Challenges & Opportunities: Assessing young people displaying technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviours

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Asking the right questions helps us make good decisions!
Beware of dichotomous signs!

Case study 1.
15 year old boy who had exposed his genitals to his peers in a classroom.

Head Teacher to me:
“Until you tell us he is a low risk, he will stay excluded from school...I have other children to think about”.

Case study 2.
4 year old girl grabs the breasts of her foster mother whilst using sexualised language.

Social worker to me:
“We need to work out if she [the child] could be a perpetrator”.
...instead ask a different question

Case study 1.
15 year old boy who had exposed his genitals to his peers in a classroom.

Me to teacher:

“Tell me what you know about him. How has he explained what happened in class?”

Case study 2.
4 year old girl grabs the breasts of her foster mother and uses sexualised language.

Me to Social Worker:

“What might the girl be communicating to us?”
Questions and decisions are important!

What is our understanding of adolescent harmful sexual behaviours (HSB)?

What is different about Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours (TA-HSB)?

What does this say about the future direction of TA-HSB assessment?
The AIM Project: A quick tour

Assessment
(How we understand HSB?)

Intervention, &
(What we do next that helps?)

Moving On...
(How we encourage desistance?)
The AIM Project: A quick tour

1999 AIM Project founded by 10 local authorities within Greater Manchester.
Purpose was to establish objective and consistent set of practice guidance and training regarding harmful sexual behaviours.
Welcome to Manchester signs!
The AIM Project: A quick tour

Since 2003 AIM has established itself as not-for-profit charity providing HSB training for multi-disciplinary groups across the UK and Ireland.

- AIM2 Assessment
- Under 12’s Assessment
- AIM Interventions for Adolescents & Families
- Education Guidelines
- TA-HSB Practice Guidance.
AIM Project, V27 and RVTS

V27/Betanien Hospital has adopted and adapted the AIM2 assessment and AIM Intervention manuals. V27 together with RVTS has trained and implemented these tools for multi-disciplinary professionals across Norway.
Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB)

Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or abusive towards another child, young person or adult.

(Derived from Hackett, 2014.)
HSB: A continuum of behaviours

Figure 1: A continuum of children and young people’s sexual behaviours (Hackett, 2010)

**Normal**
- Developmentally expected
- Socially acceptable
- Consensual, mutual, reciprocal
- Shared decision-making

**Inappropriate**
- Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group
- Context for behaviour may be inappropriate
- Generally consensual and reciprocal

**Problematic**
- Problematic and concerning behaviours
- Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected
- No overt elements of victimisation
- Consent issues may be unclear
- May lack reciprocity or equal power
- May include levels of compulsivity

**Abusive**
- Victimising intent or outcome
- Includes misuse of power
- Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance
- Intrusive
- Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given by victim
- May include elements of expressive violence

**Violent**
- Physically violent sexual abuse
- Highly intrusive
- Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator
- Sadism
HSB: Prevalence in UK

• Definitive data difficult to obtain since this sits across a range of agencies, including social care, health and criminal justice professionals
• NSPCC study (2012) suggested proportion as high as 65%
• Recorded sexual offences for young people under 18 in England and Wales (2013-14) was 20%.
• Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2015) estimated 25% of intra-familial sexual abuse involved a child or young person.
• Barnardos Inquiry (2016) 1/3 of incidents of child sexual abuse involved a child or young person.
HSB: Problems with the terminology used

- Researchers and professional use many terms to describe both the children and the harmful behaviour, including, “adolescent sexual offender”, “young abusers”, “sexually abusive children”.
- The term adolescent sexual offender is used in studies which contain both pre-pubescent children and adolescents as well as young people who have not been convicted.
- HSB is a spectrum of behaviours, displayed by a diverse population, for multiple reasons.
- THEREFORE assessment & therapy has to be tailor-made, not off the peg!

**Developmental Factors**
*(Sexual abuse, rejection, attachment problems)*

**Trait Factors**
*(Anti-social behaviours, emotional loneliness, etc)*

**Situational Triggers**
*(Substance misuse, victim access, conflict etc)*

**Stable Dynamic Risk**
*(Anti-social behaviours, emotional loneliness, etc)*

**State Factors**
*(Abusive sexual thoughts, need for intimacy, availability of victim)*

**Acute Dynamic Risks**
*(Abusive sexual thoughts, need for intimacy, availability of victim)*

**Sexually Abusive Act.**

**Protective Factors**
*(Skills, strengths, Resilience)*

Victim resists, Outsider intervenes, Young person desists
“Another critical feature to increase the effectiveness of predicting risk is the availability of detailed information about the family history...the unavailability of detailed historical information or the availability of inaccurate information neutralises the use of research findings... ”
“We found very few examples where holistic, multi-agency assessments had been undertaken and shared. The underlying reasons or triggers for the sexual offending were consequently not fully analysed in many of the cases inspected.”
Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours
Key definitions

Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours (TA-HSB)

One or more children engaging in sexual discussions or acts, using the internet and/or any image-creating/sharing or communication device - which is considered inappropriate and/or harmful given their age or stage of development.

This behaviour falls on a continuum of severity, from the use of pornography to online child sexual abuse.
Case Study 3...from 2004

- A 14 year old male referred by police for risk assessment following arrest and caution for possession of high volume of indecent images of children (IIOC) obtained via mother’s credit card.
- The investigating police officer described “surprise” that the offender was an adolescent.
- Youth justice social worker unsure what to do with him.
- No evidence of any other form of harmful sexual and non-sexual behaviours.
- Emotionally lonely, socially isolated, bullied at school, under-achieving at school.
- Created an online persona (digital avatar) on Second Life.

**Challenges?**

- What has motivated him to access IIOC?
- What impact had viewing on his emerging sexual understanding?
- How did he access this material? Who else was he in communication with online? Adults? Children?
- Does he represent a risk to other children and young people? How can we reliably measure (and manage) his risk?
- No evidence-based and tested assessment models available.
- How significant is his emotional withdrawn and use of Second Life?
Redeveloping HSB practice.

Current assessment models do not readily equip busy practitioners with the means by which they can gather, analyse, and formulate therapeutic plans regarding TA-HSB risk. Furthermore, we need to understand the facilitating function of how the online environment might interact with the young person’s internal psychology.

Are we being left behind the curve?

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a large part of young people’s lives, and we found it was a factor in the build up to the offence in approximately one quarter of the cases examined.
Case study 4: During two recent consultations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker A states:</th>
<th>Worker B states:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“He uses porn. So what? Most young people do. It really isn’t the main issue here.”</td>
<td>“I have no idea what he was looking at, nor what impact viewing sexual imagery had on his sense of entitlement to sex. I really need to check this out.”</td>
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### Intuitive Judgement.
- Involves a rapid, unconscious data processing, combining available information by ‘averaging’ it.
- Low consistency.
- Subjective quality.
- More likely to be reactive.
- Potential for assumptions to be made, and then firmed up.
- Prone to verification errors.

### Analytical Judgement
- Involves slow conscious and consistent thought.
- Objective quality.
- More likely to be critically reflective.
- Assumptions acknowledged, but then ‘checked out’ against other available information,
- Remains professionally curious.
- Able to suspend belief.
TA-HSB Case Study 5

• 16 year old male
• Using Chatroulette to randomly pair with other users for webcam-based conversations,
• Coerced a girl to engage in sexual activity online.
## Facilitating function of the online environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Offline</th>
<th>Victim vulnerability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓ anxiety: “I won’t get caught...no-ones watching”</td>
<td>Lack of online supervision</td>
<td>Premature sexualisation? Sex as currency for meeting other needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ guilt: “I’m in a bubble...it doesn’t feel real...I’m not harming anyone”</td>
<td>Alcohol/substances</td>
<td>Seeking out love, affection, validation – immediate availability of respondents online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ shame: “I can say or do what I want, I can be who I want...they’ll never know its me”</td>
<td>Low mood</td>
<td>Online naivety, lack of understanding of risks and online safety</td>
</tr>
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<td>↓ effort: “I don’t even have to get changed or leave my bedroom”</td>
<td>Anger (feeling wronged, sense of entitlement)</td>
<td>Lack of parental/carer supervision</td>
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<td>↑ Victim access, opportunity: “I can contact 100s of girls in minutes...it’s like fishing, eventually someone will bite”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>↑ Arousal: In an aroused state following pornography use?</td>
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<tr>
<td>↑ Confidence/boldness: I won’t get caught.</td>
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NSPCC Literature Review 2016

Explored three key questions:

(i) The developmental appropriateness of children and young people accessing IIOC

(ii) If children and young people who display technology-assisted HSB differ to those displaying offline HSB

(iii) The crossover between online and offline HSB among children and young people
i) Explore the prevalence of TA-HSB displayed by 275 children and young people being assessed for the NSPCC’s HSB service, Turn the Page’

(ii) Explore the range of TA-HSB displayed by young males accessing this service and compare the backgrounds and characteristics of those with:
   - TA-HSB only (n=21),
   - Offline HSB only (n=35)
   - Dual HSB. (n=35)

(iii) Investigate the association between TA-HSB and offline HSB

(iv) Investigate professional involvement with, and response to, TA-HSB.
### Key Finding 1: Children and young people engage in a range of TA-HSB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TA-HSB is harmful for the child/YP and may directly or indirectly harm another person</th>
<th>TA-HSB is likely to directly harm another person</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally inappropriate use of adult pornography (DIP)</td>
<td>Showing another young person developmentally inappropriate pornography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmful to self</td>
<td>Sexting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessing, making and distributing indecent images of children (IIOC)</td>
<td>Technology-assisted sexual grooming</td>
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<td>Sexual harassment and sexual solicitation</td>
<td>Sexual abuse of children online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other forms of TA-(H)SB</td>
<td>May include the writing of sexually explicit stories which are inappropriate for the child/young person’s developmental stage and/or have been shared using technology.</td>
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<td>May also include other developmentally inappropriate behaviours such as phoning adult sex lines.</td>
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### Three stages of the TA-HSB Practice Guidance, 2017.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HSB factors?</strong></td>
<td>Developmental factors?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harm to self &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>harm to others</td>
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<td><strong>Family factors?</strong></td>
<td>Environmental factors?</td>
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**Factors that increase % of persistence?**

**Factors that increase % of desistence?**

#### Interventions

- **Supervision:** restrictions & enhancements.
- **Monitoring:** identification of early warning signs.

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**NB If new information shared then re-evaluate the case formulation**

**NB How does any new formulation change the safety plan?**
Viewing frequent/extreme pornography and sexually aggressive/harmful behaviours

- Relationship between IIOC and contact HSB unclear
- Research studies suggesting a stronger link between viewing frequent/extreme pornography and HSB
- Svedin (2011) self-report study 2015 male students found that frequent users X3 more likely to have committed a sexually coercive act
- Ybarra (2011) two year longitudinal survey of 10-15 yr old found intentional exposure to violent X-rated material predicted a X6 increase of self-reported sexual aggression.
Facilitating function of technology: CSA victims’ perspective


Young people identified how technology assisted the initial maintenance and escalation of their own abuse by:

1. Increased ease of access to victims,
2. Lowering inhibitions
3. Powerlessness
4. Control of the night time space
5. Emotional blackmail
6. Image related blackmail
7. Reduced recognition of the abuse.
In summary...

✓ The facilitating function of the online environment and how it interacts with a young person’s harmful sexual behaviour risk is not yet addressed in standard HSB risk-assessment models.

✓ The TA-HSB Practice Guidance supplements existing risk assessment models, and does not substitute for them.

✓ It prompts the practitioner to ask different questions.
Mange takk!

Questions?