



Dissertation Title: Are the risks posed by female child sexual offenders given appropriate and effective investigative consideration, and how could current risk assessment methods be improved upon to mitigate these risks?

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Declarations

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This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BSc Professional Investigation.

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This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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Abstract

This dissertation asked whether risks posed by female child sexual offenders are considered appropriately, and how current risk assessment methods could be improved to mitigate those risks.

The research centred on indecent images of children (IIOC) offences. The Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool (KIRAT), currently used by all police forces in the United Kingdom to assess risk of IIOC suspects, is only applicable to adult males. The dissertation sought to challenge this and discover whether there is evidence supporting KIRAT's application to females.

Relevant literature surrounding several key areas was reviewed to establish any academic basis for KIRAT's modification. Topics researched included female IIOC and contact child sexual offences, links between the offending types, and risk assessment methods. A questionnaire distributed to IIOC investigators obtained opinions and perceptions of female IIOC suspects and KIRAT's current capabilities. The responses supported several key aspects of the literature.

The research found evidence of bias towards stereotyping of males as IIOC offenders and underestimation of the prevalence of female offending, suggesting female offenders are not given appropriate consideration. The literature and empirical data both suggested that KIRAT requires development and found a consensus that KIRAT could be improved by modification to include females, which could mitigate risk.

The findings have clear implications for risk assessment of female IIOC offenders. As identified in the literature and justified by this research, however, further study into the complexities of female offenders is required so that risk assessment modifications are effective in maximising risk mitigation.

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List of abbreviations

CPORT – Child Pornography Offender Risk Tool

HMICFRS – His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

IIOC – Indecent Images of Children

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

KIRAT – Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool

PIVET – Prioritisation and Intervention for Violent Extremists Tool

POLIT – Police Online Investigation Team

TVE – Terrorism and Violent Extremism

UK – United Kingdom

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 - Purpose

This dissertation is being conducted with two main purposes. The first is to examine whether the risks posed by female child sexual offenders, in particular perpetrators of online indecent images of children (IIOC) offences, are afforded appropriate and effective investigative consideration. The second is to consider how existing methods of risk assessment could be improved to mitigate risks posed by female offenders. This chapter serves to establish the background of this area of research and highlight its importance.

1.2 - Background

There appears to exist an underestimation of females as sexual offences perpetrators. Brown and Kloess (2022) note that research is mainly focussed on male offenders, and Cortoni *et al.* (2017) suggest that sexual offending by females is under-recognised.

A consequential relationship between online and physical, in-person (contact) sexual offending creates a division in opinion in the literature. Long *et al.* (2016) argue that online offending can develop into contact offending, however Riegel (2004) considers conversely that offenders view IIOC to prevent urges to commit contact sexual abuse of children. Both studies, however, refer only to male offenders, highlighting the lack of research into their female counterparts.

Despite differences in opinion regarding a correlation, to understand the risk profiles of online offenders and address the need for their prioritisation, the Psychology Department at the University of Liverpool, together with Kent Police, developed the Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool (KIRAT) (Long *et al.*, 2016).

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services [hereafter HMICFRS] (2023) defines KIRAT as:

A tool used to assess the level of risk posed by a suspect who possesses and views indecent images of children on the internet, and likelihood of that person becoming a contact offender.

Figure 1.1 – Definition of Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool (KIRAT) (Source: HMICFRS, 2023)

Long *et al.* (2016) state that KIRAT's purpose is to assist in risk and workload management, and in prioritisation of IIOC suspects. They explain that KIRAT "does not purport to predict future risk or reoffending", but "assumes that past behaviour is one of the most reliable predictors of future behaviour, in risk terms" (Long *et al.*, 2016, para 8).

Presently, KIRAT is only applicable for male IIOC suspects. Long *et al.* (2016) did not consider female offenders in their empirical research, reasoning that commission of child contact sexual offences by females is rare.

Research such as that conducted by Cortoni *et al.* (2017), however, suggests that sexual offences committed by females may be more prevalent than KIRAT's creators were aware of at the time of its development.

This dissertation therefore seeks to establish whether KIRAT should be modified to become applicable to female IIOC suspects. It will attempt to achieve this by examining the literature surrounding the subject matter and collecting and analysing primary data.

1.3 - Rationale

There are two main aspects to the research rationale. Firstly, having previously worked within South Wales Police's Online Investigation Team (POLIT), the researcher encountered an IIOC investigation with a female suspect, and believes that due to the significant risk they were found to have posed, a suspect risk assessment would have been helpful.

The researcher reflected that they exhibited unconscious bias in assuming that the female suspect had been mis-identified, and that a male was more likely responsible. The investigation revealed the female suspect to be guilty of serious IIOC offences.

This experience led the researcher to question investigators' perceptions of female IIOC suspects and highlighted to them the potential future child safeguarding benefits if the risk assessment process was applied to females.

Secondly, the literature claims that the impact and harm caused by female sexual offenders is comparable to that caused by their male counterparts, as asserted by Cortoni *et al.* (2017, para 2):

Despite popular beliefs about the lack of harm caused by women, studies have found that victims of female sexual offenders suffer the same traumatic effects as victims of male sexual offenders, including depression, rage, substance abuse problems, self-injury and suicidal ideation, problematic relationships, and difficulties with sexuality.

As such, the researcher believes that equal risk assessment consideration should be given to both male and female IIOC suspects.

1.4 - Aims and objectives

The aims of this dissertation are:

1. To examine whether the risks posed by female child sexual offenders are given appropriate and effective investigative consideration.
2. To consider how current risk assessment methods could be improved to mitigate risks.

The researcher will seek to achieve these aims by undertaking the following objectives:

1. To explore and discuss research surrounding the prevalence of females as IIOC and contact child sexual offenders, the links between IIOC and contact offending, and current IIOC suspect risk assessment methods.
2. To identify the most suitable research method to appropriately conduct research on the sensitive subject matter.
3. To conduct primary research, and present, analyse, assess, and evaluate gathered data in relation to the research question.
4. To put forward any recommendations that the research has justified relating to the improvement of risk assessment procedures for female IIOC suspects.

1.5 - Structure

This dissertation will be presented with a structure consisting of five chapters.

After this introduction chapter, chapter two will consider objective one. It will consist of a review and interpretation of existing academic literature surrounding the perception of females as sexual offenders and IIOC offenders, the links between online and contact offending, and current IIOC suspect risk assessment methods.

Chapter three will address objective two, outlining the research methodology. The research philosophy, approaches, and planned primary research techniques will be identified and explored, as will any research limitations.

Chapter four will address objective three, presenting the gathered data, and will analyse, discuss, interpret and evaluate it.

Chapter five will address objective four, reviewing and concluding the findings, along with considering whether the aims and objectives have been achieved. As per the final objective, recommendations will be considered and put forward if appropriate.

1.6 - Conclusion

Chapter one has presented the background, rationale, and benefits of research into the risk assessment of female IIOC suspects. Chapter two will expand on the points and arguments introduced in chapter one, by way of an in-depth literature review.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 – Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine relevant and academically reviewed research into several key areas pertinent to the dissertation subject area. These include IIOC offences, contact child sexual offences, the prevalence of females' commission of these offences, the relationship between the two offence types, and IIOC suspect risk assessment tools.

2.2 – Female sexual offenders

2.2.1 - The perception of females as sexual offenders

A common feature in the study of female sexual offenders is a “culture of denial” (Tozdan, Briken and Dekker, 2019, para 28). Gölge, Özgeldi, and Akdemir (2021, para 6) use the same phrase – “culture of denial”, and claim that there exists a refusal to accept that women can perpetrate sexual offences. Tozdan, Briken and Dekker (2019) highlight the stereotype of perpetrators of child sexual abuse being male, whilst Martellozzo, Nehring and Taylor (2010) challenge the legitimacy of this stereotype, drawing attention to the significant risk females pose in committing child sexual offences.

Females being disregarded as child sexual offenders may have contributed to an identifiable research gap, with child sexual abuse perpetrated by females being under-researched (Darling, Hackett and Jamie, 2018). More recently, Gölge, Özgeldi, and Akdemir (2021) report that literature regarding sexual offences is centred on male perpetrators, and that females' potential as perpetrators had at the time of their writing only recently been recognised.

Denov (2003) expresses that the accepted notion that males are sexual offenders has obscured the reality that females are capable of being perpetrators of sexual violence, and statistics support this. Cortoni *et al.* (2017) found that in 12 countries analysed, almost 12% of sexual offences reported in a victimisation survey were perpetrated by females, a number which they describe as far from minimal. Interestingly, only 2% of these offences were reported to police, which may go some way to explaining the lack of attention given to female offenders – the potential that a low rate of crime reporting is leading to a disproportionate view of their prevalence.

Augmenting this distorted view, females that are known to have committed sexual offences against children are more likely to be perceived positively, and their crimes minimised and considered less harmful (Brown and Kloess, 2022). Hetherton (1999, para 5) goes further,

explaining that these attitudes may prevail due to “idealised beliefs about women, which dictate that females, particularly mothers, are incapable of sexually abusing children”, leading to minimisation, dismissal and denial of their crimes.

2.2.2 - Females in possession of IIOC

The field of research relating to female sexual offenders is small but growing, however research surrounding females as perpetrators of IIOC offences is significantly more deficient, with a particular shortage of recent literature.

Prat *et al.* (2014, para 1) note the research gap, stating “to our knowledge, no cases of women charged with sex-related offences, including child pornography, have been described in the literature”. Martellozzo, Nehring and Taylor (2010) do address females as IIOC offenders, but also note a total absence of literature due to a dearth of research conducted on females that commit such crimes online, admitting that evidence of female involvement in such offences is sparse. They account for this by noting that as female perpetrated sexual abuse is relatively rare, a misunderstanding has arisen that it is non-existent.

Whilst the literature is lacking in evidence of female IIOC offenders, statistical data confirms that the concept is a reality. South Wales Police (2024, n.p.) confirm that since the introduction of POLIT in 2016, 29 females have been either arrested, charged or cautioned with IIOC offences in their force area, demonstrating that these offences are being committed by females, and the lack of research is not justified.

Martellozzo, Nehring and Taylor (2010) describe their research as merely exploratory, intending to identify knowledge gaps and pave the way for future research. They conclude that the documented existence of female sexual offenders warrants attention, and the significant phenomenon of online sexual abuse by females is under-researched and further empirical study is required.

2.3 - Links between online and contact offending

Research into IIOC offenders going on to commit contact child sexual offences is similarly scarce (McManus *et al.*, 2014), and the few existing studies paint a varied picture of the relationship.

Inconsistencies in how IIOC offences are conceptualised, categorised, and recorded has led to the examination of the relationship between online and contact offending being frustrated

due to its inherent complexity (McManus and Almond, 2014). This is exemplified in several studies. Whilst Endrass *et al.* (2009) found prevalence of contact sexual offending amongst a sample of IIOC offenders at a rate of 0.8%, Bourke and Hernandez (2009), found it to be significantly higher, at 85% in their sample.

Babchishin, Hanson and Hermann (2011) acknowledge arguments that both support and refute a relationship between IIOC and contact offences, concluding that research into the area is too new to reach a consensus. Long *et al.* (2016) point out that the risks posed by IIOC offenders vary, whilst McManus *et al.* (2014) demonstrate this variety by referring to two studies into the quantity of IIOC possessed by different groups of offenders, revealing similarly polarised results to the two studies mentioned in the previous paragraph. They write that McCarthy's (2010) study of 107 IIOC offenders found that dual offenders (offenders committing both contact and non-contact offences) possessed significantly more IIOC than non-contact offenders. Long *et al.* (2013) however, whose study involved 60 IIOC offenders, concluded conversely that non-contact offenders possessed more images, a conclusion that McManus *et al.* (2014) also found in their own study. The small number of studies therefore display a wide spectrum of opinions, results, and conclusions.

Despite no definitive link having been established (Long *et al.*, 2016), offenders themselves have stipulated that viewing IIOC has justified their in-person child sexual abuse, giving them the desire and courage to commit contact offences (Quale and Taylor, 2010).

There are certainly unanswered questions in the literature, such as whether IIOC offenders in fact possess more self-control than contact offenders and may therefore be less likely to act on their paedophilic impulses (Garrington, Meridian and Boer, 2020). First-hand accounts of IIOC offenders' willingness to commit contact offences though, exemplify and justify serious contemplation of the risk they pose (Long *et al.*, 2016).

2.4 - Risk assessment

Gillespie (2005) and Bailey *et al.* (2022) note that IIOC offences have greatly increased in correlation with the rapid growth of the internet. Gillespie (2005) consequently questions whether UK IIOC legislation passed before the mainstream introduction of the internet in the 1990's (Kahn and Dennis, 2024), remains effective.

The questioning of current IIOC legislation suitability contributes to the researcher's consideration of the suitability of other aspects of IIOC investigative procedure, specifically suspect risk assessment methods such as KIRAT.

In the UK, IIOC suspect risk assessment ubiquitously involves the use of KIRAT, however it is currently only applicable to adult male suspects. It could be argued, based on the points raised above regarding the risks posed by female sexual offenders, that it should be reviewed and made applicable to females.

2.4.1 – KIRAT and other tools

KIRAT is the approach utilised by all 43 UK police forces in the prioritisation of IIOC suspects (Giles and Alison, 2021). KIRAT is a four-tiered decision and risk assessment tool that assesses suspects against nine features commonly found amongst offenders that commit both online and contact sexual offences. The goal is to ascertain the risk of IIOC suspects going on to commit contact offences. Giles and Alison (2021) note that KIRAT demonstrates upwards of 95% accuracy and is effective in the prioritisation of high-risk offenders. Garrington, Merdian and Boer (2020) agree that it contributes, via police resource prioritisation, to the protection of society.

Despite support of KIRAT's usefulness and reliability, Giles and Alison (2021) concede that it requires work. KIRAT's creators note that their own empirical study which led to its development employed a sample of adult male offenders only. They note that further studies are required to establish the potential for KIRAT's application to female offenders (Long *et al.*, 2016), however no further studies have yet been conducted.

Risk assessment tools are not unique to sexual offences, and KIRAT itself has formed the inspiration and basis for tools used in other areas of criminality. It played a key role in the development of the Prioritisation and Intervention for Violent Extremists Tool (PIVET). This tool was developed by Shortland *et al.* (2022), to assess the risk of individuals committing acts of terrorism and violent extremism (TVE). The process features similar questions to KIRAT, and also results in the generation of a suspect risk level.

Whilst TVE and IIOC may be vastly differing criminological concepts, investigators of both offence types encounter similar difficulties in identifying which suspects will go on to commit more serious offences. Prioritisation of suspects is essential in mitigating risk (Shortland *et al.*, 2022).

Extending the similarities, TVE, like IIOC, appears to be vastly male-perpetrator oriented. TVE has been viewed academically as an area of criminality largely not involving female perpetrators. Shock and disbelief often pervade in cases involving women, due largely to traditionally accepted gender roles (Davis, West and Amarasingam, 2021). This response

mirrors reactions to female child sexual offenders put forward by Gölge, Özgeldi, and Akdemir (2021).

Closely reflecting research suggesting under-representation of female child sexual offenders, academic research is emerging recognising the underestimated prevalence of female TVE perpetrators (Davis, West and Amarasingam, 2021). Females' potential for radicalisation and participation in TVE has been overlooked (Carter, 2013), which echoes the conclusions of Martellozzo, Nehring and Taylor (2010), that female IIOC offenders are similarly overlooked.

The common theme is an academic recognition that female offenders in both offence types are more prevalent than previously thought. Despite this similarity, consideration of the risks posed by female offenders differs. Whilst Long *et al.* (2016) excluded females entirely from KIRAT, Shortland *et al.* (2022) have not done so. PIVET is therefore applicable to suspects regardless of gender, supporting the notion that KIRAT has the capability of being applied to females.

The omission of the consideration of females as IIOC offenders is not limited to KIRAT. Eke, Helmus and Seto (2019) developed the Child Pornography Offender Risk Tool (CPORT), which assesses likelihood of IIOC perpetrators re-offending. As with KIRAT, the tool is applicable to adult males only. Eke, Helmus and Seto (2019) support the arguments put forward above by also conceding that in relation to female offenders, further research may alter how the tool is used.

2.5 - Conclusion

This literature review has addressed objective one by considering viewpoints across a wide range of academic sources in relation to IIOC and contact child sexual offences and risk assessment processes.

In conclusion, a general theme is that perceptions of females as sexual offenders may not accurately reflect their true prevalence and the risk they pose, which is reflected in the exclusion of females from KIRAT. Similar risk assessment tools demonstrate KIRAT's capability to be applied to females.

Some researchers recognise and challenge the underestimation of the risk females pose but accept that further study is required.

The next chapter will identify and explore the most appropriate methodology for collecting, analysing, assessing, and evaluating primary data.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 - Introduction

This chapter will address objective two by identifying the most suitable research method to appropriately conduct research on the subject matter.

Oxford English Dictionary [hereafter OED] (2010) defines research as “systematic investigation or inquiry aimed at contributing to knowledge of a theory, topic, etc.”, whilst Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 5) describe it as something undertaken with the aim of systematically ascertaining information to augment knowledge.

The common feature is the word ‘systematic’. OED (2015) defines systematic as “arranged or conducted according to a system, plan, or organised method”, and Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, cited Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 5) put forward that systematic research is based on beliefs and logical relationships. It is with these definitions in mind that the researcher has sought to conduct research in an organised and systematic fashion.

As established in chapter two, research into the relationship between IIOC and contact sexual offending reveals diverse results and opinions and calls for further study. The researcher has deemed that primary research, defined by Hox and Boeije (2005) as data collected specifically and appropriately for the research question, is most appropriate. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate the methodology for the collection of relevant data for analysis and contribution to the research area.

3.2 – The research ‘onion’

The research ‘onion’ model (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 128), formed the framework for this research. The model acts as a guide in research decisions, with the researcher moving from the outer layers towards the centre. The researcher’s decisions in the outer layers influence what data collection, processing, and analysis techniques should be chosen as they move through the layers (Sahay, 2016).

The research ‘onion’ is diagrammatically presented in figure 3.1 below. The aspects of each layer used for this research are circled:

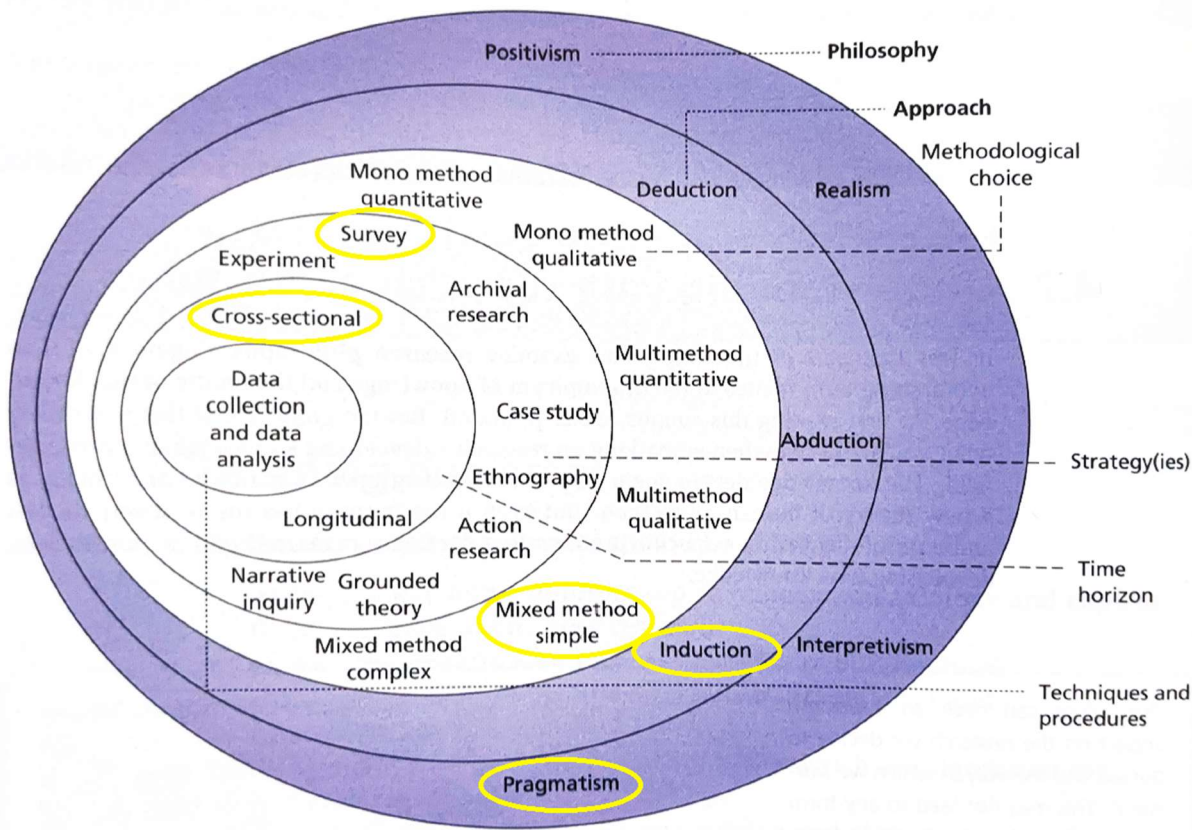


Figure 3.1 – The research 'onion' (Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012)

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 126) point out that data collection methods are aligned with the centre of the research 'onion' model. Sahay's (2016) outlining of the requirement for the researcher to begin at the outer layer and work their way in constitutes a process that allows the research to be taken seriously by others (Crotty, 1998).

3.2.1 – Research philosophy

The researcher initially thought an interpretive philosophy most appropriate, a method by which knowledge is gained via "social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings" (Rowlands, 2005). Bhattacharjee (2019) describes interpretive research as consisting of an attempt at interpretation of social reality by gathering and considering subjective views of research participants, which would align with the research methods utilised in this study.

One philosophical domain is rarely sufficient to answer a specific research question however, and if a research question does not naturally point to one philosophy, different

philosophical positions can be employed and multiple methods used (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 129-130).

Pragmatic philosophy recognises that there are multiple ways of interpreting the world. Pragmatism focuses on “practical understandings and wisdom about concrete, real-world issues” and utilises research questions that seek “practical and useful insights to inform action” (Patton, 2005, p. 152), adhering to this study’s search for insights that may assist in formulating practical recommendations for the future of KIRAT.

This research will therefore exhibit aspects of both interpretive and pragmatic philosophies, with an emphasis on pragmatism.

3.2.2 – Research approach

This research followed the inductive approach, described as the best approach when expressing arguments that are based on experience or observation (Soiferman, 2010). The description aligns with this research, which is based on observations made by analysing participants’ questionnaire responses.

Any recommendations regarding the modification of risk assessment processes were based on the results of data gathering and analysis, following the inductive process.

3.2.3 – Research strategy and choice

Pragmatism values both quantitative and qualitative research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 164), and for this dissertation both types of data were collected. The research therefore employed a simple mixed-method strategy, using the survey method in the form of a single questionnaire. A mixed-method strategy was considered most valuable as, used together, quantitative and qualitative methods elucidate differing facets of a phenomenon and overcome limitations of using one method only (Kelle, 2008).

Whilst questionnaires are usually associated with a quantitative research strategy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 161), they can also be considered in qualitative research, influenced by the type of questions asked (Business Research Methodology, 2013).

The questionnaire completed by participants included opportunities for them to provide their opinions via multiple-choice (which will be analysed quantitatively), and free text (which will be analysed qualitatively) questions. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods creates

a stronger research outcome than if either method is used individually (Malina, Nørreklit and Selto, 2011). It is hoped that this combination of methods will assist the researcher in developing a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions than a purely quantitative approach. Disadvantages of the mixed-method approach however include lack of clarity, as focussing on one method may offer greater opportunity for validation of findings (Adu *et al.*, 2022).

3.2.4 – Time Horizon

This project adopted a cross-sectional time horizon, used to describe studies that are carried out over a short period of time (Levin, 2006). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 190) recognise that cross-sectional, time-restrained studies often employ surveys, as this one has.

The short-term nature of cross-sectional studies does present drawbacks, including their limited ability to explain sequences of events between causes and outcomes, an issue overcome by longer, longitudinal studies. They are, however, better suited to generating further research questions that may be more effective in establishing cause and effect relationships (Cummings, 2017).

3.2.5 – Techniques for data collection and analysis

3.2.5.1 – Data collection

The data collection method was a questionnaire, compiled using Microsoft Forms and distributed to investigators working within the South Wales Police POLIT. Advantages of questionnaires as research tools include consistency in questioning across the sample, cost and time-effectiveness, lack of researcher bias, and lack of time-pressure for participants (Business Research Methodology, 2013). The researcher found the time-effectiveness particularly beneficial, with data being collected quickly. Whilst disadvantages of questionnaires generally include the lack of possibility for participants to express additional views (Business Research Methodology, 2013), the researcher sought to minimise this by including opportunities for participants to openly provide comments.

Electronic questionnaires come with their own advantages and disadvantages. These largely mimic those of questionnaires in general, however the main disadvantage is in ensuring participant engagement (Business Research Methodology, 2013), a drawback noted by the researcher as participants required encouragement to complete the questionnaire.

As the research question concerns law enforcement approach to female IIOC suspects, the researcher deemed a questionnaire directed at IIOC investigators the most appropriate data gathering method.

3.2.5.2 – Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of eight multiple-choice and five free-text questions.

The first three introductory questions were intended to set the scene, put participants at ease, and introduce the subject matter, before progressing to more thought and opinion-provoking questions. Early questions can influence participants' later responses, and consequently influence the questionnaire's validity (Bhandari, 2023), which is why simpler introductory questions were included. The introductory questions were "category questions" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 434), and progressed to "rating questions", that adopted the "Likert-style rating" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 436).

The inclusion of the opportunity to add comments combined open and closed approaches. Reja *et al.* (2003) recognise that open questions afford participants the opportunity to provide opinions relating to their closed question answers, mitigating disadvantages of using purely closed questions, such as generation of bias.

3.2.5.3 – Data analysis

The data analysis will include inspecting the raw data on Microsoft Forms, transforming it to Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for analysis, and modelling it by presenting it visually, enabling the drawing of conclusions and justification of recommendations (datacamp, 2024, para 1).

Different analysis styles will be employed to complement the mixed-method approach. Quantitatively, statistical analysis will search for relationships between participants' characteristics and opinions (Scribbr, 2021), whilst graphs and charts will be used to assist in presenting any evident relationships (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 472).

Thematic analysis, used to analyse qualitative data such as survey responses to examine participants' views (Caulfield, 2023), will be applied to the written responses provided. Whilst Caulfield (2023) outlines that thematic analysis is a good approach for ascertaining themes in participants' opinions, disadvantages are also warned against, including avoiding false interpretations and obscuring present information.

The qualitative-type questions will be analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The main goal of these questions closely reflects that of IPA, exploring the participants' understanding and experiences of IIOC investigations (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). The subject matter inevitably invokes an emotional response, as is discussed further in section 3.8, and IPA is particularly useful in the examination of such topics (Smith and Osborn, 2015). IPA does possess disadvantages, with questions raised over its capacity to grasp experiences and their meanings as opposed to opinions of them (Tuffour, 2017). The researcher has found this to be the case in this research, and this would be more carefully considered in future collection of similar data.

3.6 – Research limitations

3.6.1 – Omission of inclusion of probation services

The researcher originally intended to disseminate a questionnaire to probation service staff, analysing the differences between their perceptions and those of IIOC investigators. As the research question and objectives developed around law enforcement risk assessment and not management of offenders, however, that approach was not considered sufficiently relevant. The researcher does however consider that this element would add value to the understanding of the subject matter, and its exclusion is considered a limitation in obtaining a more holistic and rounded view of IIOC offender risk assessment and management.

3.6.2 – Sample size

This study features a relatively low number of participants. It can be argued that large sample sizes will better represent the population, garnering results with greater accuracy (Andrade, 2020), however this view is not universal. Guetterman (2015, p.4) believes that a research sample as small as six can be adequate to “understand the essence of an experience”. The aim of this dissertation, however, was to go beyond the essence and gain a deeper understanding so that potential changes in policing practice may be considered. The small sample size has in the researcher's opinion prevented the study from reaching its data saturation point, with maximum information regarding the research subject not being obtained. A gap has been left where more data is required, especially further statistical data of offending rates. This could have helped to meet the important aim of collecting enough detailed data to demonstrate existing trends in the phenomenon (Moser and Korstjens, 2018).

The fact that all participants were IIOC investigators and therefore possess similar characteristics and attributes qualifies the sample as homogenous (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Whilst Moser and Korstjens (2018) purport that IPA studies require less than ten interviews, and Kuzel (1992, cited in Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) supports this, suggesting that six to eight data sources are sufficient for homogenous samples, Kuzel also notes that twelve to twenty are generally necessary. The sample size is therefore considered a limitation. A larger sample, consisting of POLIT investigators from a wider geographical area, may have ascertained whether the perceptions observed are localised or widespread, or if they are anomalous, and therefore potentially provided more meaningful findings.

3.6.3 – Mandatory questions

Another limitation is that the researcher marked the opportunities to provide comments as optional. Whilst this was intended to prevent participants feeling forced to answer questions, the limitation here was that very few participants provided comments, creating an even smaller sample size and generating limited qualitative data to analyse. Whilst it can be argued that including mandatory questions in online surveys can lead to lower response rates, they can improve the quality of responses (SurveyPoint, 2023). As the sample comprised professional IIOC investigators, the researcher believes participants would have been willing to provide comments if mandatory, negating these disadvantages, and therefore considers this a limitation.

3.7 – Reliability and validity

The ability and likelihood of research producing consistent results, should it be repeated or replicated, can be expressed by the concept of research *reliability* (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 192). Babu and Kohli (2023, para 1) echo this, considering reliability the “stability or consistency of the measurement method”.

The researcher has attempted to standardise the data collection by compiling a questionnaire applicable to IIOC investigators outside the sample group, so that the ability for re-testing under the same conditions exists (Shortcuts TV, 2015).

Research *validity* inspires a variety of academic opinion. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 193) state that validity solidifies the quality of research, whilst Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) warn that mixed-method research creates complexity in assessing validity. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.193) describe “internal validity” as involving

questionnaire-based data collection, where “an intervention can be shown statistically to lead to an outcome”. This concept applies to this dissertation as the researcher is assessing whether modification of IIOC suspect risk assessment could lead to risk mitigation.

Flaws in research design may affect validity. One of the “threats to internal validity” outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.193) applicable to this dissertation is the concept of “maturation”, defined as the impact of change in participants’ attitudes or behaviours. The researcher is aware that the participants are active investigators of IIOC offences, and their level of experience will change over time, which may influence their attitudes and perceptions, and consequently affect the reliability of potential future research in which they participate.

3.8 – Ethical considerations

Before conducting research, the researcher must consider and evaluate their competency, their understanding of appropriate guidelines for ethical research, the strength of their research design, and the ethical acceptability of their research (Aguinis and Henle, 2004, p. 35). The researcher studied the university ethical guidelines before the submission and approval of a research proposal and ethics form.

The researcher sought to conduct research on a sensitive subject matter in a way that minimizes the negative effects on participants. Only police investigators already exposed to the realities of IIOC investigations were approached to participate.

IIOC investigations can create negative psychological impacts for investigators (Franqueira *et al.*, 2018). The design of the questionnaire therefore sought to avoid psychological discomfort by prompting participants to think of hypothetical investigations, as opposed to previous experiences.

The exception to this was establishing participants IIOC investigative experience. The researcher adopted a teleological view here, evaluating whether the potential benefits outweigh any negative consequences (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 227-228). The researcher concluded that analysing how the participants’ exposure to such investigations affects their perceptions of suspects was an advantage that outweighed what was considered minimal risk of psychological impact given the non-specific nature of the question.

Participants were advised they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would remain completely anonymous and stored within a password protected Microsoft Forms account.

The online nature of the questionnaire brought its own ethical considerations. Barchard and Williams (2008) argue that whilst researchers' lack of contact with participants assists in maintaining their anonymity and willingness to take part, the absence of face-to-face contact withdraws the researcher's ability to determine the participants' understanding, or whether the content has upset them. The researcher ensured the accompanying consent and participant information forms assisted understanding and offered the opportunity for the researcher to be contacted for support or clarification.

3.9 – Conclusion

This chapter has achieved objective two by successfully identifying and planning the most suitable and appropriate research methods and strategies.

The employed research philosophies and approaches, as well as data collection and analysis techniques, have been discussed in-depth.

The next chapter will present and analyse the collected data, utilising the methods outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis

4.1 - Introduction

This chapter will present, interpret, discuss, analyse and evaluate the gathered data in relation to the research question, addressing objective three.

As proposed in chapter three, the primary data was gathered via online questionnaire, completed by IIOC investigators within South Wales Police, and to which 12 responses were received.

A blank copy of the questionnaire distributed to participants can be found in Appendix A.

A table showing the participants' (numbered 1 – 12) responses to each quantitative-type question can be found in Appendix B, and a separate table showing their responses to the qualitative-type questions can be found in Appendix C.

4.1.1 - Chapter structure

The methodology discussed the inclusion in the questionnaire of quantitative and qualitative-type questions. As each qualitative-type question consisted of opportunities to provide comments in relation to the quantitative-type question directly before it, the analysis will follow this format, with qualitative responses considered directly after the quantitative-type questions to which they relate.

4.2 - Analysis of questionnaire responses

4.2.1 - Questions one to three - introductory questions

Question one asked participants which gender they most identified with. The researcher decided to include this question due to the gender focus nature of the research, and to analyse relationships between participants' gender and their answers to other questions. The ratio of male to female participants was 1:1, creating an impartially gendered sample.

Participants were next asked how long they had worked within POLIT as IIOC investigators. The purpose of this question was to ascertain participants' experience in dealing with IIOC investigations, so that comparisons could be made as to whether this has a bearing on their perceptions of female IIOC suspects. The researcher hoped to obtain responses from investigators with a range of experience levels. 50% of participants had more than three

years' experience, 25% had two to three years' experience, 16.67% had less than one year of experience, and 8.33% had one to two years of experience.

Question three asked participants how many times a female had featured as a suspect of IIOC offences in their investigations. Most respondents (58.33%) stated that they had been involved in one to three such investigations, one third answering four to six, and one participant had never been involved in such an investigation. Of note is that only one participant (8.33%) had not investigated a female as an IIOC suspect, whereas 91.66% had. The high number of female IIOC suspect encounters supports arguments and studies such as those from Denov (2003) and Cortoni *et al.* (2017), that suggest a significant prevalence of female sexual offenders.

The only participant to answer "Never" to this question also had less than one year of experience. This is significant as that participant's lack of exposure to IIOC investigations in general may explain the absence of female suspects, as opposed to signifying rarity of female IIOC suspects.

One limitation of this aspect of the research is that the participants are all members of the same investigative team, and participants could therefore have been referring to the same suspects, artificially inflating the figures. This potential flaw in the questionnaire is a point of improvement for future study, as is the possibility of altering the options so that participants can provide a precise number of investigations as opposed to a range to provide more accuracy.

4.2.2 - The perception of the risk of male and female IIOC suspects committing contact offences

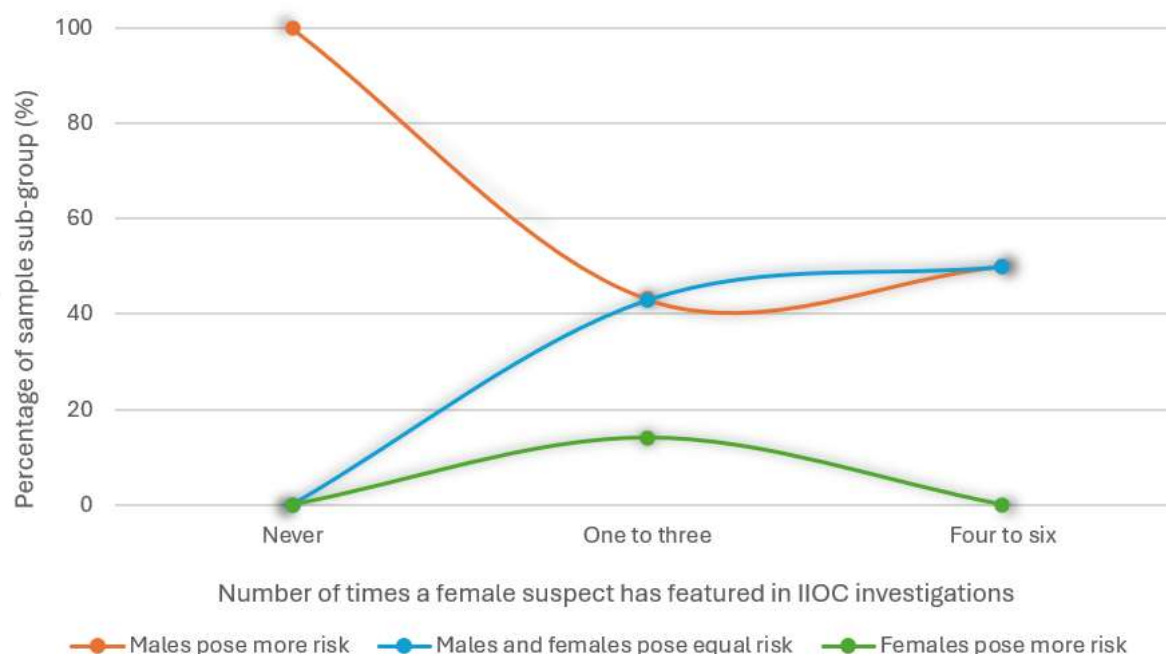
Question four asked participants whether they considered male or female IIOC suspects as posing more risk of committing contact sexual offences against children.

50% of participants considered male suspects as posing more risk, 41.66% did not consider either gender as posing more risk, and the remaining one participant (8.33%) advised they considered females as posing more risk.

The significant difference between participants that considered males as posing more risk rather than females supports the view that that males are often stereotyped as the typical perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Tozdan, Briken and Dekker, 2019) and suggests that this bias extends to professional IIOC investigators.

Interestingly, 50% of both male and female participants answered that they considered males as posing more risk, suggesting no difference in bias between participant genders.

The responses to question three regarding participants' involvement in IIOC investigations with female suspects can be compared graphically with participants' responses to question four as in figure 4.1 below:



Several trends can be observed within this graph. Firstly, the orange line illustrates that 100% of participants that had never encountered a female IIOC suspect perceived males as posing more risk, with this decreasing to 43% amongst the sub-group with one to three encounters, and increasing slightly to 50% of those in the “four to six” sub-group. The general downward trend suggests a decrease in the perception of males as posing more risk as the number of encounters with female IIOC suspects increases.

Secondly, the blue line shows that 0% of the “never” sub-group perceived the risk posed by males and females as equal, compared to 43% of the “one to three” and 50% of the “four to six” sub-groups respectively. In this case the resultant general upward trend, conversely to the perception of males as posing more risk, illustrates that with increasing exposure to female IIOC suspects, perception of equal risk posed by males and females increases.

Lastly, the green line illustrates that 0% of both the “never” and “four to six” groups, and 14% of the “one to three” group thought that females posed more risk. An initial uptrend hints at an increase in perception of females as posing more risk with an increase in

Figure 4.1 – The relationship between exposure of IIOC investigator to female suspects and perception of risk

The trends observed in figure 4.1 appear to suggest that amongst the research sample, with increasing exposure to female IIOC suspects, there is a decrease in perceptions of males as posing more risk than females, and concurrently an increase in perceptions of males and females posing equal risk. These results suggest that with increased exposure to female IIOC suspects, bias towards males as perpetrators noted by Tozdan, Briken and Dekker (2019) decreases. This trend validates Martellozzo, Nehring and Talyor's (2010) challenge of the male perpetrator stereotype and their recognition of the risk females pose in committing child sexual offences. As no participants had been involved in "seven to nine" or "ten or more" investigations involving female IIOC suspects, these categories were not included in this analysis, although further research incorporating participants with this increased experience may assist in confirming or refuting the trends outlined above.

As only one participant perceived females as posing more risk, a trend is more difficult to establish, although the presence of a participant with this opinion supports the views mentioned in the previous paragraph. A larger sample size may have helped to establish more accurate and representative trends, supporting sample size limitation concerns and Andrade's (2020) views on sample size outlined in the methodology.

Question five invited participants to provide comments in relation to question four. The main theme identified was a recognition of the risk females pose to children. Participant four stated that whilst most offenders they dealt with were male, female IIOC suspect numbers are increasing. Participant five offered a different perspective, as seen in figure 4.2:

"Male offenders tend to see a child as their personal possession. Females have been seen to treat the child as something they can also farm out to other offenders"

Figure 4.2 – Participant five's comments in relation to question four

This answer potentially provokes the need for further research into the indirect risk females pose to children by enabling contact sexual offending by other individuals, a further complex aspect to the risk females pose to children. Figure 4.3 includes participant six's concerns:

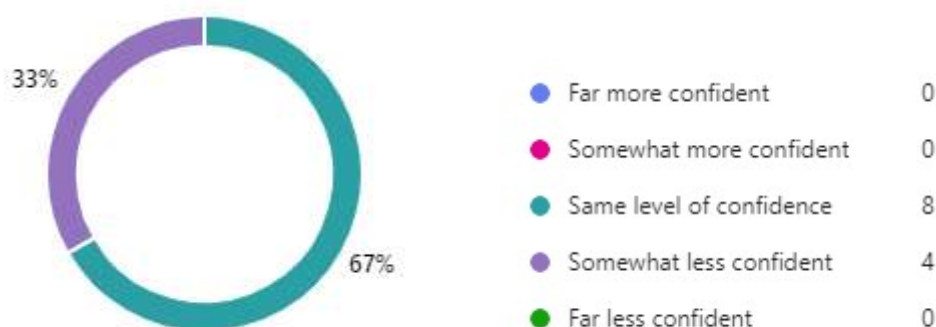
"I feel male suspects we deal with more often, however female suspects pose a greater risk, especially if they have children"

Figure 4.3 - Participant six's comments in relation to question four

The specific risks mothers pose to their children are addressed here, which validate the concerns of Hetherington (1999), who warns of misguided beliefs that mothers are incapable of sexually abusing children, and again suggesting further research into this area may be beneficial.

4.2.3 - Level of confidence in intelligence-led identification of IIOC suspects

Question six assessed participants' level of confidence in intelligence identifying IIOC suspects. The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether IIOC investigators regard positively identified female suspects in the same way as male suspects. The results are presented in figure 4.4 below:



100% of participants would either have the same level of confidence (67%) or less confidence (33%) that intelligence identifying a female as opposed to a male IIOC suspect was correct. No participants would feel more confident that the intelligence was correct if a female was identified.

The results show that generally, IIOC investigators are less confident in intelligence identifying female than male suspects. This suggests a slight bias amongst IIOC investigators away from females, and towards males, being perceived as IIOC offenders.

Figure 4.4 – Graphical representation of responses to question six - confidence of participants in hypothetical intelligence identifying a female IIOC suspect.

The results support the concept of a refusal to accept that females can be sexual offenders (Gölge, Özgeldi, and Akdemir, 2021) and support the results of question four by suggesting this bias extends to IIOC investigators.

Three participants that stated in question six they would feel less confident, also considered males and females as posing equal risk in question four. This could be interpreted as a consideration of females as more likely to commit contact offences than IIOC offences, which would mirror the trend that research into female contact sexual offenders is significantly more abundant than research into female IIOC offenders.

Question seven asked for comments in relation to question six. Participant two, whose comments are seen in figure 4.5 below, responded to question six that they would be somewhat less confident in the intelligence if a female suspect was identified.

“Generally, the suspect is male, therefore when a female suspect is identified I would have more doubts over the initial intelligence”

Figure 4.5 – Participant two’s comments in relation to question six

This response identifies a theme of doubt and disbelief towards females as IIOC offenders and supports the “culture of denial” purported by Gölge, Özgeldi, and Akdemir (2021, para 5), as well as Tozdan, Briken and Dekker’s (2019) highlighting of the bias towards the perception of males as offenders.

Participants five and seven chose in question six that they had the same level of confidence in intelligence that identifies a female, and participant five’s comments, shown in figure 4.6 below, suggest that their exposure to female IIOC offenders has moved their perception towards impartiality:

“Having identified female offenders, this is now something I don’t discount”

Figure 4.6 – Participant five’s comments in relation to question six

Participant seven adopted an impartial view and would rely on the strength of the intelligence and the circumstances.

The second theme of impartiality is identified in these responses suggesting bias is not ubiquitous in the sample. The vastly differing themes demonstrate differences of opinions even amongst this small sample.

4.2.4 - Opinions on KIRAT being applied to females

Question eight asked participants whether they thought KIRAT should apply to female IIOC suspects, with the purpose being to discover whether professional IIOC investigators, who use KIRAT regularly, believe that its disregard of females is a fundamental shortfall.

100% of participants agreed that KIRAT should apply to females. The researcher purposefully included “unsure” as an answer option, so that if a participant’s opinion was not wholly supportive or unsupportive of the notion, they would not feel forced to answer positively or negatively.

In relation to the literature, whilst there is a gap in the research when it comes to the opinions and perceptions of IIOC investigators themselves, this finding supports Long *et al.* (2016) in considering the application of KIRAT to females as a potential area of development.

Question nine requested comments in relation to question eight. The same three participants, two, five and seven, provided comments. Whilst each comment was different, the theme identified was that female IIOC suspects should be subjected to a risk assessment process. Participant two’s comments are outlined in figure 4.7 below:

“Female suspects pose the equal amount of risk to children, and it can be argued would have easier access to a child than a male. Therefore, I can’t think of a sound argument for this tool not to be used on female suspects”

Figure 4.7 – Participant two’s comments in relation to question eight

The concept of females’ access to children and being in positions of trust influencing risk is an area minimally encountered during the literature review and is one that, as alluded to above, warrants further research.

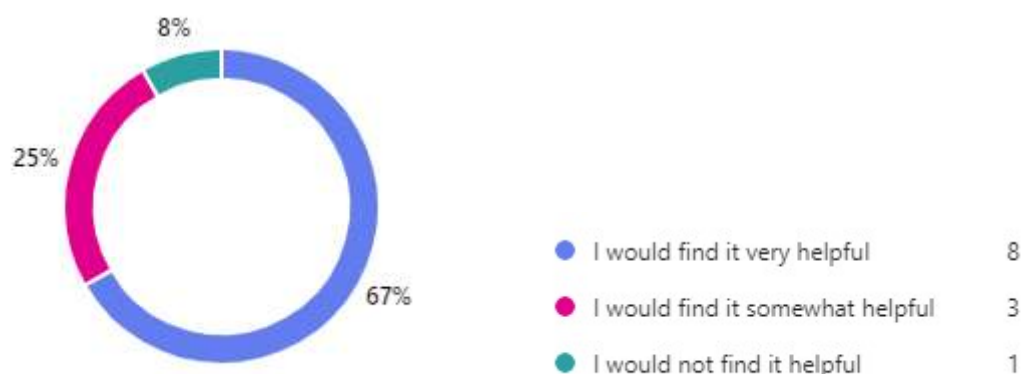
Participant five stated that KIRAT was not fit for purpose. This is significant in that IIOC investigators are recognising potential shortfalls within the tool, and such first-hand accounts from IIOC investigators assist in answering the research question by suggesting the

modification of KIRAT could improve risk assessment procedures and confirm Giles and Alison's (2021) claim that KIRAT requires improvement.

Lastly, participant seven suggested the development of a separate risk assessment tool specifically for females. Whilst this study has focussed on KIRAT, the development of a separate tool is a consideration for future research alongside consideration of a modification to KIRAT.

4.2.5 – Perceptions of the usefulness of a female suspect risk score

Question ten hypothesised a female IIOC suspect having been subjected to KIRAT and assigned a risk level. Participants were asked whether they would find this helpful in their consideration of enforcement and investigative actions. Figure 4.8 below presents the participants' opinions:



91.66% of participants would find female IIOC suspects being assigned a risk level helpful, with 72.7% of these participants stating they would find it very helpful in their consideration of enforcement and investigative

Figure 4.8 – Graphical representation of responses to question ten - opinions of participants on the helpfulness of a risk level being assigned to female IIOC suspects

This finding assists in answering the first part of the research question by suggesting that as there is currently no risk assessment process for females, they are not given the most appropriate and effective consideration.

Question eleven provoked comments, seen in figure 4.9 below, in relation to question ten from participant two:

“This process has been developed to provide the correct risk based on the initial circumstances. This can only be helpful when preparing an investigation and subsequent enforcement”

Figure 4.9 – Participant two’s comments in relation to question ten

This view relates directly to the research question in that it suggests that KIRAT being applied to females could assist in effective investigative consideration of the risks they pose.

Participant five stated that they already apply the KIRAT process to female suspects themselves to obtain a guide risk score for them. This not only confirms the theme introduced by participant two but goes further by revealing that IIOC investigators are already adapting the risk assessment process themselves. Follow up research would be beneficial in discovering what the outcomes of this practice have been and whether the risk scores obtained were accurate and assisted in the investigation.

4.2.6 Should KIRAT be modified?

Question twelve asked whether participants agreed that KIRAT should be modified to include application not only to females, but to all suspects of IIOC offences, regardless of age, gender, or other characteristics.

91.66% of participants agreed, with the remaining one participant neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Most participants agreeing that KIRAT should be modified is another indication that IIOC investigators believe that a modification to the process would assist them. This further assists in answering the research question by suggesting that the risks posed by female IIOC suspects could be mitigated by a modification of KIRAT.

Question thirteen asked for comments in relation to question twelve, and the two responses presented differing themes. Participant two supported the updating of KIRAT, stating that all suspects should be treated equally. Participant ten, however, whose comments are included in figure 4.10 below, adopted a varying perspective:

“The KIRAT isn’t always accurate, as sometimes we don’t know the full circumstances until we are at the address”

Figure 4.10 – Participant ten’s comments in relation to question twelve

This again demonstrates a subjective, impartial view. Whilst KIRAT does not purport to predict the future but assess the risk of progression of offending and dictate police response times (Long *et al.*, 2016), the comments do raise the question of whether KIRAT in its current form is fit for purpose if investigators do not see the benefit of it.

4.3 – Conclusion

In conclusion of this data analysis chapter, a sample group of IIOC investigators has provided their opinions on the risk assessment process of IIOC suspects, and the consensus is that they would find KIRAT being applied to female suspects helpful in their investigations. All participants stated that female IIOC suspects should be subjected to the same risk assessment process as male IIOC suspects.

One of the key findings was that there appears to exist, even amongst a group of professional investigators with specialist experience in investigating female IIOC suspects, some bias away from females as perpetrators of IIOC offences. The perceived risk of female suspects, however, appears to increase with exposure to such suspects, demonstrating a validation of several points raised in the literature regarding the underestimation and under-recognition of female sexual offenders.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 - Introduction

The central aims of this research reflected the two parts of the research question:

1. To examine whether the risks posed by female child sexual offenders are given appropriate and effective investigative consideration.
2. To consider how current risk assessment methods could be improved to mitigate risks.

Four key objectives were identified, with objectives one to three having been addressed in the previous chapters. These objectives were:

1. To explore and discuss research surrounding the prevalence of females as IIOC and contact child sexual offenders, the links between IIOC and contact offending, and current IIOC suspect risk assessment methods.
2. To identify the most suitable research method to appropriately conduct research on the sensitive subject matter.
3. To conduct primary research, and present, analyse, assess, and evaluate gathered data in relation to the research question.
4. To put forward any recommendations that the research has justified relating to the improvement of risk assessment procedures for female IIOC suspects.

This final chapter seeks to address the last objective by summarising key findings of the research and examining whether the aims have been addressed and the research question answered. It will also outline contributions that the study has made to the research area and put forward appropriate recommendations.

5.2 - Summary of key findings

Through the review of relevant literature, and the empirical research conducted, several key findings have become evident.

Firstly, a bias towards males being stereotyped as IIOC offenders was evident in both the literature and the data, with the level of consideration of females as perpetrators not matching the prevalence of their perpetration.

Secondly, the empirical data suggests that IIOC investigators generally feel less confident in intelligence identifying female IIOC suspects than male suspects, supporting the notion that

females are not afforded the same level of investigative consideration as males in IIOC investigations.

Thirdly, the research has identified that KIRAT currently only being applicable to adult males is a shortfall. The limited literature concedes that KIRAT has room for development and that females were not considered during its formulation due to the perceived relative lack of offences committed by them, a notion that this dissertation has challenged. The empirical data shows that the participants unanimously thought KIRAT should be applied to females, and the vast majority would find a risk level being applied to female suspects useful in their investigative considerations.

5.3 - Research questions and aims

In relation to the first part of the research question - “Are the risks posed by female child sexual offenders given appropriate and effective investigative consideration”, the literature has outlined the risks that female offenders pose, and the empirical data demonstrates that despite recognising these risks, some IIOC investigators feel less confident when female suspects are identified. From this finding, along with recognition that KIRAT is not currently applicable to females, and IIOC investigators would find it helpful if it was, it can be concluded that at present, female child sexual offenders are not given appropriate and effective investigative consideration.

Regarding the second part of the research question – “how could current risk assessment methods be improved upon to mitigate these risks?”, examination of the literature demonstrates that risk assessment tools directly influenced by KIRAT from other areas of criminality such as TVE, are applicable to all genders. This is despite similarities in misconceptions over the prevalence of female offenders in both offence types. The empirical data confirms that IIOC investigators believe KIRAT should be applied to females. As the risk posed by female offenders has been documented, the second part of the research question can be answered by suggesting that KIRAT being applied to females could improve the tool and mitigate risks.

Each research aim has therefore been achieved and the research question answered, with the caveat that the requirement for further research has been raised.

5.4 - Further research

Further study is required into the underlying reasons why IIOC investigators, despite recognising the risks posed by female offenders, still feel less confident in female suspect identification.

Research would also be beneficial into how this lack of confidence affects the law enforcement response to female IIOC suspects. Future studies could include a larger sample of IIOC investigators from different police forces in different geographical areas to obtain a more accurate picture of IIOC investigator opinions.

There is a significant gap in the research of female IIOC offenders. Despite this group representing a minority of IIOC offenders, the risk they pose is significant and should not be overlooked, and the complexities of the motivations and methods of these offenders should be researched further.

Whilst this dissertation has considered female child sexual offenders, no research has been conducted into transgender sexual offenders. There is no documented procedure for whether males who have transitioned to and identity as females, or vice versa, would be subject to KIRAT if suspected of IIOC offences. Whilst cases of transgender females being convicted of IIOC offences have been reported in the media (Parkin, 2023; Everett and Jolly, 2023), there is no existing academic research on the subject. Further research in this area may contribute to the debate over whether KIRAT should be applicable to all IIOC suspects.

5.5 - Contribution to research area

This dissertation has drawn attention to the under-representation of female child sexual offenders in the literature, and the lack of consideration of the risks posed by these offenders in the construction and implementation of KIRAT.

The researcher believes that the dissertation has contributed to the research area by highlighting the requirement for female child sexual offenders, in particular female IIOC offenders, to be targeted by more detailed research. It has also utilised a sample that made it possible to demonstrate in practical terms that IIOC investigators who use KIRAT to conduct investigations believe that it should be adapted to be applicable to females.

5.6 - Recommendations

Taking the results and findings into account, the researcher makes two recommendations.

Firstly, and most prominently, given the demonstration of the prevalence and risk of female IIOC offenders, it is recommended that KIRAT as a risk assessment tool for IIOC suspects is reviewed, and its application to female IIOC suspects considered. If, due to the method of KIRAT's construction it is unable to be modified in its current state, the formulation of a separate risk assessment tool that is applicable to females should be considered.

The second recommendation is that IIOC investigators should receive mandatory training to address unconscious bias in relation to female sexual offenders. Despite almost all participants having experience of IIOC investigations involving female suspects, and all participants believing KIRAT should be applied to females, there is a lack of confidence in intelligence identifying females as IIOC suspects. This suggests that education around the documented prevalence of female sexual offenders could assist investigators to overcome this bias and regard male and female IIOC suspects with greater impartiality.

5.7 - Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has considered and drawn attention to the need for adequate consideration and risk assessment of female IIOC suspects. Literature surrounding female sexual offenders, and the misconception of their low prevalence, has identified gaps, particularly in relation to commission of IIOC offences. Addressing these gaps could contribute to the understanding of these individuals and their offences. KIRAT was examined and its efficacy challenged due to its inability to be applied to female IIOC suspects. The researcher hopes that the recognition of the risks posed by female IIOC suspects could influence contemplation of a review of KIRAT so that female suspects are given appropriate and effective investigative consideration, with the ultimate view of mitigating the risk they pose to vulnerable children.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Copy of questionnaire completed by participants

Risk Assessment of Female Child Sex Offenders

- ...
1. Which gender do you identify as?
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
2. How long have you worked within POLIT?
- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 2-3 years
- ☐ More than 3 years
3. How many times has a female featured as a suspect of indecent images of children offences in an investigation you have had any involvement in?
- ☐ Never
- ☐ On 1-3 occasions
- ☐ On 4-6 occasions
- ☐ On 7-9 occasions
- ☐ On 10 or more occasions
4. In relation to suspects of indecent images of children offences - do you consider female suspects or male suspects as posing more of a risk of committing contact sex offences against children? If you wish to provide comments, please do so in question 5 below:
- ☐ I consider female suspects as posing more risk
- ☐ I consider male suspects as posing more risk
- ☐ I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other

5. Comments

6. Think about if you were tasked with an investigation into indecent images of children offences - if the intelligence provided to you identified a female suspect, would you feel more or less confident that the correct suspect had been identified than if a male suspect was identified? If you wish to provide comments, please do so in question 7 below:

- ☐ Far more confident
- ☐ Somewhat more confident
- ☐ Same level of confidence
- ☐ Somewhat less confident
- ☐ Far less confident

7. Comments

8. Currently, the Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool (KIRAT) is used to assess the risk that suspects of indecent images of children offences will commit contact child sex offences, however this tool can only be applied to male suspects of such offences. Do you think that female suspects should be subjected to the same risk assessment process? If you wish to provide comments, please do so in question 9 below:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

9. Comments

10. If a female suspect of indecent images of children offences you were investigating was subjected to a risk assessment process such as KIRAT, and was subsequently assigned a risk level (i.e. high, medium, or low risk), would you find this helpful in your consideration of enforcement and investigative actions? If you wish to provide comments, please do so in question 11 below:

- ☐ I would find it very helpful
- ☐ I would find it somewhat helpful
- ☐ I would not find it helpful

11. Comments

12. Do you agree or disagree that KIRAT should be modified to be made applicable to every suspect of online child sex offences, so that their individual risk can be assessed? If you wish to provide comments, please do so in question 13 below:

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

13. Comments

Appendix B – Table of participants' responses to quantitative-type questions

PARTICIPANT	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 6	Question 8	Question 10	Question 12
1	Female	2-3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other	Somewhat less confident	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
2	Male	2-3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other	Somewhat less confident	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
3	Female	More than 3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
4	Female	More than 3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
5	Male	More than 3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I consider female suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
6	Female	Less than 1 year	Never	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it somewhat helpful	Strongly agree
7	Male	More than 3 years	On 4-6 occasions	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Somewhat agree
8	Female	Less than 1 year	On 4-6 occasions	I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other	Somewhat less confident	Yes	I would find it somewhat helpful	Strongly agree
9	Male	More than 3 years	On 4-6 occasions	I do not consider either female or male suspects as posing more risk than the other	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Strongly agree
10	Female	1-2 years	On 1-3 occasions	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would not find it helpful	Neither agree nor disagree
11	Male	2-3 years	On 1-3 occasions	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Somewhat less confident	Yes	I would find it very helpful	Somewhat agree
12	Male	More than 3 years	On 4-6 occasions	I consider male suspects as posing more risk	Same level of confidence	Yes	I would find it somewhat helpful	Somewhat agree

Appendix C – Table of participants' responses to qualitative-type questions

PARTICIPANT	Question 5	Question 7	Question 9	Question 11	Question 13
1	x	x	x	x	x
2	I believe the risk posed is equal.	Generally the suspect is a male, therefore when a female suspect is identified I would have more doubts over the initial intelligence.	Female suspect's pose the equal amount of risk to children and it can be argued would have easier access to a child than a male. Therefore I can't think of a sound argument for this tool not to be used on female suspects.	This process has been developed to provide the correct risk based on the initial circumstances. This can only be helpful when preparing an investigation and subsequent enforcement.	All suspects should be treated the same..
3	x	x	x	x	x
4	Majority of offenders we deal with are male subjects but female offending subjects are increasing	x	x	x	x
5	Male offenders tend to see a child as their personal possession. Females have been seen to treat the child as something they can also farm out to other offenders.	Having identified female offenders, this is now something I don't discount.	KIRAT is a guidance tool, and not really fit for purpose. I have personally fed this back during sessions with them.	I still provide the investigating a risk score for the female as a guide, by using the same process as for males.	x
6	I feel male suspects we deal with more often however female suspect pose a greater risk especially if they have children	x	x	x	x
7	x	This depends on the strength of the intelligence or particular circumstances	Or a risk assessment tool that is developed with the same process as KIRATS	x	x
8	x	x	x	x	x
9	x	x	x	x	x
10	x	x	x	x	The KIRAT isn't always accurate, as sometimes we don't know the full circumstances until we are at the address.
11	x	x	x	x	x
12	x	x	x	x	x

Key: x = Participant did not provide an answer to question