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New research shows action needed to stop people seeing indecent images of children for the first time

Initial research findings into the motivations, behaviour and actions of people who view indecent images of children (often referred to as child pornography) online is released today (Thursday, March 28) by the child protection charity the **Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF)** and the **Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)**.

The qualitative research involved hearing from Internet Offenders in their own words about what prompted them to begin viewing indecent images of children; how their illegal behaviour developed over time; methods used to find and view images; potential strategies for desisting; and how they are managing this behaviour at present.

It is hoped the research will lead to the development and implementation of new strategies to tackle the global problem of indecent images of children, in particular to prevent the first viewing of child sexual abuse images. Recommended areas for government, industry, law enforcement and the not for profit sectors to consider are:

- **Preventing incidental viewing and first time access.** Warning users of adult legal pornography of the dangers of straying into illegal materials when sexually aroused.
- **Warnings for risky key word searches.** A warning about the dangers of risky searches and the potential to find illegal indecent images could help some offenders think twice about their actions.
- **Warnings for accessing sites assessed as containing child sexual abuse images.** A warning that a website is no longer accessible as it contains child sexual abuse images.
- **Better management of legal pornographic websites.** Many offenders used progressive links on legal websites to access child sexual abuse images on their first occasion.
- **Increased awareness of how to report child sexual abuse images.** The Internet Watch Foundation takes reports of images and works with the online industry to remove them at source.
- **Increased availability of resources for those who develop risky sexual thoughts and behaviours.** The Stop it Now! Helpline can offer confidential advice to people concerned about their thoughts and feelings towards children and help them to manage them
- **Making monitoring software available.** As well as filtering and blocking software monitoring software is available to help individuals avoid taking risks online.
- **Educating both young people and adults about the criminal law in this area.** Informing them that all sexual images of people who are, or appear to be, below 18 years of age are likely to be illegal.

These recommendations are based on initial findings which are detailed below.

Donald Findlater, Director of Research and Development, Lucy Faithfull Foundation said: “Child sexual abuse, both online and offline, is a major social problem and one that concerns many parents. We cannot simply arrest our way out of this problem.

“Knowing why and how people access child sexual abuse images on the internet is essential to developing effective responses to the problem. These responses include removal of images and, crucially, preventing offending from happening in the first place. Industry and the police have a key role to play in this particular aspect of prevention.”

Susie Hargreaves, CEO of Internet Watch Foundation said: “This qualitative research illustrates the importance of the services the IWF provides not only in protecting the victims of child sexual abuse from revictimisation but also by preventing offences from being committed. Understanding more about how child sexual abuse material is located online allows us to develop new strategies for disrupting access to this content and ensure that we are providing services which continue to be relevant and effective.”

Initial findings:

Negative emotional states were frequently evident immediately prior to first viewing indecent images. Many offenders reported feeling socially isolated with unfulfilled needs for intimacy. They described the internet as an ‘escape’, a way to resolve interpersonal inadequacies and a way of fulfilling fantasy.

... Sometimes when I'd just come out of bad relationships and felt quite vulnerable that's often when I'd turn to the internet ... so I'd say loneliness and a state of mind if I was feeling particularly depressed. What I see now as depression did have a big impact....

...I thought I was coping quite well but on another level I wasn't coping at all. So outwardly you'd say this guy looks ok, this looks fine and inwardly it was it was really bad. So I think it was just like a reaction to a whole host of pressures just built up that's the case that pushed me into it...

Offenders commonly reported not having an initial desire to find sexual images of children, but rather first viewings were described as incidental to their consumption of adult legal pornography. Nine out of ten offenders said they did not intentionally seek child sexual abuse images, but found them via pop ups and progressive links while looking at adult material. Offenders reported entrenched pornography use.

...I think I would describe it as falling into it rather than choosing to...

...I wasn't at that time deliberately looking for indecent images but when I spotted a reference to it. Then that interested me so yeah I clicked on it, clicked on the link through. So when I saw the opportunity that, made me deliberately go and look at it although I wasn't necessarily you know thinking of that beforehand....

...When you're looking at adult images, the occasional child image would come along...

...a long time ago I come across certain images. Not children, a kind of just younger people and teenagers. That's just mean and I start watching it...I was

searching for something else. I was looking for something then I come across that...

Having started 'incidentally', subsequent methods of finding child sexual abuse images are rarely sophisticated. Offenders report using search engines, initially using obvious search terms.

...I would go into the search engine and just type in 'child porn' things, anything, any descriptions around like that and then I would just look at things that came up. It wasn't systematic; it was just what came up and very haphazard and then if I go, if I'd gotten onto certain sites then I'd just use the links that were on those sites...

...When looking at mainstream pornographic sites and you click on the web links, or the 'pop-ups' and things like that, I do remember once something illegal did pop up and being interested in it and then wanting to clicking on it that then took you to advertising and then, that's oh too complicated and went away from it...

Offenders were not initially conscious of risk and did not take security measures. Offenders were initially not concerned about security measures and did not go to any great lengths to protect their identities. They showed little regard for risk of detection.

...I was aware that there was technology, software, proxy software, but I could never understand it. So that gives you an idea of how savvy I was. I could never crack that idea. I was aware it was there. Again to do all of that would have meant that I'd have to consciously wake myself to that this isn't, this isn't casual surfing. That I'm deliberately and consciously structuring an illegal activity and it would be difficult for me to do that...

...my profile, it had pictures of me, it had my first name, it had where I lived. MSN had my full name, it had the last two digits of my year of birth, so no, I took no real effort to, to sort of cover up my identity...

Some offenders experienced negative reactions to viewing child sexual abuse images

...I would feel absolutely terrible...beating myself up...

...These are real children, they're not made up whatever...

Negative reactions led to some offenders attempting self-help methods to address their behaviour. Some report deleting collections of images, avoiding the use of the internet and also abstaining from using adult pornography.

...There'd been times when I felt so sickened by my own behaviour I've got rid of any images on my computer. I know when I first started doing it. I did something stupidly ceremonial by burning all the images to a CD and cracking the CD into as many pieces as possible and burying it in the forest...

...As soon as I could I'd go back and delete all the images because I felt so sickened by them um 'cos I hated it so much this was a way of trying to clean...

... at this stage I went to counselling and I remember even at one stage went...I saw an advert for help with addictions...

*... I switched the computer off, turned it off thought, 'no I'm not going on it today'.
Next day but something always drags you back to it...*

The research has prompted questions for further research:

- **Incidental versus purposive first viewing.** We need a greater understanding of the differences between incidental first viewers and those who purposefully sought out indecent images of children. These different motivations are likely to have implications as to their potential risk to children as well as their management and treatment needs.
- **How does initial incidental viewing affect the viewer's thoughts, fantasies and behaviours over time?**
- **Trial potential preventive measures such as pop up warnings, and methods for aiding desistance such as monitoring software.** What works to prevent individuals looking at sexual images of children, whether again or for the first time?

The study was made possible thanks to a grant from the International Foundation For Online Responsibility (IFFOR).

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

For interviews, and potential interviews with internet offenders, contact Deborah Denis, Media and Communications Manager at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation on +44 (0) 1372 847160, +44 (0) 7540 690315 or ddenis@lucyfaithfull.org.uk.

Or Emma Lowther, IWF Director of Communications on +44 (0) 1223 203030 or +44 (0) 7929 553679 or media@iwf.org.uk.

1. About the Research

The research involved qualitative in-depth one to one interviews with 10 men who had committed online offences relating to child sexual abuse images and who have completed the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's 10- week educative course for preventing reoffending. Supported by police forces from across the country, the programme is for those arrested, cautioned or convicted for offences involving indecent images of children. Alongside an exploration of past offending behaviour, sessions support offenders and their families to ensure responsible and legal online behaviour in the present and future.

Participants were diverse in terms of their age, relationship and family status, number of times convicted. All participants admitted having accessed indecent images of children, with many either having criminal charges or having served a custodial sentence. All participants gave their written informed consent to take part. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview developed by the researchers from LFF and the IWF. Interviews were audio recorded and later

transcribed. Transcripts were analysed using a technique known as Thematic Analysis, this technique allowed the researchers to identify important themes from the transcripts.

Quotes used in this release have been edited to ensure they are succinct and understandable. Full quotes can be obtained on request.

2. About the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF)

LFF is the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. We work with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members.

Drawing on our expert knowledge about child sexual abuse we offer a broad range of services for professionals and members of the public. These include: assessments, intervention and treatment of known offenders, case specific advice and support, training and development courses and workshops, educational programmes for internet offenders and their families, circles of support and accountability and internet safety seminars for schools (teachers, parents and children).

More information: www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk

3. About the Internet Watch Foundation

The IWF was established in 1996 by the internet industry to provide the UK internet Hotline for the public and IT professionals to report criminal online content in a secure and confidential way. The Hotline service can be used anonymously to report content within our remit:

- child sexual abuse content hosted anywhere in the world;
- criminally obscene adult content hosted in the UK;
- non-photographic child sexual abuse images hosted in the UK.

More information: www.iwf.org.uk.

How IWF services relate to this research

IWF analysts receive online reports of potential child sexual abuse images and videos from the public, police and the internet industry. We assess the images and videos against UK law to determine if we can take action.

Where images or videos are found to be actionable, we work in partnership with law enforcement, the internet industry and Hotlines both in the UK and internationally to ensure the content is removed from the internet. If the content is hosted in the UK, this usually takes place within an hour.

Where content is hosted internationally, it is added to the IWF URL List which we provide to industry members to ensure that access to the content is prevented on their networks whilst removal takes place. We also provide our members with a list of known child sexual abuse keywords to minimise the ability to locate child sexual abuse content via search engines.

4. About IFFOR

The International Foundation for Online Responsibility (IFFOR) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to developing policies for Top Level Domains that maximize benefit to global Internet users, domain holders and domain registry operators.

Baseline Policies developed by IFFOR are specifically designed to establish a global standard in combating sexual child abuse images, providing effective parental control, ensuring accurate domain registration information, and protecting the privacy, security, and consumer rights of all internet users.

5. Child sexual abuse online content analysed by IWF during 2012

- 81% of child victims appeared to be 10 years or under.
- 53% of images and videos depicted sexual activity between adults and children including rape and sexual torture.
- 75% of images and videos featured female victims.
- 10% of images and videos featured male victims.
- 11% of images and videos were of both genders. It was not possible to identify the gender of a small number of images.

The IWF works to ensure that criminal content hosted in the UK is removed as quickly as possible. We can only do this in partnership with the online industry. Due to the increasingly rapid responses to takedown notices, we are now measuring removal time in a matter of minutes, rather than weeks or days.

- **56% of child sexual abuse images and videos hosted in the UK** are removed in **60** minutes or less.
- **78%** are removed in **120** minutes or less.

During 2012:

- Just **73** child sexual abuse webpages were hosted in the UK.
- There were **9,477** webpages hosting child sexual abuse content outside of the UK.