

<b>Institution:</b> Middlesex University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20 Social work and social policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving Children's Digital Experiences and Reducing Real-World Exploitation		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2008-2020.		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Martellozzo	Associate Professor	2009-date
Horvath	Associate Professor	2010-date
DeMarco	Lecturer	2014 – date
Adler	Professor	1999-2019
Davidson	Professor	2013-2019
Gekoski	Senior Researcher	2013-2019
Leyva	Lecturer	2015-2017
Monaghan	Research Assistant	2015-2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 to 31 December 2020.		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> The research findings and recommendations presented here have informed important legislative, policy, education and policing changes relating to children and young people across the UK. These changes include: a new statutory requirement to teach relationships and sex education in all secondary schools with concomitant guidance and a public consultation on how to implement the duty; a significant contribution, through training, to the way officers perceive, understand and police online child sexual abuse; new guidance from the information Commissioner's office designed to deliver 'safety by design'; and a child sexual abuse offending typology.		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> The research team investigated how internet access may compound risks children face that, if unmanaged, could undermine their well-being. The impacts identified result from uptake of this underpinning research, which focuses on the online exploitation of children and their exposure to harmful content. <b>Improving Policing and Child Protection Practices</b> The Office of the Children's Commission for England (OCC) commissioned Horvath and Davidson to conduct a Rapid Evidence Assessment of the literature on criminal justice system responses to intra-familial child sexual abuse and the impacts on children and young people, both of exploitation and how authorities have responded [1]. Building on this research, the European Commission (EC) funded Davidson and Bifulco, with DeMarco, to investigate policing practice tackling online child sexual abuse across the UK, Netherlands, Italy and Ireland, as well as victims' experience of being solicited and groomed online [2]. This was achieved through stakeholder engagement and surveys administered to police and interviews with police officers and young adults. Following this work was the 2017 study in which DeMarco and Martellozzo, funded by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) evaluated key performance indicators and desired outcomes in safeguarding cyberspace from indecent images of children [3] through semi-structured interviews with employees ( $N=10$ ) and stakeholders ( $N=9$ ). This explored the strengths and challenges of both the task of removal and the IWFs remit. Most recently Martellozzo, Davidson and DeMarco were commissioned by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, to develop a new typology of offending behaviours related to child sexual abuse through a review of case files across multiple police forces [4]. <b>Informing public debate on pornography, healthy relationships and sex education</b> Since 2008, Horvath (then at University of Surrey continuing at MU from 2010) led a series of widely cited and highly influential studies on 'Lads Mags', focusing on their implications for men's attitudes towards women, sexual aggression, and the mainstreaming of dangerous sexism. One outcome from these studies was a consortium-based evidence review on the impacts of pornography on children and young people commissioned by the OCC as part of its national Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. The resulting report [5] led to follow-on research, commissioned again by OCC, along with NSPCC, and a third, confidential funder [6]. Findings from these two studies included gender and age differences in experiences with online pornography and		

associated risks/coercions. A key recommendation in Horvath et al. 2013 was to change Sex Education teaching so that it would become Relationships and Sex Education, switching emphasis away from biological lessons in order to introduce wider consideration of safe/unsafe, trustworthy/untrustworthy relationships. A further recommendation based on the study was that relationships and sex education must better reflect young people's digital experiences of sexualised media in general and pornography, specifically. These recommendations were elaborated in [6], which focussed particularly on the need to make RSE compulsory in all secondary schools, not just those required to teach the national curriculum.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All references have been published in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals or are reports from competitively obtained funding, which have been peer reviewed by the commissioning bodies.

- [1]. Gekoski, A., Horvath, M.A. H. & Davidson, J. (2016). The effectiveness and impact of the child protection and criminal justice systems in cases of intra-familial child sexual abuse. *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, 2 (1). pp. 54-66. ISSN 2056-3841  
<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/19010/>
- [2] DeMarco, J., Cheevers, C., Davidson, J. et al. (2017). Digital dangers and cyber-victimisation: a study of European adolescent online risky behaviour for sexual exploitation. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, 14(1), 104-112. <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/24169/1/15DeMarco.pdf>
- [3]. Martellozzo, Elena and DeMarco, Jeffrey (2020) Exploring the removal of online child sexual abuse material in the United Kingdom: processes and practice. *Crime Prevention & Community Safety*, 22 (4). ISSN 1460-3780. <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/30638/>
- [4]. Martellozzo, E., Davidson, J, DeMarco, J., Monaghan, A. (2020). A typology of CSA Offending. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/our-research/perpetration/a-typology-of-csa-offending/>
- [5]. Horvath, M.A.H., Alys, L., Massey, K., Pina, A., Scally, M. & Adler, J. R (2013). "Basically... porn is everywhere" - A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People. Office for the Children's Commissioner for England. <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/10692/>
- [6]. Martellozzo, E.; Monaghan, A.; Adler, J. R.; Davidson, J; Leyva, R. & Horvath, M. A. H. (2017). "I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it..." A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people. Revised and Updated Project Report. Middlesex University, NSPCC, OCC  
[https://figshare.com/articles/ I wasn t sure it was normal to watch it /3382393](https://figshare.com/articles/I_wasn_t_sure_it_was_normal_to_watch_it/3382393)

#### Key Funding

- [1] 2014: Rapid Evidence Assessment in relation to intrafamilial child sexual abuse. Commissioned by Office of the Children's Commissioner, £45,885, Horvath, Davidson and Gekoski.
- [2] 2014: Enhancing police and industry practice: EU online child safety project. European Commission ISEC fund, €670,000, Davidson, Bifulco, DeMarco (non-MU McMahon, Bogaerts, Schimmentii, Caretti Puccia).
- [3] 2016: An evaluation of effectiveness in safeguarding cyberspace. Commissioned by Internet Watch Foundation, £50,000, DeMarco and Martellozzo.
- [4] 2018: Development of a typology of CSA offending. Commissioned by Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (Bernardo's), £215,000, Martellozzo, Davidson and DeMarco.
- [5] 2013: Literature Review on the impact of pornography on children and young people. Commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, £24,995, Horvath, Scally, Adler and (non MU: Alys, Massey, Pina).
- [6] 2015: A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of children and young people. Commissioned by the NSPCC, Office of the Children's Commissioner and a third unnamed funder, £74,984, Horvath, Martellozzo, Davidson and Adler.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Improving Policing and Child Protection Practices

Our research highlighted gaps in policing practice, and differences in risk of solicitation across adolescents. In the UK, the research has had impacts in educational settings, on police and social work actions and policy discussion {a}. Examples include:

- DeMarco produced a pre-recorded webinar in June 2016 which CEOP shared across the 43 police forces in England and Wales, social work training and safeguarding practice in the UK

(and 6 other European jurisdictions) {b}

- Educational poster for schools distributed in the UK and Republic of Ireland via eSafety Ltd. Replicated in Dutch and Italian and shared with partners in Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium and Italy for dissemination. Over 5,000 in total.
- In collaboration with the Greater Manchester Police, DeMarco ran workshops for 200 police officers working across cybercrime and child sexual abuse in Malawi and Tanzania.
- Over 200 police officers working in child protection in Italy and the UK {c} and 120 medical staff from Central and North West London NHS Trust {d} were trained by Martellozzo.
- Creating an episode of 'The Know Show', a podcast providing digestible content for sixth form and college students. This has been viewed 332 times on YouTube as well as streaming on Spotify and 'liked' 376 users on Twitter.
- Findings have been used in working with senior government staff at the Home Office, structuring new policy-based research around online CSA.
- Findings informed the Home Secretary's 'Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy' 2021.

The typologies in [2] informed the development of a new online safeguarding strategy for the National Volunteer Police Cadet programme. DeMarco assisted with informing a Theory of Change which led to the development of their safeguarding policy, as well as a platform used to (a) collect information from the cadets and (b) ensuring that the platform allowed for safe and appropriate communication between cadets and the adult leaders. Currently, there are 7348 young people and 1863 police enrolled on the platform across England and Wales. The abovementioned work has influenced policy and practice globally, and is demonstrated by:

- DeMarco's work with foreign police forces and governments translates findings into workshop content for frontline staff tackling online sexual abuse from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Recipients countries include: Palestine and Jordan (UNDP), Malawi (Youth Justice System), Tanzania (Ministry of Justice), and Singapore (Police force).
- In Palestine and Jordan, respective UNDP offices now create 'online safety hubs' allowing victims to report the experience of online CSA, grooming or solicitation anonymously.
- In Malawi
  - all staff working with the charity Chisomo have incorporated online safety questions and knowledge with 'street' children under their care.
  - Police now ask questions about the online habits of youth when investigating cases of child sexual abuse.
  - Police practice has changed, and they now collect ICT devices from suspected child sex offenders under investigation.
- Martellozzo and DeMarco are delivering a series of seminars for 20 non-governmental organisations working to prevent and support victims of online child sexual abuse as part of an Erasmus+ funded project in Poland which will reach over 400 practitioners.

Our research has informed police practice in the UK and police forces internationally. This has resulted in: police officers 'up-skilled' in the understanding of sex offenders' complex online behaviours; increased engagement by police with young people in raising awareness about online harms; improvement of investigations more generally (e.g. interview questions, evidence collection). Not measurable but evidenced by our testimonials {b,c}, these skills have led to more efficient investigations, signifying that offenders have been identified more quickly, and mitigated some of the harm/risk to young people.

### **Driving public debate on pornography, healthy relationships and sex education**

This research provided the first incontrovertible evidence that viewing pornography affects the behaviour of young people and received extensive national and international media coverage {e}. The results provided fresh leverage for a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, politicians, and NGOs to evidence the need for changes in sex education {f}. The NSPCC alone used our research in their:

- written and oral evidence to the House of Lords' Children and the Internet Inquiry {g};
- Health Committee Inquiry into children and young people's mental health;
- oral evidence to House of Common's Public Bill Committee, Digital Economy Bill;

Contributions to policy development in the UK were widespread, including citations in a number of parliamentary debates and discussions:

- a report drafted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015, titled '*Identifying the Routes by which Children View Pornography Online: Implications for Future Policy-makers Seeking to Limit Viewing*';
- findings fed into the PSHE and SRE inquiry;
- consultation on online age verification and to the expert panel supporting it;
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) established direct links with Horvath and Adler who contributed to and reviewed POST Note: Relationships and Sex Education (2018) {h};
- sessional reports from The House of Commons; Science and Technology Committee reviewing the impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health {i}.

Legislation addressed the issues identified in the research, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which adopted the change in priorities to *Relationships and Sex Education* and made it compulsory in all secondary schools in England from September 2020 {j}.

Practice has also been influenced:

- Horvath created a video which is being used to train youth workers in Scotland and Iceland initially and will be rolled out across Europe as part of an Erasmus+ funded project with the aim of bringing together a community response to gender-based violence.
- Martellozzo has created a training session focusing on the impact of pornography on young people, funded by the NHS, for sexual health doctors and clinicians.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

{a} Deputy Director Research and Evaluation, The Centre for Expertise for Child Sexual Abuse

{b} Independent Expert, National Research Institute, Poland [Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (PIB)]

{c} Ex-Superintendent, Metropolitan Police

{d} Director of Training, Central and North West London NHS Trust

{e} Media Coverage includes: 'Most boys think online pornography is realistic, finds study'

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jun/15/majority-boys-online-pornography-realistic-middlesex-university-study> (Readership <https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2020/jun/17/new-data-shows-guardian-is-the-top-quality-and-most-trusted-newspaper-in-the-uk>) 'Does porn hurt children?' <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/29/sunday-review/does-porn-hurt-children.html> (Readership <https://letter.ly/new-york-times-readership-statistics/>)

{f} Ex-Deputy Children's Commissioner for England

{g} Our research is cited multiple times by different people and organisations in the House of Lords Select Committee on Communication: Inquiry: Children and the Internet, Written and Oral Evidence <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-committees/communications/children-internet/Childrenandtheinternetevidence.pdf>

{h} POST Note June 2018 'Relationships and Sex Education'

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/POST-PN-0576>

{i} House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. Impact of Social Media and Screen use on young people's health. 14<sup>th</sup> Report of Session 2017-2019

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/822/822.pdf>

{j} Children and Social Work Act, 2017

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga\\_20170016\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga_20170016_en.pdf) The new relationships and sex education curriculum became mandatory in secondary schools in England in September 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education> there are over 3.41 million pupils in secondary school in England and Wales who will receive the new Relationships and Sex Education <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>