exploration would be beneficial to assess how culture may influence attitudes towards females who sexually offend in general, and build upon the current findings of attitudes specifically towards females who sexually offend against children. One aspect to bear in mind would be language ability – this was of note with regard to one participant whose first language was not English, causing some difficulty in being able to express their thinking, and therefore not being able to access important information. A dictionary was used as an aid, but at times this was not effective in supporting translation. This also led to some questions being misinterpreted or misunderstood, which further implicated the richness of the data.

Future directions for research grounded in findings from Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 include further exploration of the link between goal-based motivations and offence-supportive cognitions, and how possession of both may increase an individual's vulnerability to offending. Furthermore, the tentative support for female-specific motivations and offence-supportive cognitions require more research in order to be able to draw more robust conclusions.

Implications for Practice

Clinical implications based upon the current findings were identified. Specific to Chapter 1, the identification of female-specific motivations highlights the importance of building the evidence base in order to be sufficient to inform practice. Furthermore, the varied motivations of women raises the need for innovative risk reduction programmes that are responsive to unique motivations of females. Until the evidence base provides greater understanding of this phenomenon, existing models and theories that are derived from male samples should be used with caution and, where possible, information from female-exclusive models should be consulted. Using a responsive and individualised approach to risk management will also support practitioners to recognise female-specific factors that may be overlooked in existing models and theories.

In respect to Chapter 3, the importance of therapeutic rapport in the context of behavioural change is widely recognised (Willis et al., 2010). Findings from the study note that the client group one works with (e.g. victims of child sexual abuse), and personal factors (e.g. being a parent), may promote harsher attitudes which have the potential to impact upon the therapeutic alliance. Conversely, greater compassion for women who offend, as opposed to males, was also noted by some. Whilst this is in line with promoting rapport, one professional reflected on this potentially removing responsibility, and not holding offenders accountable for their actions. This is a tentative finding, given that it was merely reported by one participant, however, it further highlights the importance of clinical supervision in managing one's own biases and emotional responses when working with this population.

It is also of note that knowledge around theories and management of sexual offending appears to have a positive impact on neutralising attitudes, and enhancing more positive views. As such, it would be beneficial for those who implement policy to have some

knowledge of effective management strategies and theories of offending. It is reported that policies are typically influenced by society (Willis et al., 2010) who tend to present with more negative attitudes and inaccurate perceptions around effective management strategies – policies thought to be effective by the general public mostly do not support desistance, which is problematic as does not reduce the risk of re-offending. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to 'educate' society, and the general public more broadly, in order to achieve their support with offender rehabilitation, especially back in the community. Consideration of how this may be done is beyond the scope of the present study, however, it appears that without doing so, societal attitudes and perceptions remain unchallenged, countering efforts around community reintegration and desistance, which represents a *'constant battle'* (Adele) professionals face.

An important finding highlighted in Chapter 3 is that of students holding attitudes that minimise, and at times romanticise, female child sexual offending. In addition to this, a culture of disbelief was also noted in this sample. This has serious implications on victims, and their recovery, following experiences of sexual abuse by female offenders, in that they are likely to feel that they will not be believed, and/or taken seriously, further contributing to the underreporting of this type of offending behaviour. Whilst students are arguably not representative of the general population, more polarised views are likely to be present in the general population, which further highlights the need for wider education in order to promote understanding, with a view to raise awareness and ultimately contribute to the detection of female child sexual offending.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has built upon the limited knowledge base and has identified a continuous need for further research to enable evidence-based practice. Furthermore, female-specific treatment to reflect unique motivations was highlighted as important.

Additionally, the exploration of attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children provided insight into how female offending is typically minimised in comparison to males, and how contextual and relational factors may play a role in contributing to this. The study also builds upon the evidence base of professionals having more favourable attitudes, providing tentative explanations for this effect. Finally, it was identified that the ATS would significantly benefit from further validation and reliability testing.

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Appendices

Appendix A– Confirmation of Ethical Approval

Dear Dr Kloess

Re: "Perceptions of Female Child Sexual Offenders; Comparing Students and Professionals"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_18-19-0540

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Susan Cottam
Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT

Appendix B – Recruitment Poster for Students

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Opportunity to participate in a research project

Title of project: **Perceptions of Females who Have Committed Sexual Offences Against Children**

We are looking for participants who are:

- Over 18 years of age
- Students at the University of Birmingham, who are not studying, or have ever studied, theories or management of sexual offending

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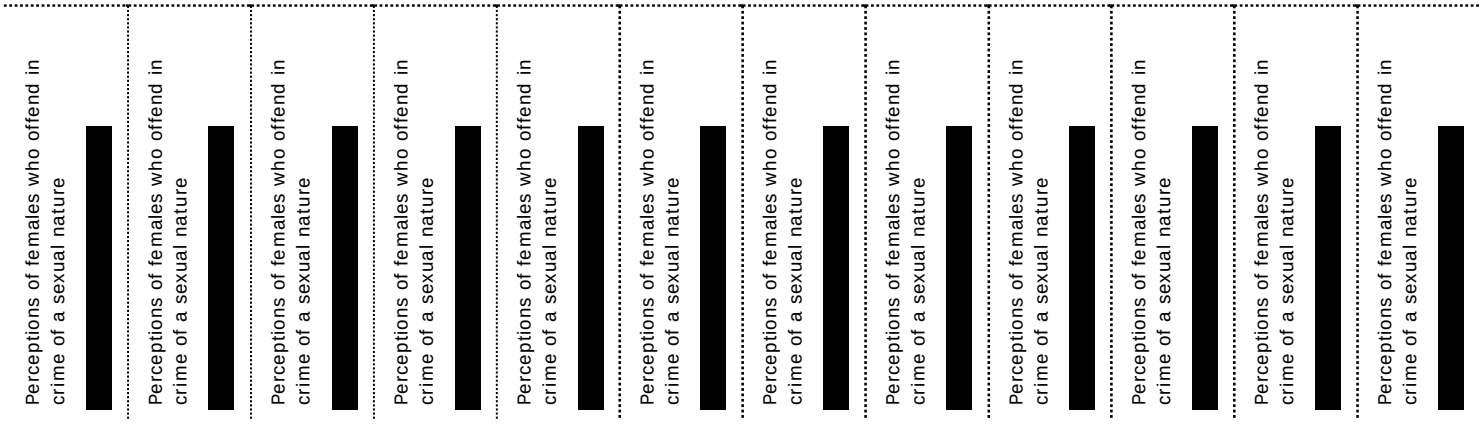
You will be invited to attend an interview to explore your perceptions of female individuals who have committed sexual offences against children. The interview should take no longer than 60-90 minutes.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact the researcher at [redacted]

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at [redacted]



Appendix C – Recruitment Flyer for Professionals

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Opportunity to participate in a research project

Title of project: **Perceptions of Females who Have Committed Sexual Offences Against Children**

We are looking for participants who:

- Work in a therapeutic capacity with females who have committed sexual offences against children (e.g., Occupational Therapist, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Nurse, etc.)
- Are over 18 years of age

You will be invited to attend an interview to explore your perceptions of female individuals who have committed sexual offences against children. The interview should take no longer than 60-90 minutes. This can be facilitated either face to face or via the telephone.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact the researcher at [redacted]

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at [redacted]

Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant information sheet

Title of Project: Perceptions of Females who have sexually offended against children.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. However, before a decision is made regarding participation it is important that you take the time to read the following information carefully so that you understand why the research is being carried out and what is expected of you. If you are unsure of anything or require more information, please contact the researcher at [redacted]. Thank you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and attitudes you hold in respect of females who have sexually offended against children.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate written consent will be required prior to an interview with the researcher. You are free to withdraw at any time, this includes before the interview, during the interview and up until four weeks after participation, without any negative consequences.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

If you choose to participate please contact the researcher, via email, at [redacted]. An interview will then be arranged. This will take place in a private room at the University of Birmingham. Prior to the interview you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. The interview is likely to last no longer than 90 minutes, and you will be asked to discuss your perceptions and attitudes towards females who have sexually offended against children. Please note that the interview will be audio-recorded using a Dictaphone. This is only so that the researcher can transcribe the data verbatim after the interview to facilitate a thematic analysis.

What are the potential benefits and risks of taking part?

Although there are no direct benefits to yourself for taking part in this research, your information will aid in the understanding of the perceptions and attitudes that are held against this population of female offenders. There are no risks to participating however, you may find the interview uncomfortable or upsetting. This is understandable, as the topic area is sensitive. The researcher will try their best to make the situation as comfortable as possible for you.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. All information will be kept confidential in accordance with GDPR and will only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisory team, both during and after completion. No personally identifying information will be included in any write-up of the results. However, it is the duty of the researcher to report any information that you disclose that indicates an intent to harm yourself or another individual.

What will happen at the end of the research study?

At the end of the research study all information will be collected and transcribed. This will then be analysed, and results will be written up as part of a professional doctorate programme.

What if I have a problem or concern?

If you have a question or concern regarding any part of this study, please contact the researcher via email at [redacted].

Who has reviewed the research study?

The research study was granted full ethical approval by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read and consider your willingness to participate in the research. If you are interested in participating, please contact the researcher via email at [redacted]. Thank you.

Appendix E – Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Title of Project: Perceptions of Females who have committed sexual offences against children.

Name of Researcher: Kelly Brown

Participant number: ……..

If you agree to participate, please read the following statements below and confirm you understand by signing your initials in each box.

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time including before I am interviewed, during the interview and up until commencement of data transcription, four weeks post interview date.	
3.	I understand to withdraw my data I will need to provide my participant number to the researcher within four weeks of the interview taking place. I can do this by emailing the researcher.	
4.	I understand that I am free to terminate the interview at any time, without penalty and I do not need to give a reason for this.	
5.	I understand that my data will be stored securely and confidentially and that I will not be identifiable in any report or publication.	
6.	I understand that the researcher may wish to publish this study and any results found, for which I give my permission.	
8.	I understand that should I disclose any information that indicates any intent to harm myself or another individual the interviewer will be bound to inform the appropriate organisation.	
9.	I agree to take part in the above research.	

If you agree to participate please read the statement below and sign.

I give my consent to participate in the research.

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F – Demographic Questionnaire

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant Number .....

Please could you provide the information in relation the following questions.

What is your age in years? _____

What is your ethnicity? _____

What is your professional status? _____

What is your highest academic level? _____

Where do you gain information in relation to local and world news? _____

What newspaper do you read? _____

Appendix G – Interview Schedule

This schedule will be used as a guide, as opposed to each question being explicitly asked. As it is semi-structured, follow-up questions will be asked depending on what the participant says in the interview.

Interview opening

- Introduce myself and the research aims.
- Explain how the interview will be set out, and the approximate expected length. Inform them that they are able to pause the interview to take a comfort break or terminate it any point.
- Ask the interviewee if they have any questions or concerns.
- Explain the bounds of confidentiality.
- Gain consent

Rapport building

- Ask the interviewee how they are feeling.
  - Validate any feelings of nervousness or discomfort and give reassurance in relation to their concerns.
  - Have they participated in research before?
  - Ask why they decided to participate?

Main interview

- Ask the interviewee what their understanding of female perpetrators of child sexual offending is.
  - What are the types of offences they may commit?
  - How often do these offences take place – more or less than male offences?
  - Is it harder to detect child sexual offences perpetrated by a female?

- Ask the interviewee about defining characteristics of a female perpetrator of child sexual offences.
  - If you could describe the characteristics of a female perpetrator of child sexual offences what would they be?
  - Are they likely to be a loner?
  - Are they likely to have close relationships?
  - Are they likely to be married?
  - Do they need love and affection like the rest of us?
  - Are all female perpetrators of child sexual offences the same?
  - Are they bad people?

- Ask the interviewee about the severity of child sexual offending perpetrated by a female.
  - How severe are the effects on the victim?
  - Does severity change with the victim's age (e.g. prepubescent vs. pubescent)?
  - Does severity change with the victim's gender?

- Does severity increase with occasions (e.g. one-time offence vs. multiple offences) against same victim?
- Does severity change dependent on how known the victim is to the perpetrator (e.g. their child, a child of a friend, a pupil, stranger)?
- Is the offence more or less severe than when perpetrated by a male?
- If the perpetrator is in professional employment, where they are trusted (e.g. a teacher), is the offence more severe?

- Ask the interviewee about perceived sentencing.
  - What is the type of sentencing (e.g. hospital, prison, or community)?
  - What is the length of sentencing? How does this compare to the sentences they believe perpetrators get when convicted?
  - Should they lose their civil rights (e.g. voting and privacy)?
  - Do they deserve brute force or the death penalty?
  - Do attitudes change depending on the type of offence?
  - What would increase sentencing?
  - Should details of females who offended sexually against children be announced to the public? What would the impacts of this be on the public and the perpetrator?
  - Do prison conditions affect perpetrators? How important is this to consider?

- Attitudes towards rehabilitation?
  - Do perpetrators need help? What help do they need?
  - If perpetrators are doing well in hospital or prison, should they be considered for parole?
  - How effective is therapy or interventions aimed at changing behaviour?
  - Would they ever be considered safe to work in a role with children?
  - How would you feel living in the same street as a female who committed a child sexual offence who has been released?

- How risky are females who offend sexually against children?
  - How concerned should people be? Can perpetrators be trusted?
  - Is there more or less risk of females perpetrating child sexual offences compared to males?
  - Can female offenders of child sexual offences be sentenced to community sentences?
  - Can female offenders of child sexual offences be managed effectively in the community?
  - Should female perpetrators be followed by services for the rest of their lives?
  - How likely are female perpetrators of child sexual offences to re-offend and commit another child sexual offence?

- Explore the perceptions they hold in relation to solo and co-offending females
  - Is co-offending more frequent than solo offending?
  - What sex would the co-offender more likely be?
  - Which is more severe?
  - Should sentencing be different?

- Ask the interviewee what they perceive motivates females to offend sexually against children?
  - Do motivations differ between female and male offenders?

- Do motivations differ between solo and co-offending females?

- Ask the interviewee how they feel perceptions and attitudes may be formed in respect of female perpetrators of child sexual offences?
  - How may the media impact perceptions of female perpetrators of child sexual offences?
  - Are offences reported differently dependent on the media source (e.g. newspapers, new shows, social media)?
  - Are we affected by the way the media reports these offences? Do they affect our perceptions and attitudes? How may they affect these? Is it in a positive way?
  - Does profession impact perceptions and attitudes? How? Is it in a positive way?
  - Do academic qualifications affect perceptions and attitudes? How? Is it in a positive way?
  - Does contact with females who commit child sexual offences impact perceptions and attitudes? How? Is it in a positive way?

Closing the interview and debrief

- Ask the interviewee if they would like to add any further comments about their experience.
- Ask the interviewee if they have any questions in relation to the research.
- Inform them of the next steps – transcriptions will occur after four weeks; the data will be analysed, and results will be written up.
- Thank the interviewee for their time and willingness to share their experience.
- Provide the interviewee with a debrief sheet that they can retain.

Appendix H – Debrief Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Debrief Sheet

Dear Participant number ....,

Thank you for taking part in the study.

The aim of the research is to explore the perceptions and attitudes held in relation to females who commit sexual offences against children, and how these may differ between professionals and the general population. Results will offer insight and understanding in this area and raise awareness of any need for education or intervention to address any biases or inaccurate perceptions.

If you feel that you have been affected in any way by this study, it is important that you seek support. There are contact details below for organisations who you can contact.

If you wish to withdraw from this study, you are free to do so without penalty, until four weeks post-interview. After this time, data will be transcribed and analysed, and as such it will no longer be possible to remove your data. If you decide to withdraw within this time frame, please contact the researcher via email at [redacted]. When you do so, please quote your participant number (stated at the top of this form) so that your data can be found and destroyed.

For further help and support please contact:

Researcher:

Kelly Brown

Email address: [redacted]

Research Supervisor:

Dr Juliane Kloess

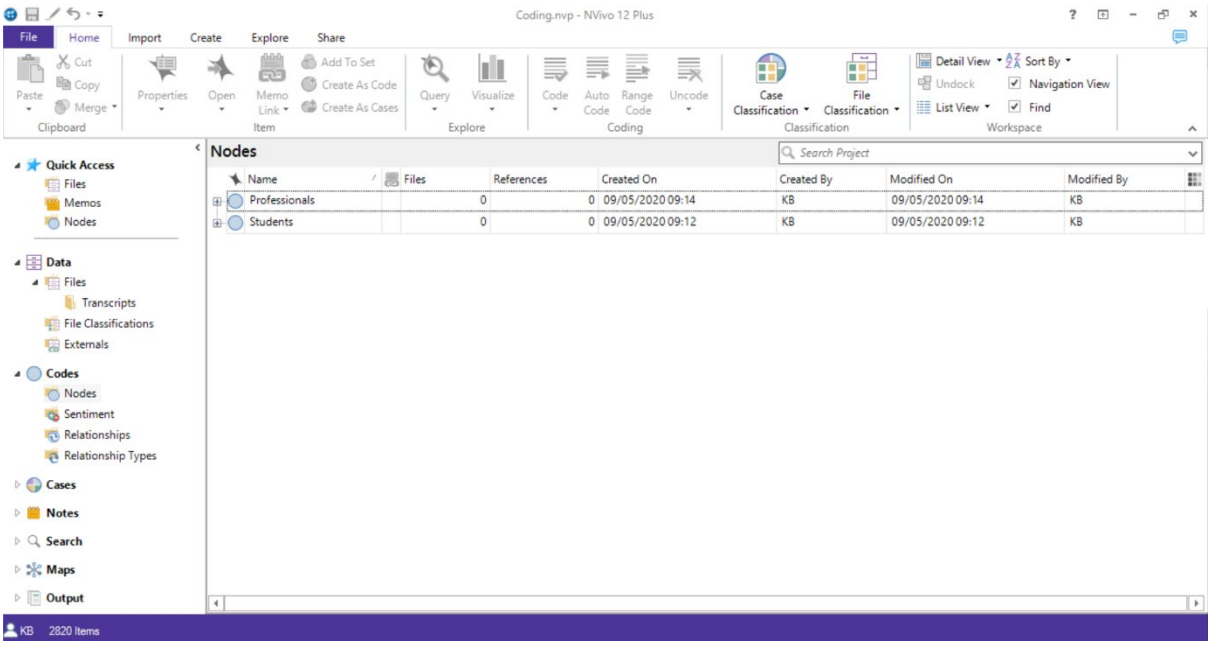
Email address: [redacted]

If you feel that you have been affected emotionally or in any other way, regarding the material in this study, please seek support.

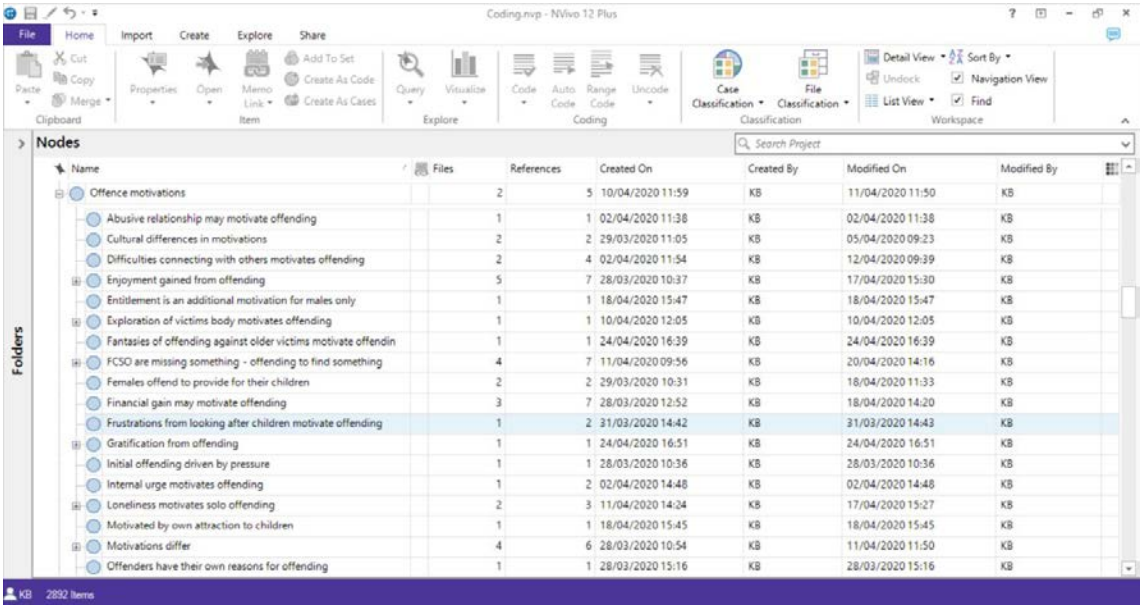
The Samaritans

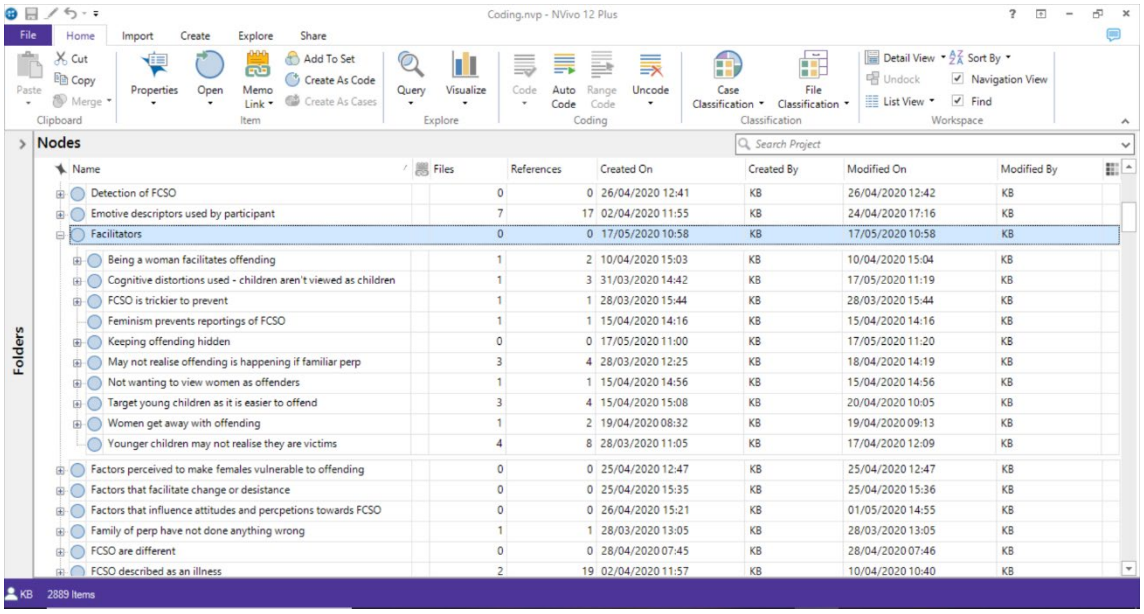
Telephone: 116 123

Appendix I – Overview of Coding Framework

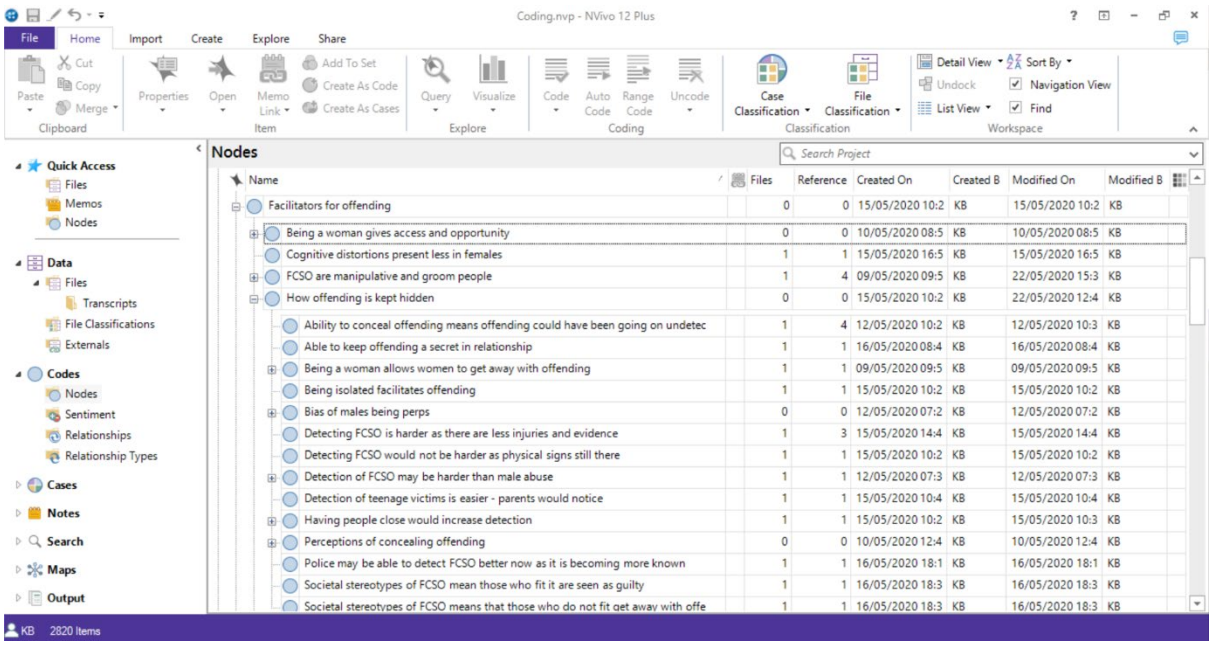


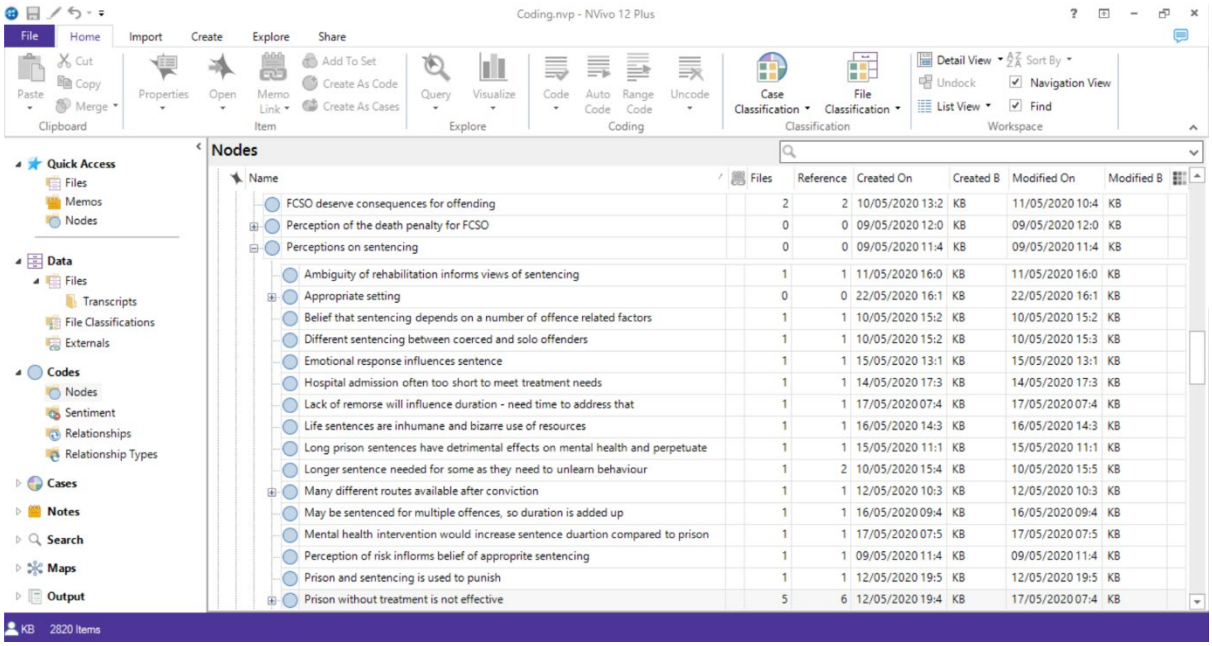
Coding Framework Student Participants:





Coding Framework Professional Participants:

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FCSO deserve consequences for offending 2 2 10/05/2020 13:2 KB 11/05/2020 10:4 KB
Perception of the death penalty for FCSO 0 0 09/05/2020 12:0 KB 09/05/2020 12:0 KB
Perceptions on sentencing 0 0 09/05/2020 11:4 KB 09/05/2020 11:4 KB
Ambiguity of rehabilitation informs views of sentencing 1 1 11/05/2020 16:0 KB 11/05/2020 16:0 KB
Appropriate setting 0 0 22/05/2020 16:1 KB 22/05/2020 16:1 KB
Belief that sentencing depends on a number of offence related factors 1 1 10/05/2020 15:2 KB 10/05/2020 15:2 KB
Different sentencing between coerced and solo offenders 1 1 10/05/2020 15:2 KB 10/05/2020 15:3 KB
Emotional response influences sentence 1 1 15/05/2020 13:1 KB 15/05/2020 13:1 KB
Hospital admission often too short to meet treatment needs 1 1 14/05/2020 17:3 KB 14/05/2020 17:3 KB
Lack of remorse will influence duration - need time to address that 1 1 17/05/2020 07:4 KB 17/05/2020 07:4 KB
Life sentences are inhumane and bizarre use of resources 1 1 16/05/2020 14:3 KB 16/05/2020 14:3 KB
Long prison sentences have detrimental effects on mental health and perpetuate 1 1 15/05/2020 11:1 KB 15/05/2020 11:1 KB
Longer sentence needed for some as they need to unlearn behaviour 1 2 10/05/2020 15:4 KB 10/05/2020 15:5 KB
Many different routes available after conviction 1 1 12/05/2020 10:3 KB 12/05/2020 10:3 KB
May be sentenced for multiple offences, so duration is added up 1 1 16/05/2020 09:4 KB 16/05/2020 09:4 KB
Mental health intervention would increase sentence duartion compared to prison 1 1 17/05/2020 07:5 KB 17/05/2020 07:5 KB
Perception of risk infloms belief of approprite sentencing 1 1 09/05/2020 11:4 KB 09/05/2020 11:4 KB
Prison and sentencing is used to punish 1 1 12/05/2020 19:5 KB 12/05/2020 19:5 KB
Prison without treatment is not effective 5 6 12/05/2020 19:4 KB 17/05/2020 07:4 KB
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2820 Items

Appendix J – Example of Theme and Subtheme of Final Thematic Structure (including developing argument and discussion points)

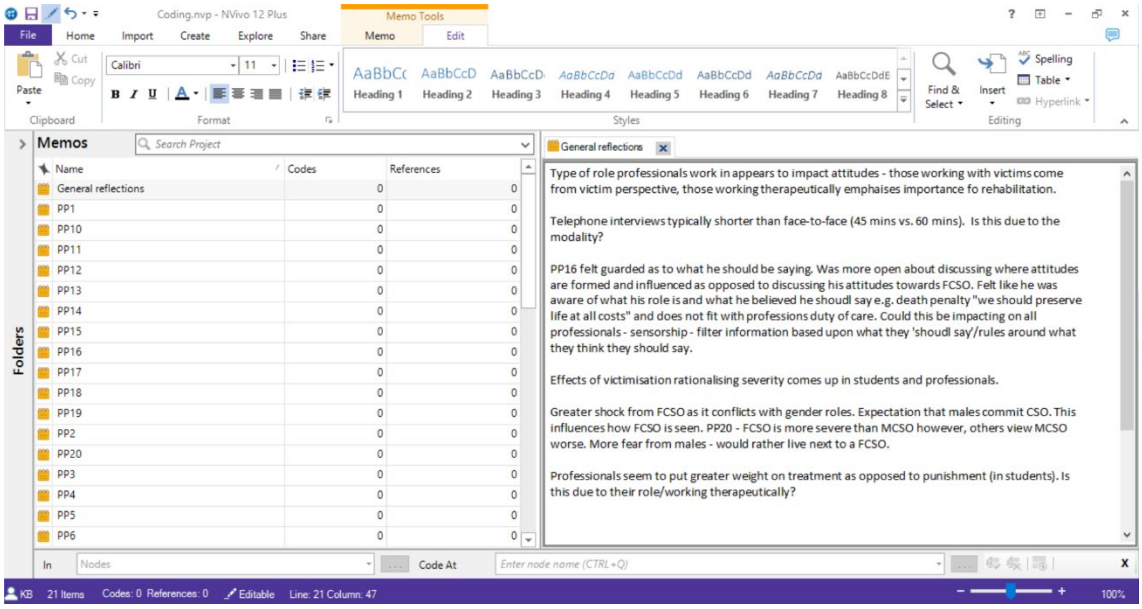
Themes and subthemes	Quotes	Argument
Theme 1 – Role of Women in Society Facilitates Offending and Prevents Detection		
Subtheme 1 – **Women Are Not Capable of Offending**	*Student quotes* Lea - *It's like you know, a woman can never, never do that (.) erm or especially if it's their own child.* Lan - *does that really happen like females offending sexually to children. Does it happen? Because I feel like erm with males it does happen.* Lea - *It's almost they don't associate that aggression and sexual violence (.) with a woman, it's more with a man.* Laia - *They don't like, if, if, if they see a female teacher hugging a male student they just think 'oh she's just being motherly'.* Lorraine - *women are soft and lovely and nurturing ((laughs)) and then men are evil perverts.* Lisa - *I guess there is less things they could do (.) as like sex offending… I know obviously you could, like there are ways that you could get raped by a female but I think it's easier maybe for a male to (.) rape someone.*	A perception that women are not capable of committing child sexual offences. It is perceived that a mother could not do that. It's like the role of a woman is perceived to be the nurturing role, which helps to keep offending hidden. Sexual violence is attributed to men and women are not capable. As such, women can keep offending hidden and prevent detection. It was perceived that there was an expectation that men offend. This was impacted by females offending being at odds to gender roles and the motherly, care giving role that women provide. The caretaker/mother role is at odds with the idea that a woman could harm a child. So, people do not think to suspect women as it does not fit with perceptions of child sexual offenders. Women are seen in direct contrast to men – men are predators, sexual beings and females are vulnerable. Men were viewed more negatively and women more compassionately. Some professionals reported having more compassion for females due to how women are perceived, and because they related to females as they were females themselves.

	Professional quotes Adele - *Mm (.) I wonder if it's, err (.) the, like the police's erm own kind of (.) like a bias, like an unconscious bias, maybe and that you kind of automatically assume that it would be a male or they are kind of looking for men.* Anna - *Possibly maybe because of our kind of bias (.) that we do kind of assume that males are perhaps more likely to be responsible for that kind of behaviour. So maybe if there was a, I don't know, a child who professionals suspected that something had happened, maybe their first thought would be to go down that, because of that bias that we have because of what we are exposed to.* Adele - *Erm I think mainly, yeah, it doesn't fit with I guess my own kind of perception of a woman erm in that we are generally more kind of motherly and nurturing. Erm (.) and it just seems to jar with that kind of erm (.) that way you think a woman is.* Adele - *They are meant to be caring ((pause)) so (.) it's just harder for me to get my head around how, how this female can do that.*	Sexual offending is in men's nature. However, women are less active in or responsible for their offences. The role a woman plays in offending is different to a male (less invasive, fewer types of offences) and that they target 'borderline teens' who can consent. This subtheme was more prevalent in student participants, whereby they felt that it explained how offending remained hidden. However, in professionals the view of males being perpetrators was used to make sense of gender roles and stereotypes allowing offending to remain hidden e.g. police would not assume it would be a female perpetrator. Gender roles inadvertently gives them more time/access to children to offend i.e. through the care giving role, which facilitates offending. Because of how women are seen in society (i.e. nurturers and care givers) offending stays hidden, because they are not expected. These biases may mean offending is overlooked by police and society. They are more likely to be looking for a male. Professionals were able to recognise that FCSO biases may mean that we do not know the true rates of offending. So, rates are likely to be higher than expected. But that males are more likely to offend.

Subtheme 2 – **Women Get What They Want**	*Student quotes* Lea - …*she is just hiding and lying to her partner (.) erm but I feel like the women are able to, there's that idea that women are erm (.) well as a woman myself I think it's (.) most women are able to manipulate and hide things well.* *Int: Right.* Lea *I think it comes with (.) it's just one of those features I guess that women have. There's that social intellect (.) that's a lot better than a man. It's a different level to what a man can do, and I think they (.) us women can hide things well.* Lorraine - *like if they are (.) overly sexual like that could be something that would like tip someone off as to something's going on…erm ((pause)) but that's also kind of just seen as normal for women (.) so I don't know how (.) how obvious it would be they were a sexual offender just because they are overly sexual.* *Professional quotes* Angela - *I, I think there are certain traits with those type of offenders that err, the few that I've worked with or come across, and it's not lots actually, and there's always a certain trait that I can see through (.) through, you know the manipulation, the grooming element, the erm (.) especially observing them with others and erm (.) so (.) I think there's something that makes them ((pause)) similar.*	Women are manipulative, have social intellect, and are flirtatious, so they can get what they want whilst keeping offending hidden. This theme was stronger in students. However, manipulative traits were acknowledged by professionals when discussing gender roles and how women could keep offending hidden. It was a way that allowed them to make sense of offending, drawing upon personal experiences. The quotes in this subtheme are quite contradictory to the characteristics used to describe females under the theme of 'the role of women'. It seems that although women are not seen as offenders due to gender roles, when participants reflected on how FCSOs may have gone about their offending, it became clear to them that they may have had to be quite clever in how they go about it.

	Abigail - *they want to get into families. So they can present as quite likeable and trustworthy.* Adele - *Erm maybe women are a bit (.) a bit more I guess clever at hiding it because it doesn't fit with kind of the way they are seen.*	
Discussion points relating to this theme	Although there is the perception that women are not capable of offending and they are nurturing and kinder, student participants acknowledged that offences are 'bad' and make women 'bad people'. In contrast, there was the general attitude to avoid labels by professionals and see the offence as bad, but it was one aspect of the female. They were able to see beyond the offence. Women are seen more favourable. But some did acknowledge that they should be seen the same in terms of sentencing and need for treatment. This was stronger in professionals, who noted that the offence remains severe despite the gender of the perpetrator. Student participants recognised that how women are perceived in the context of offending depends on number of victims, frequency of the offending, the impacts/effects on the victim and closeness of the relationship. So, it can be severe, although it is typically minimised. Professionals noted that when women do offend it is viewed as more shocking and severe because it is at odds with gender roles. There was a recognition that this conflict caused discomfort. Which may explain the perception of increased severity. It is thought by some professionals that awareness of female child sexual offending is shifting. There is becoming greater awareness, so people may become more attuned to sexual offending by females. One participant reflected upon her childhood and how FCSO was not known. However, society are perceived to be becoming more accepting of this happening. As such, women may become less able to conceal offending. Which may explain why offending is becoming considered more, despite gender roles and stereotypes.	

Appendix K – Key Points from Reflective Logs



Examples from Student Participants:

Participant	Example reflection
Lin	Overall points that stay with me from this interview are that PP1 has quite punitive views in relation to supervision and sentencing. There is support for the death penalty and lifelong supervision. PP1 endorses that Female Child Sex Offenders (FCSO) are very dangerous wearing something that identifies them as being dangerous to children.
Lorraine	The way that a teacher-student dynamic offender is described minimises harm and offence e.g. 'coming on to a boy'. However, child molesters are described as horrible and severity is viewed differently. It seems that a belief that 14-year-old boys can consent to having sex

	with their teacher and victims enjoy it, so it is not seen as an offence.
Laia	Initial thoughts of FCSO are that she is a teacher and it is not as serious as male to female abuse. This has come up before. There seems to be something about consent. Older teen victims are minimised - believes cultural differences in age of consent blur what constitutes CSO. Subjective scale as it varies between countries. This has come up before and spoken about regarding what constitutes an offence – as some cultural practices would be offences in some countries.

Examples from Professional Participants:

Participant	Example reflection
Andrea	Recognition that society may be resistant to accept FCSO - many factors e.g. gender roles, detection rates skewing beliefs. Knowledge base being greater in males so less awareness of FCSO and risk factors. There is discomfort elicited from FCSO. Reflects on offending rates being skewed. Gender roles may mean offending is overlooked. People aren't ready to accept FCSO is happening. Sentence should involve intervention. Phased treatment plan to treat victim

	experience and then outstanding offending needs. Responsive approach to treatment and supervision. This conflicts with students, where it feels more like a blanket response. Is this due to working parameters and individualised treatment plans?
Alison	Either offended on own or been coerced to offend by a male. Offending under coercion comes up a lot. This is also reflected in other professionals. Less so in students. Professionals feel that they have worked with more coerced offenders. Could this be influencing their perceptions, whereas students rely upon media stereotypes that are reported by student professionals (teacher-student dynamic)?

Appendix L – Reflective Statement

Further to the limitations presented in Chapter 2 (p. 56), I encountered a number of challenges whilst conducting the research study. These were primarily concerned with data collection in respect of professionals feeling able to talk openly about their attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, which may have been impacted by my role as a researcher and trainee forensic psychologist in terms of professionals potentially feeling judged, and therefore presenting as more cautious as a result.

The area of study (i.e. sexual offending against children) is an emotive subject which many expressed finding incomprehensible. As such, emotional responses towards those who commit such offences are often negative. Although those who work with offenders in a professional capacity are generally found to be more supportive and hold more positive attitudes, they are human and will still feel the same emotional responses others feel when thinking, or reading, about this topic. As such, it likely created inner conflict between participants' own feelings and those they feel that professionals ought to express.

In professional interviews, I noticed that, at times, responses were out of context or participants identified that what they were communicating was incongruent with professional values. Despite encouragement to talk openly and an emphasis on confidentiality, it likely led to professionals being guarded against what they felt conflicted with professional values. I noticed this more so with one professional participant, where there was a difference between how they spoke about their attitudes towards and perceptions of females who sexually offend against children, and what they feel influences attitudes and perceptions. The latter was richer and contained greater detail, with the former being more guarded and involving shorter responses. Talking about what influences attitudes and perceptions likely felt safer and less

likely to elicit discomfort. I also feel that this was further impacted by me knowing the participant, as we had worked together in the past.

My role as a trainee forensic psychologist was known to many participants as they questioned what I was studying. Whilst my professional skills supported me to build rapport and manage emotions expressed by two participants (who became tearful when reflecting upon their attitudes and perceptions in the context of their professional values), it may have also changed the dynamic. Participants would have been aware of the core values of psychology in respect of rehabilitation and supporting behavioural change. Thus, expressing attitudes and perceptions that were in conflict with this may have been uncomfortable. Given that participants were working in a therapeutic capacity, it would not be unreasonable to assume that expressing hostile or negative attitudes and perceptions would evoke judgment from myself. Furthermore, as humans are motivated to be seen desirably and be accepted, it may have influenced the degree to which participants felt able to share negative attitudes and perceptions in order to present themselves in line with their professional values – of which there was a shared awareness of what these were.

Finally, COVID-19 meant that four interviews took place via the telephone. I felt that the dynamic changed during these interviews, as they were typically shorter in duration and it was initially harder to support participants to open up. I feel that not being able to conduct face-to-face interviews acted as a barrier for fostering a safe space. This is reasonable, as it felt different for me too. I feel rapport was established better in face-to-face interviews as there was naturally more time to converse whilst participants were completing the necessary forms (i.e. consent and demographic forms) prior to interviews commencing. This allowed time to put participants at ease, which I feel enhanced comfort and thus promoted participants

sense of feeling safe to talk openly. Although it took longer to establish rapport in telephone interviews, I found that once it was established it did promote richer content.