

KINDERMISBRUIK  
**STOP IT  
NOW**



National Rapporteur on Trafficking in  
Human Beings and Sexual Violence  
against Children

*Summary*

**‘We have to talk about it’**

*Research into young (potential) offenders  
of child sexual abuse*

sexual  
violence  
against  
children

## Summary

Many offenders of child sexual abuse are still young themselves. Of the suspects of sexual violence against children registered by the National Police of the Netherlands, over a quarter are minors.<sup>1</sup> In fact, international academic research shows that over a third of offenders are minors.<sup>2</sup> This also applies to the types of sexual abuse that take place online, such as viewing child sexual abuse material.<sup>3</sup> In-depth insight into young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse is essential to prevent future criminal behaviour and thus victimization. Stop it Now and the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children therefore jointly conducted research into young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse up to the age of 25 who contact Stop it Now.

The research topic of young people who commit child sexual abuse is a socially sensitive subject, and reading this report can be confronting. However, knowledge about the diversity and complexity of (potential) offending behaviour among young people is of great importance to develop and implement targeted and effective preventive strategies to prevent victimization. After all, without offenders, there are no victims.

### STOP IT NOW

Stop it Now is an Offlimits initiative aimed at preventing child sexual abuse. Via a telephone helpline and a chat, Stop it Now offers anonymous, confidential support free of charge to anyone concerned about their own or others' sexual feelings and/or behaviour towards minors.

### NATIONAL RAPPORTEUR ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The National Rapporteur is an independent institute that conducts research into the nature and scope of human trafficking and sexual violence against children in the Netherlands, and into the impact of policy measures on these issues. Moreover, the National Rapporteur advises the government how the approach might be improved.

This research provides a broader insight into the characteristics and the personal circumstances of young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse who are not or not sufficiently known to professional organisations. It distinguishes between viewers of child sexual abuse material, offenders of other forms of child sexual abuse, potential viewers of child sexual abuse material, potential offenders of other forms of child sexual abuse and individuals with a sexual attraction to minors. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of the anonymous reports of conversations that Stop it Now makes when people contact the helpline. The research also provides insight into the situational context giving rise to the offending behaviour, the coping strategies that young (potential) offenders use to prevent offending behaviour, and their need for help.

- 1 Nationaal Rapporteur, 2021 (Dadermonitor seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2015-2019).
- 2 Finkelhor et al., 2009.
- 3 Nationaal Rapporteur, 2021 (Dadermonitor seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2015-2019).

### *The majority of offenders view child sexual abuse material*

The majority of the 146 individuals up to the age of 25 who contacted Stop it Now between 2019 and 2022 are male and of age. The sexual preference described by young (potential) offenders of sexual abuse is diverse. A significant proportion of the young (potential) offenders indicate they have no sexual preference for minors.

Over half of the individuals who contacted the helpline (58%, n=84) have committed or are still committing one or more criminal acts. Most of them have been guilty of viewing child sexual abuse material (n=73). In addition, there are individuals who have contacted minors online and exchanged sexual photos or videos, with or without the consent of the minor. Some offenders also report that they have committed physical sexual abuse against a minor.

The remaining 42% has not (yet) committed any crime, but are concerned about their own (future) behaviour or their feelings. For example, because they regularly search for young girls or boys on porn websites and are afraid to find illegal images. Or because they are chatting with minors and afraid of crossing a line. There is also a group that reports getting sexually aroused when they see minors, for example in the street or while babysitting.

### *A need for reliable information and education about healthy (online) sexual behaviour*

The research shows various factors that contribute to the offending behaviour of young (potential) offenders. Almost half of the young viewers describe risky porn-viewing behaviour or an escalation thereof as the main reason for viewing child sexual abuse material. For many young people, viewing legal pornography is part of their sexual development. However, repeated exposure to pornographic material can lead some people into a downward spiral. They start looking for more and more extreme images to experience the same level of excitement and arousal. The need to search for increasingly extreme images and click-throughs on porn websites often result in young (potential) offenders ending up with illegal images. Although many young (potential) viewers of child sexual abuse material do not deliberately search for this material from the start, they often continue viewing it afterwards.

It is important to pay attention to this situational context in preventive policies and in strategies to support young people in (re)developing healthy sexual behaviour. Also because the academic literature shows that viewing extreme or illegal pornographic material can lead to stereotypical and one-sided notions of sexuality<sup>4</sup> and potentially also to committing other forms of sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup> This means that it is important to provide young people with proper information and to educate them about how they can engage in online sexual behaviour in a positive and healthy way. And also about when (online) sexual behaviour becomes risky and/or illegal. Finally, young people need to know where they can go for information, advice and help.

### *Many (potential) offenders have a need for help*

The research shows that almost half of the young (potential) offenders struggle with various mental health problems, such as compulsive thoughts or thoughts about suicide. A large part also struggles with negative feelings, such as guilt and shame. These specific issues and circum-

4 Hald & Malamuth, 2015; Litsou et al., 2021; Maris et al., 2020; Seabrook et al., 2019.

5 Gassó & Bruch-Granados, 2021; Insoll et al., 2022; Mestre-Bach et al., 2023; Ybarra et al., 2011.

stances play a role in (the lead-up to) the (potential) offending behaviour. The young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse in this research use various strategies to try to desist from offending, such as distraction and avoidance techniques. But when something happens in their personal situation or when the urge gets too great, they are not always able to stop the offending behaviour.

Most young (potential) offenders do not talk to anyone about their feelings, problems, or offending behaviour. There is a great fear of misunderstanding and judgement by their environment. Hence, it is unsurprising that many young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse share their story for the first time with Stop it Now. Yet some of the young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse – in addition to the help they receive from Stop it Now – do also look for support in their social surroundings or from other professionals. Or they indicate that they feel a need to do so. In some cases, talking is simply a way to share these feelings, behaviours and problems. In other cases, talking is used as a means to more easily keep one's behaviour under control. Finally, for some, talking is a first step to obtaining additional help.

A safe environment where they can talk about their feelings and behaviour is therefore essential. Anonymous and accessible support increases the chance that in the future, more young people with concerns about offending behaviour will seek help before committing a crime. This knowledge can help Stop it Now and other organizations to structure their support and prevention services in a targeted way, in order to better match the needs of young (potential) offenders.

#### **YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DO NOT CONTACT STOP IT NOW ALSO NEED SUPPORT**

Young people who contact Stop it Now are possibly more motivated to prevent future offending behaviour than other young (potential) offenders of child sexual abuse. However, many of the results of this research are confirmed in the academic literature. Therefore, it is plausible that young (potential) offenders who do not make contact are facing similar problems and needs for support.

### **About Stop it Now**

The goal of Stop it Now is to prevent child sexual abuse. Via a telephone helpline and a chat, Stop it Now offers anonymous, confidential support free of charge to anyone concerned about their own or others' sexual feelings and/or behaviour towards minors. Professionals can also contact Stop it Now. Stop it Now is an initiative of Offlimits, expertise centre on online abuse.

### **About the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children**

The National Rapporteur investigates the nature and scope of human trafficking and sexual violence against children in the Netherlands and the impact of policy measures on these issues. In the annual monitoring reports and the thematic studies, the emphasis is on monitoring and improving the strategies for tackling human trafficking and sexual violence against children. Based on information from a wide range of sources, the National Rapporteur advises national and local government, other administrative bodies, international organisations and professionals who provide help and support, on how to prevent and combat human trafficking and sexual violence against children.

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August 2023