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Since the advent of the internet, investigations and convictions for the crime of online child sexual offending have risen steadily. While police investigation and associated management activities in this area have increased, the relationship that exists between online child sex offending, contact sexual offending and recidivism is unclear, with little information available to support law enforcement identification of those actively committing, or at risk of committing, contact offences against a child in their online investigations. Very little empirical research has been undertaken to inform an investigative approach to this type of appraisal, focusing on the investigative factors available to law enforcement agencies that could inform decision-making processes to support the identification of those at risk of contact offending. Specifically, little information is available to investigating law enforcement concerning criminogenic features of online environments that support the manifestation of problematic trajectories of online child sex offending behaviour, that could inform these risk-related decisions.

The programme of research in this thesis examines the processes of online child sex offending and investigation in Peer-to-peer (P2P) networks in order to identify investigative and offence-related factors that may improve investigative capacity for the identification of online child sex offenders with problematic profiles. Furthermore, it develops the basis of an empirical decision-support tool intended to support investigators in achieving this objective. In support of this aim, three studies were undertaken, addressing the following questions:

- What are the factors that influence investigative decision-making and action in P2P investigation processes, and where is risk-related decision support needed for the identification of those at risk of contact offending and recidivism?
- How does the online P2P environment influence the manifestation of problematic trajectories of online child sexual offending in online environments? Can we identify criminogenic features of this environment of relevance to risk-related decision-making; that offer specific eliciting conditions for the manifestation of problematic profiles in online offending contexts?
- Can we use this knowledge to develop a decision support system for investigating law enforcement that could support the identification and

interception of problematic profiles (i.e. at risk committing contact sexual offences, or recidivism) in P2P environments?

The epistemology underlying this programme of research is that of 'subtle realism'. Through this lens, the research and supporting methodologies sought to approximate the objective realities of online investigation and offending contexts, in order inform an empirical basis for enhanced decision-support, investigation and management of online child sex offenders on P2P systems; one with scope for direct, practical application in the investigative context.

Studies I and II employed a 'mixed methods' design, featuring combined Thematic and Correspondence Analysis strategies. Study I identified a range of social and criminal influences on decision-making and action in the process of online P2P investigation, and revealed a range of major challenges to this practice. This study highlighted investigators' particular need to access information concerning the risk potential of observable offending behaviours in their online investigations that would support the investigative prioritisation of contact offenders and those with recidivistic tendencies. Study II adapted this methodology to an examination of the role of the online offending situation in the offence pathway of P2P offenders. It specified a range of criminogenic factors (e.g. software functionalities and affordances) in the online offending situation of P2P offenders associated with problematic cognitive-behavioural trajectories of P2P use.

The design of Study III was adapted in direct response to the challenges to investigative prioritisation of contact offending cases identified at Study I. Using a Latent Class Modelling approach, this study developed a methodology for profiling problematic paraphilic interest in online P2P systems, with intended application to investigative decision-support and case prioritiation. The major empirical findings of the thesis are revisited in an expanded discussion at the conclusion of the thesis. This discussion reviews the empirical contributions of the research and its strengths and limitations. It further provides a reflection on the research design, prospective applications of these studies in investigative risk appraisal settings, and a series of recommendations for future research.