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Abstract | This study examines reoffending among 1,092 male offenders proceeded against for a child sexual offence in New South Wales between 2004 and 2013, including 863 child sexual assault offenders, 196 child abuse material offenders and 33 procurement/grooming offenders.

Seven percent of child sexual offenders sexually reoffended within 10 years of their first police proceeding for a child sexual offence, while 42 percent non-sexually reoffended. Risk of sexual and non-sexual reoffending was highest in the first two years.

Child sexual assault offenders were the most likely to reoffend non-sexually, while procurement/grooming offenders were the most likely to reoffend sexually. There was evidence of transition to other sexual offence types, but this varied between groups. Indigenous status, history of offending and the number of child sexual offences emerged as important predictors of reoffending, although risk profiles varied between offender types.

Reoffending among child sexual offenders

Christopher Dowling, Anthony Morgan and Kamarah Pooley

Given the significant harms caused by sexual offences against children, there is considerable academic, clinical and policy interest in the extent to which perpetrators reoffend after detection. An established body of research has examined rates of reoffending among child sexual offenders, along with the predictors and correlates of their offending (see Hanson & Bussière 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon 2005; McCann & Lussier 2008; Seto, Hanson & Babchishin 2011; Seto & Lalumière 2010 for reviews). A rapid evidence assessment of 33 studies published since 2010 on reoffending among child sexual offenders processed through the criminal justice system found that reported rates of general reoffending (generally 20% and higher, depending on follow-up period) were notably higher than reported rates of sexual reoffending (generally 15% or lower, depending on follow-up period; Dowling et al. forthcoming). These findings are consistent with those of other reviews (Lussier & Mathesius 2018; Seto & Lalumière 2010), showing that many child sexual offenders commit a wide range of other crimes.

Dowling and colleagues' (forthcoming) review also examined predictors of reoffending. Consistent with the broader criminological literature (Britt 2019; Nagin & Paternoster 2000), they found younger offenders and those with histories of non-sexual offending were more likely than older offenders, or offenders with no history of non-sexual offending, to reoffend non-sexually. Younger offenders, those with prior offending (sexual and non-sexual), and histories of community order breaches and sexual offences against extra-familial children, were more likely to sexually reoffend. More broadly, research has found that higher levels of both antisociality (ie impulsivity, recklessness, aggression and a lack of empathy) and sexual deviance (eg sexual preferences for children over adults, abnormal preoccupation with sex) are associated with an increased likelihood of sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders (Hanson & Bussière 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon 2005; Seto & Lalumière 2010). While sexual deviance is taken as indicative of a stronger sexual desire for children, antisociality is thought to facilitate crime (including sexual offending) in that it underpins weaker moral and cognitive restraints against acting on this desire (Pullman, Stephens & Seto 2016).

Prior order breaches and extra-familial sexual offending could be indicative of a willingness to overcome legal and practical obstacles to sexually offend, and may reflect a stronger sexual desire for children. Building on this, some studies have found that offenders who expend greater effort over a longer period of time to access and 'groom' children for sexual abuse are more likely to sexually reoffend (eg Hanson & Harris 2000). However, others have found that those who attempt to solicit children online are less sexually deviant (Seto et al. 2012). The risk profiles and reoffending probabilities of these offenders may depend on whether they are contact-driven (ie procuring and grooming children for real-world sexual abuse) or fantasy-driven (ie procuring children for online sexual interactions; Briggs, Simon & Simonsen 2011). Importantly, Dowling and colleagues' (forthcoming) review includes a number of studies examining child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offenders. Research on these offenders has found that their rate of general (sexual and non-sexual) reoffending is slightly lower than that of other child sexual offenders (Babchishin, Hanson & VanZuylen 2015; Babchishin et al. 2018; Brown & Bricknell 2018; Seto, Hanson & Babchishin 2011). Additionally, while rates of sexual reoffending among CSAM offenders are comparable to those of other child sexual offenders, there is some evidence CSAM offenders are less likely to sexually reoffend. However, when they do reoffend, they are more likely to commit CSAM and other non-contact offences.

Comparative studies have drawn attention to the importance of distinguishing between CSAM offenders and other sexual offenders in research samples (for reviews see Babchishin, Hanson & VanZuylen 2015; Babchishin et al. 2018; Brown & Bricknell 2018; Garrington et al. 2018; for recent Australian research see also Henshaw, Ogloff & Clough 2018). In short, CSAM offenders tend to be more sexually deviant and find it harder to engage socially and sexually with others. Meanwhile, contact and dual (contact and non-contact) child sexual offenders tend to be more generally antisocial and have weaker connections to informal social controls that regulate behaviour such as work, school and family. That CSAM offenders are less likely to sexually reoffend despite exhibiting higher levels of sexual deviance may be due to their lower levels of antisociality and their stronger connections to informal social controls, both of which could allow them to exercise greater restraint. Additionally, the ease of accessing CSAM in low-risk online environments could mean that many CSAM offenders are opportunistic users of it, who are unlikely to persist when it becomes more difficult or dangerous (ie after police detection; Wortley & Smallbone 2012).

Despite a large body of international evidence, Dowling and colleagues' (forthcoming) review located only three Australian studies (Daly et al. 2013; Goodman-Delahunty & O'Brien 2014; Krone & Smith 2017). Goodman-Delahunty and O'Brien (2014), following offenders referred to a treatment program for an average of around 10 years ($SD=4.5$ years), found a general reoffending rate of 32 percent, and a non-sexual reoffending rate of 20 percent. Daly and colleagues (2013), following offenders for an average of around four years, found a notably higher general reoffending rate of 54 percent in their sample of juvenile sexual offenders. Consistent with the rest of the studies in Pooley and Dowling's (forthcoming) review, fewer than 10 percent of offenders in both studies sexually reoffended. The only Australian study to date examining reoffending among CSAM offenders specifically (Krone and Smith 2017) reported findings similar to those of international research. Examining reoffending over an average of about 3.5 years, they found that seven percent sexually reoffended, most (5%) with another CSAM offence, although a smaller proportion escalated to contact or grooming sexual offences (1% each).

There is a clear need for further rigorous Australian research examining baseline rates of reoffending among child sexual offenders, particularly CSAM offenders, along with its predictors. There is also a lack of research that compares CSAM offenders with contact and procurement/grooming offenders. This research is critical to informing the scale, implementation and targeting of treatment and criminal justice responses to child sexual offenders, particularly those that assume a high degree of persistence in sexual offending, such as sexual offender registers, indeterminate sentencing regimes, and sexual offender-specific treatment.

This study examines reoffending in an Australian sample of child sexual offenders. It addresses the following questions:

- What proportion of child sexual offenders commit further sexual and non-sexual offences after their first police proceeding for child sexual offences?
- How long after their first police proceeding for child sexual offences do offenders commit further sexual and non-sexual offences?
- What factors are associated with a higher likelihood of committing further sexual and non-sexual offences?
- Are there differences in the likelihood, types and predictors of further sexual and non-sexual offences between child sexual assault, child procurement/grooming and CSAM offenders?

Methods

Sample and data

This study examines the officially recorded offending and custodial histories of a sample of 1,092 male offenders who were born on or after 1984, and were first proceeded against for child sexual offences by NSW Police Force between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2013 (inclusive). Data were provided by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). The dataset includes all recorded offending and custody episodes for offenders between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 2018 (inclusive). Child sexual offences were operationalised using Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification categories (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011) and Law Part codes (Judicial Commission of New South Wales 2020), and defined in accordance with the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW). Offenders were classified based on their most serious child sexual offence at their first police proceeding for child sexual offending:

- child sexual assault offenders ($n=863$)—those whose most serious offence involved contact sexual offences against a person under 16 years of age (ie attempted or actual rape and other forms of indecent assault);
- child procurement/grooming offenders ($n=33$)—those whose most serious offence involved soliciting or manipulating a person under the age of 16 for sexual purposes (online or offline); and
- child abuse material (CSAM) offenders ($n=196$)—those whose most serious offence involved the distribution or possession of sexually explicit material depicting a person under 16 years of age.

Importantly, child sexual assault offenders could also have been proceeded against for child procurement/grooming and/or CSAM offences, while child procurement/grooming offenders could also have been proceeded against for CSAM offences. However, only a small number of offenders ($n=48$) were proceeded against for more than one type of abuse.

Half of offenders (48%) committed their first child sexual offence as a juvenile (ie 10–17 years of age), while 43 percent were juveniles when they were first proceeded against for child sexual offences. Thirteen percent of offenders indicated that they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at their first police proceeding, and half (48%) lived in areas classified as regional or remote based on Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia scores (Hugo Centre for Population and Housing 2018). Almost a third (29%) lived in areas ranked in the lowest quartile of the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018), suggesting a significant degree of socio-economic disadvantage.

Most (62%) had more than one sexual offence at their first police proceeding. Ten percent also had sexual offences committed against non-child victims (including sexual offences against adults, bestiality, and offences against the public involving voyeurism and exposure) recorded prior to their first police proceeding for child sexual offences, and a little under one-fifth had prior non-sexual violent (16%) or non-violent (18%) offences. Child procurement/grooming offenders were less likely to have been juveniles at their first police proceeding for child sexual offending, and when they committed their first sexual offence (18% for both), than child sexual assault offenders (45% and 55%) and CSAM offenders (39% and 41%; $\chi^2(2, 1,092)=10.73, p<0.01$, Cramér's $V=0.10$; $\chi^2(2, 1,092)=28.29, p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.16$). Meanwhile, CSAM offenders were less likely to have recorded histories of non-sexual violent (5%) and non-violent (11%) offending than child sexual assault offenders (18% and 19%) and child procurement/grooming offenders (21% and 18%; $\chi^2(2, 1,092)=20.20, p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.14$; $\chi^2(2, 1,092)=8.16, p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.09$).

Analytic strategy

The follow-up period used to measure reoffending constitutes the total amount of time an offender was able to offend between the date on which their first police proceeding for child sexual offending was finalised and 31 December 2018. Any time served in custody was subtracted from the total amount of time between these two dates. The average adjusted follow-up time was 8.9 years (SD=2.7; range=0–14.7). Reoffending was said to have occurred when offenders were proceeded against by NSW Police Force during this follow-up period. Minor traffic offences (ie speeding, parking fines) were excluded. Breaches of custodial or community orders were also excluded, as the study was interested in new episodes of offending. Sexual and non-sexual reoffending were examined separately. Sexual reoffending includes any sexual offences committed against children or adults, bestiality, and sexual offences against the public involving exposure and voyeurism during the follow-up period. Sexual offences not examined in this study include certain offences against public sexual standards (ie those involving prostitution and pornography), being an accessory after the fact to sexual offences, breaches of sex offender-specific community orders, and outdated sexual offences (eg those criminalising same-sex activity).

Survival analysis was used to measure reoffending as a function of the time an individual was free to reoffend. The analysis accounts for the variable observation periods of offenders and any time spent in custody during the follow-up period. Cox regression, which is an extension of survival analysis, was used to determine whether there were differences in the hazard (or risk) of reoffending between groups of offenders. Cumulative reoffending probabilities and hazard ratios (HR) were used to examine reoffending patterns. Whether those who sexually reoffended transitioned to different sexual offences was examined descriptively.

Logistic regression models were used to identify the predictors of sexual and non-sexual reoffending, both overall and for each type of child sexual offender, examining the criminal history, offence-specific and demographic variables discussed above. Predicted probabilities, adjusting for covariates using marginal standardisation (Muller & MacLehose 2014), were calculated for each significant predictor.

Limitations

The following results do not account for offences that do not come to the attention of police and meet the threshold for criminal justice intervention. The current data do not include information on certain offence characteristics (eg the relationship of the offender to the victim, the use of violence) or exposure to treatment, which have been shown to influence the likelihood of reoffending. While offence-switching between initial and further sexual offending episodes is examined, the omission of more detailed offence information also prohibits an examination of how and under what circumstances reoffending occurs. Sexual reoffending results combine further child and non-child sexual offences to account for, and allow examination of, offence-switching during the follow-up period. While this was of interest in the current study, it should be noted that not all who sexually reoffended did so against a child. Finally, the sample was restricted to male offenders, excluding 60 female offenders in the sample originally provided by BOCSAR. Over 95 percent of child sexual offenders are male—a higher proportion than for any other major form of crime (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020). Additionally, female sexual offenders have been shown to differ significantly from male offenders in offending patterns and predictors of offending (eg Bourke et al. 2014).

Results

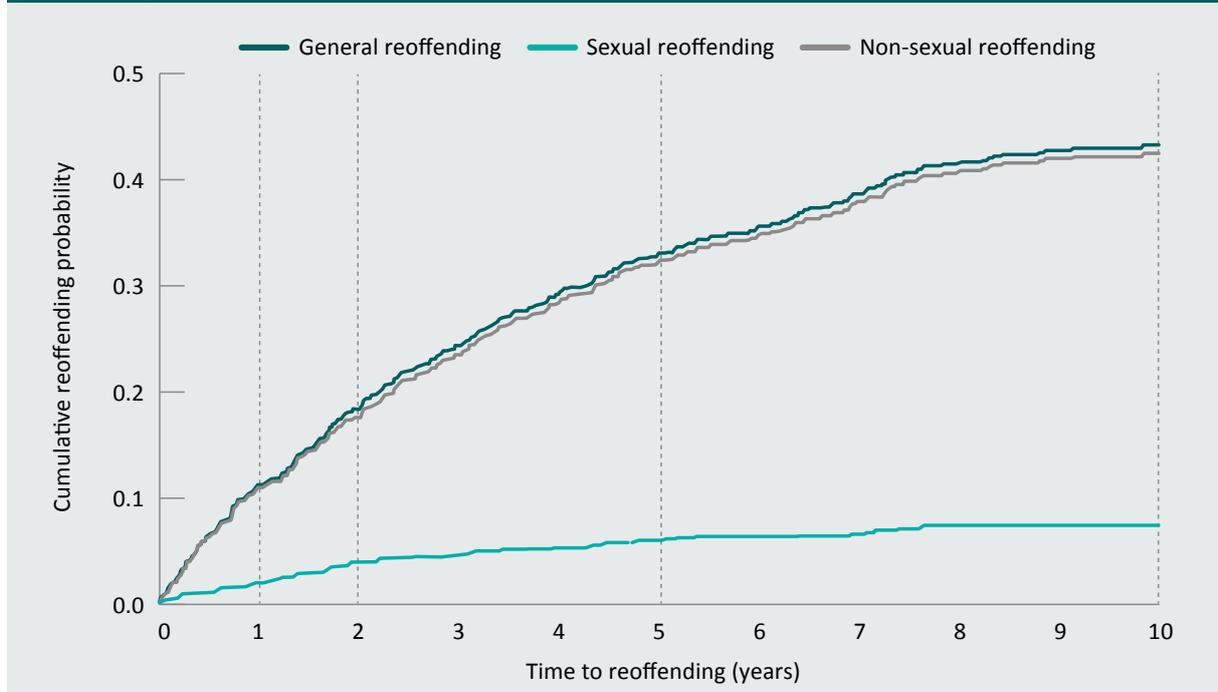
What proportion of child sexual offenders reoffend after their first police proceeding for child sexual offences?

Figure 1 plots the cumulative sexual and non-sexual reoffending probabilities (ie failure curves) for child sexual offenders over the entire follow-up period. Cumulative probabilities at one year, two years, five years and 10 years are reported in Table 1. Overall, 43 percent (95% CI=40%–46%) of offenders reoffended either sexually or non-sexually within 10 years of their first police proceeding for child sexual offences. Seven percent (95% CI=6%–9%) reoffended sexually in this period, and 42 percent (95% CI=39%–46%) reoffended non-sexually.

Sexual and non-sexual reoffending rates were compared using Cox regression run on a duplicated dataset with a single merged reoffending variable. A variable distinguishing reoffending types (sexual or non-sexual) was entered into the model, and standard errors were adjusted to account for clustering within offender ID. The difference observed was significant (HR=8.42, 95% CI=6.60–10.73, $p<0.001$). At any given point in time during the follow-up period, child sexual offenders were over eight times more likely to reoffend non-sexually than sexually.

There was also some evidence of offence transition among child sexual offenders who reoffended. More than half the offenders who sexually reoffended committed an offence type different to their offence at the first police proceeding (56%, $n=42$). Transitions were most often to CSAM offending or sexual offending against non-child victims. Of those who sexually reoffended, 25 percent went on to commit either or both of these types of sexual offences ($n=19$ each). Fewer transitioned to committing child sexual assault (11%, $n=8$) or child procurement/grooming offences (8%, $n=6$).

Figure 1: Cumulative reoffending probabilities for child sex offenders, by years from first police proceeding



Note: Vertical lines denote 1, 2, 5 and 10 year intervals

Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

Table 1: Cumulative reoffending probabilities for child sex offenders, by principal offence type, with confidence intervals

	1 year (95% CI)	2 years (95% CI)	5 years (95% CI)	10 years (95% CI)
Sexual reoffending				
Child sexual assault offenders	0.01 (0.01–0.02)	0.03 (0.02–0.05)	0.05 (0.04–0.07)	0.06 (0.05–0.08)
Child procurement/grooming offenders	0.12 (0.05–0.30)	0.12 (0.05–0.30)	0.19 (0.09–0.37)	0.28 (0.13–0.54)
CSAM offenders	0.01 (0.00–0.05)	0.04 (0.02–0.08)	0.08 (0.05–0.12)	0.09 (0.06–0.15)
All child sex offenders	0.02 (0.01–0.03)	0.04 (0.03–0.05)	0.06 (0.05–0.07)	0.07 (0.06–0.09)
Non-sexual reoffending				
Child sexual assault offenders	0.11 (0.09–0.13)	0.19 (0.16–0.22)	0.33 (0.30–0.37)	0.44 (0.40–0.48)
Child procurement/grooming offenders	0.16 (0.07–0.33)	0.16 (0.07–0.33)	0.31 (0.18–0.50)	0.40 (0.22–0.64)
CSAM offenders	0.09 (0.05–0.14)	0.12 (0.08–0.17)	0.28 (0.22–0.34)	0.36 (0.29–0.43)
All child sex offenders	0.11 (0.09–0.13)	0.17 (0.15–0.20)	0.32 (0.30–0.35)	0.42 (0.39–0.46)

Note: CI=confidence interval

Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

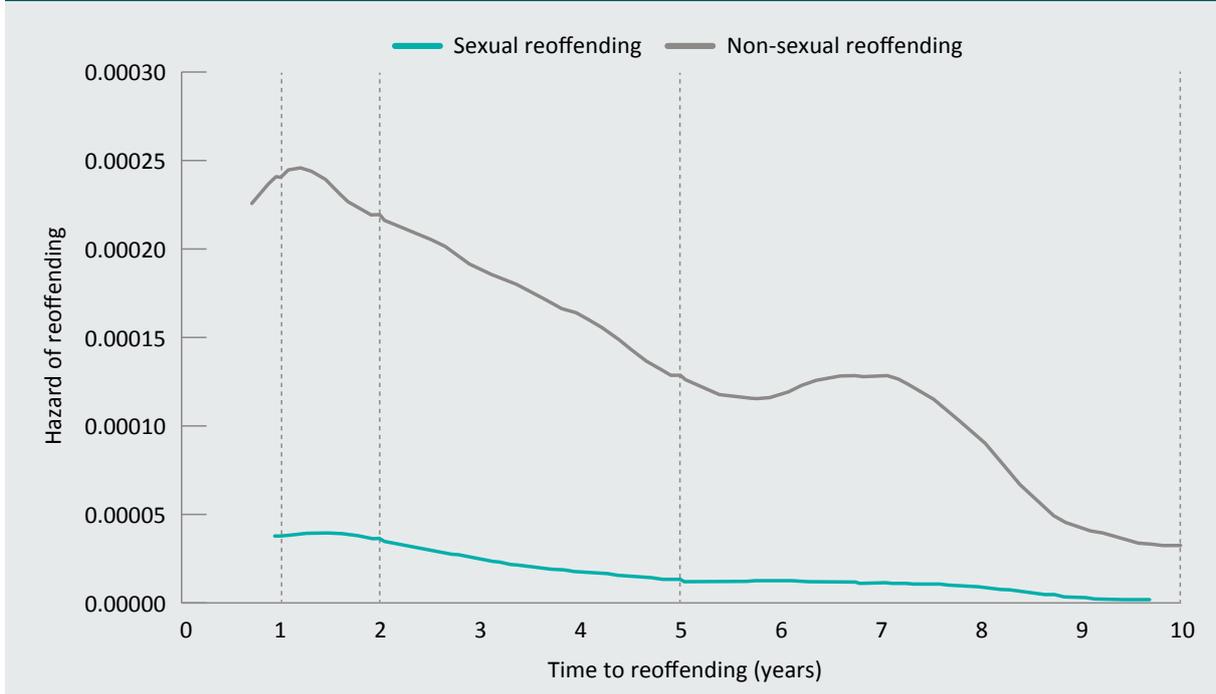
How long after their first police proceeding for child sexual offences do offenders commit further sexual and non-sexual offences?

The failure curve in Figure 1 and cumulative probabilities in Table 1 reveal a number of important findings about how long it takes child sexual offenders to reoffend. An estimated two percent of child sex offenders sexually reoffended within one year of their first police proceeding, and four percent within two years. The rate of failure (sexual reoffending) slowed after this period, with six percent reoffending within five years and seven percent within 10 years.

Similar results emerged in relation to non-sexual offences. An estimated 11 percent of child sexual offenders reoffended non-sexually within one year of their first police proceeding for child sexual offences, 17 percent within two years, 32 percent within five years and 42 percent within 10 years.

Taken together, these results show that the highest risk period for reoffending, both sexually and non-sexually, is the two-year period following their first police proceeding. This is further illustrated by the hazard curve for sexual and non-sexual reoffending, presented in Figure 2. This shows the hazard (risk) of reoffending at each time point, and clearly shows a peak in the relative short-term.

Figure 2: Hazard of sexual and non-sexual reoffending for child sexual offenders, by years from first police proceeding

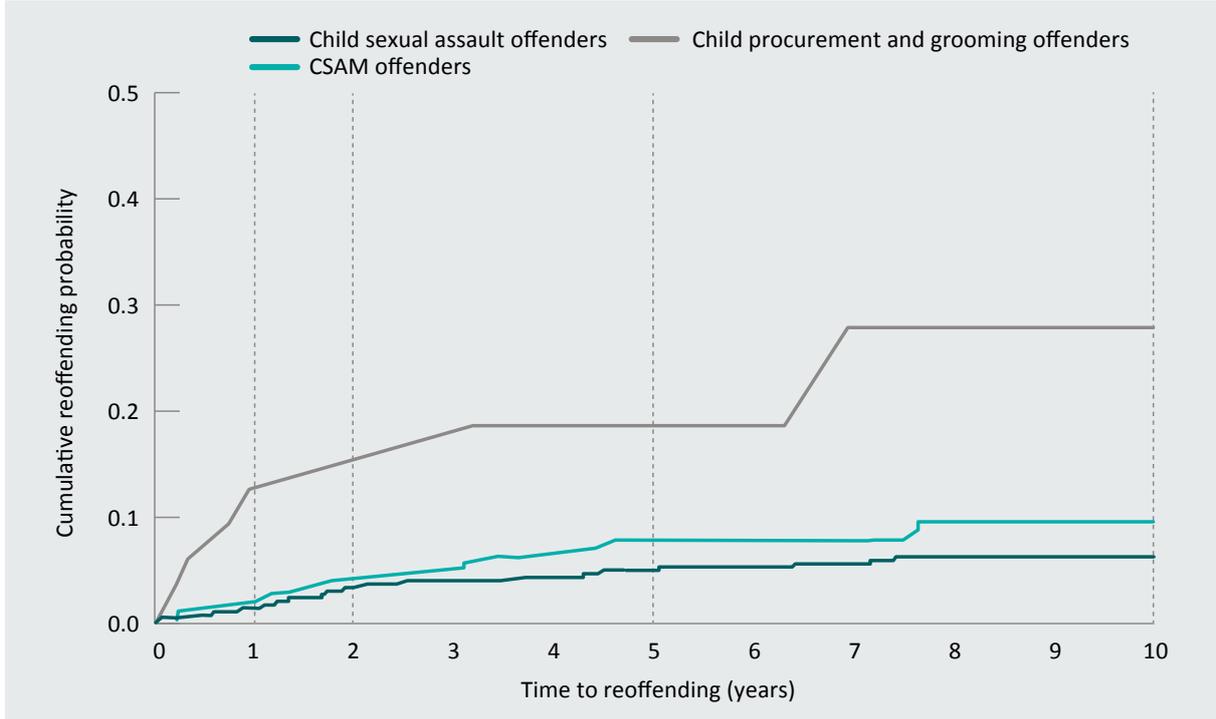


Note: Vertical lines denote 1, 2, 5 and 10 year intervals
Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

Differences in the likelihood and types of reoffending between child sexual assault offenders, child procurement/grooming offenders, and CSAM offenders

Differences in reoffending between child sexual assault, child procurement/grooming offenders and CSAM offenders were analysed next. Survival analysis revealed that more than one-quarter (28%) of child procurement/grooming offenders sexually reoffended in the 10 years following their first police proceeding for child sexual offences, compared with nine percent of CSAM offenders and six percent of child sexual assault offenders (Table 1 and Figure 3). Cox regression, run as an extension of this survival analysis, was used to further analyse differences in the risk of sexual reoffending between these offender groups. Child procurement/grooming offenders were assigned as the reference category. There was a significant difference between child procurement/grooming offenders, and both child sexual assault offenders (HR=0.23, 95% CI=0.10–0.51, $p<0.001$) and CSAM offenders (HR=0.34, 95% CI=0.14–0.83, $p<0.05$). At any given point in time during the follow-up period, child procurement/grooming offenders were more than four times as likely as child sexual assault offenders ($1/0.23=4.34$), and around three times as likely as CSAM offenders ($1/0.34=2.94$) to sexually reoffend.

Figure 3: Cumulative probabilities of sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders, by years from first police proceeding



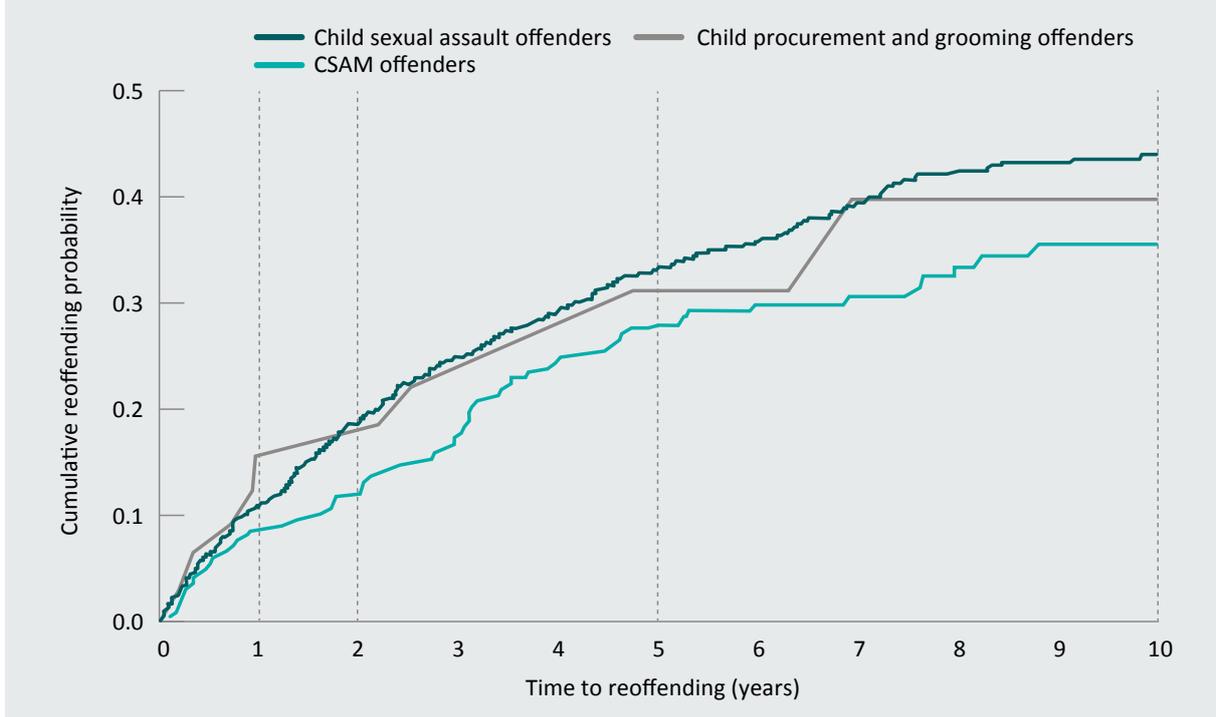
Note: Hazards were proportional, assessed using Schoenfeld residuals. Vertical lines denote 1, 2, 5 and 10 year intervals

Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

Almost half of child sexual assault offenders (44%) reoffended non-sexually in the 10 years following their first police proceeding for child sexual offences, compared with a third of CSAM offenders (36%) and 40 percent of child procurement/grooming offenders (Table 1; see also Figure 4). Cox regression, using child sexual assault offenders as the reference category, revealed significant differences in non-sexual reoffending between these and CSAM offenders (HR=0.76, 95% CI=0.59–0.99, $p<0.05$; see Table 1 and Figure 3). At any given point in time during the follow-up period, child sexual assault offenders were 31 percent more likely than CSAM offenders to have reoffended non-sexually ($1/0.76=1.31$). There was no difference between child sexual assault offenders and child procurement/grooming offenders (HR=0.88, 95% CI=0.48–0.1.61, $p=0.68$).

Almost two-thirds of child sexual assault offenders who sexually reoffended went on to commit a different sexual offence (62%, $n=32$). Over a quarter sexually reoffended against a non-child victim (31%, $n=16$) and/or with CSAM (29%, $n=15$), while only six percent went on to engage in child procurement/grooming offences. CSAM offenders who sexually reoffended ($n=21$) were the least likely to commit a different sexual offence (43%, $n=9$). These offenders most often went on to commit child sexual assault ($n=5$), while two committed a child procurement/grooming offence and one committed a sexual offence against a non-child victim. Most of those with child procurement/grooming offences who sexually reoffended ($n=7$) did so with a different sexual offence (71%, $n=5$). This was most often a CSAM offence ($n=3$) or a sexual offence against a non-child victim ($n=2$). None went on to sexually assault a child.

Figure 4: Cumulative probabilities of non-sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders, by years from first police proceeding



Note: Hazards were proportional, assessed using Schoenfeld residuals. Vertical lines denote 1, 2, 5 and 10 year intervals
Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

Predictors of reoffending, and differences between child sexual assault offenders, child procurement/grooming offenders, and CSAM offenders

The final stage of the analysis examined predictors of sexual and non-sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders. Logistic regression models were run predicting sexual and non-sexual reoffending in the two years following the first police proceeding for child sexual offences. Predicting short-term reoffending was of interest here due to the heightened risk of offending in the first few years following criminal justice system contact, and also because many offenders continue to have contact with the criminal justice system throughout this period (eg probation and parole, community sentences, police registration). Due to the low number of child procurement/grooming offenders, analyses were not undertaken for these offenders. Additionally, the low number of CSAM offenders who sexually reoffended during this period ($n=8$) prohibited multivariate analysis of its predictors. Chi-square analyses with Fisher’s exact tests were used instead.

The ages at which offenders committed their first offences correlated strongly with the ages of their first police proceeding for child sexual offending, and were excluded. Five offenders who were followed for less than two years were excluded, as were those with missing data on one or more of the predictors examined. This left a sample of 932 child sexual offenders, including 732 child sexual assault offenders, 170 CSAM offenders and 30 child procurement/grooming offenders.

Child sexual offenders with prior non-sexual violent and non-violent offending, Indigenous offenders and those living in a regional or remote location at the first police proceeding for child sexual offences were more likely to reoffend non-sexually (Table 2). Prior violence was associated with a 47 percent increase in the predicted probability of reoffending (17% vs 25%), while the predicted probability of reoffending for those with prior non-violent offending was over twice that of those without (15% vs 33%). The predicted probability of reoffending was around 65 percent higher for Indigenous (28%) than for non-Indigenous offenders (17%), and around 71 percent higher for those living in regional or remote locations (24%) than for those in urban centres (14%). Offenders who committed their first child sexual offence as an adult (16%) were 37 percent less likely to reoffend than juvenile offenders (22%).

The same factors emerged as important, and to a similar magnitude, in predicting short-term non-sexual reoffending among child sexual assault offenders. However, only Indigenous status and the number of child sexual offences committed were associated with non-sexual reoffending among CSAM offenders. The predicted probabilities of reoffending were over three times higher for Indigenous CSAM offenders (40%), and those with more than one child sexual offence (24%) than for non-Indigenous offenders (11%) and those with one child sexual offence (7%).

These factors also emerged as important in predicting short-term sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders. The predicted probability of reoffending was six times higher for those with more than one child sexual offence, although both groups had low rates of reoffending (1% vs 6%). Additionally, the predicted probability of reoffending was around twice as high for Indigenous offenders as for non-Indigenous offenders (7% vs 4%), but again rates across both groups were low.

Given the small number of CSAM offenders in this analysis who sexually reoffended ($n=8$), and the fact that results are not independent of the influence of other predictors, results need to be interpreted cautiously. Much like child sexual offenders generally, Indigenous status and the number of child sexual offences at first police proceeding significantly predicted sexual reoffending among CSAM offenders. Indigenous CSAM offenders (33%, 3 out of 9) were over 10 times as likely to reoffend as non-Indigenous CSAM offenders (3%, 5 out of 163). Additionally, all CSAM offenders who sexually reoffended had more than one child sexual offence at their first police proceeding (11%, 8 out of 75 vs 0%, none out of 113).

Table 2: Predictors of short-term sexual and non-sexual reoffending among child sex offenders

	All child sexual offenders		Child sexual assault offenders		CSAM offenders	
	Non-sexual reoffending OR (95% CI)	Sexual reoffending OR (95% CI)	Non-sexual reoffending OR (95% CI)	Sexual reoffending OR (95% CI)	Non-sexual reoffending OR (95% CI)	Sexual reoffending OR (95% CI) ^a
Prior adult sexual offending ^b	ns	ns	ns	ns	–	ns
Prior non-sexual violent offending	1.70 (1.12–2.56)*	ns	1.63 (1.04–2.53)*	ns	ns	ns
Prior non-violent offending	2.81 (1.89–4.18)***	ns	3.27 (2.12–5.01)***	ns	ns	ns
More than one child sexual offence at first police proceeding ^c	ns	5.19 (1.81–14.91)**	ns	3.76 (1.11–12.71)*	5.04 (1.35–18.84)*	–
Adult at first police proceeding	0.65 (0.46–0.93)*	ns	0.63 (0.42–0.93)*	ns	ns	ns
Indigenous	1.94 (1.23–3.06)**	2.26 (1.05–4.84)*	1.67 (1.01–2.75)*	ns	5.93 (1.45–24.18)*	10.87 (2.23–53.04)**
Lived in low socio-economic area at first police proceeding	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Lived in regional/remote area at first police proceeding	1.94 (1.36–2.75)***	ns	2.18 (1.47–3.22)***	ns	ns	ns

***statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, **statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, *statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

a: Fisher's exact test used instead of logistic regression due to low sex reoffending rate ($n=8$)

b: Prior adult sex offending was excluded from the model predicting non-sex reoffending in CSAM offenders due to collinearity

c: While statistically significant, having more than one child sexual offence at first police proceeding was a perfect predictor of sexual reoffending in CSAM offenders, and it was not possible to calculate an OR

Note: OR=odds ratio, CI=95% confidence interval, ns=not significant. Model statistics as follows: (1) All child sexual offenders; non-sexual reoffending Model $\chi^2(df, n)=74.95 (8, 932)$, $p < 0.001$, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.13$; sexual reoffending Model $\chi^2(df, n)=31.50 (8, 932)$, $p < 0.001$, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.10$; (2) Child sexual assault offenders non-sexual reoffending Model $\chi^2(df, n)=66.72 (8, 732)$, $p < 0.001$, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.15$; sexual reoffending Model $\chi^2(df, n)=18.76 (8, 732)$, $p < 0.05$, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.08$; (3) CSAM offenders non-sexual reoffending Model $\chi^2(df, n)=27.17 (7, 170)$, $p < 0.001$, Nagelkerke $R^2=0.23$; sexual reoffending more than one child sexual offence $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.36$; Indigenous status $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.22$.

Source: NSW BOCSAR 2020 [dataset]

Discussion

This study has examined reoffending in an Australian sample of child sexual offenders. Results are largely consistent with those of prior reoffending studies (Hanson & Bussière 1998; McCann & Lussier 2008; Seto, Hanson & Babchishin 2011). Main findings are as follows:

- Sexual reoffending among child sexual offenders was rare. In fact, the estimated rate of reoffending after 10 years (7%) is towards the lower end of the range reported in Dowling and colleagues' (forthcoming) review.
- Child sexual offenders were much more likely to reoffend non-sexually than sexually. After 10 years, two in five child sexual offenders had committed further non-sexual offences.
- The likelihood of sexual and non-sexual reoffending is highest in the two years following the first police proceeding for child sexual offences, and steadily decreases over time.

These findings lend further support to the now considerable body of research showing that, for many, child sexual offending is part of a broader pattern of criminal behaviour, underpinned by antisocial, impulsive and aggressive tendencies and a lack of empathy—characteristics that also drive their involvement in non-sexual offending (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon 2005; McCann & Lussier 2008; Seto & Lalumière 2010). Meanwhile, the heightened risk of reoffending in the shorter term could partially be due to a monitoring effect, with closer supervision of offenders in the period immediately following criminal justice system contact increasing the likelihood that further offences will be detected. This period may also see some offenders re-exposed to the stressors that underpinned their initial sexual offences, while others may experience new stressors as a result of their involvement with the criminal justice system.

These findings highlight the importance of implementing more intensive treatment, incapacitation and monitoring responses in the first few years after criminal justice system contact, and targeting these interventions at those offenders most at risk of reoffending. They also support the utility of interventions addressing criminal and antisocial behaviour broadly, rather than sexual offending specifically.

Child sexual assault offenders were the most likely to reoffend non-sexually, and the least likely to reoffend sexually. This broad category likely encompasses a variety of offenders, from those whose sexual offending is persistent and predatory, to opportunistic or impulsive offenders whose motivation to sexually abuse children is more ambivalent. Those whose principal child sexual offences were procurement or grooming-related, in contrast, may constitute a more homogeneous, sexually deviant group of child sexual offenders who were determined to procure a child for sexual contact. Alternatively, the higher rate of sexual reoffending in this group may reflect the ease with which they can continue to interact sexually with children (or access CSAM) in an online environment in which accessing victims and materials requires little effort and comes with little risk. The latter conclusion is supported by the fact that no procurement/grooming offenders who sexually reoffended did so with a contact sexual offence. Meanwhile, the low rates of sexual *and* non-sexual reoffending among CSAM offenders, and the very small number who escalated to contact offences, is consistent with prior research showing similarly low rates of sexual reoffending, and less criminal involvement, among these offenders.

Those with a history of non-sexual offending were the most likely to reoffend non-sexually, while those with more than one child sexual offence at their first police proceeding were more likely to sexually reoffend. Juveniles were also more likely to reoffend non-sexually. Indigenous offenders and those living in regional and remote areas were more likely to reoffend both sexually and non-sexually. This may reflect the barriers those living outside urban centres can face in accessing effective support, justice and treatment services that address sexual offending in particular (Law Council of Australia 2018).

While the risk profile of child sexual assault offenders for non-sexual and sexual reoffending was consistent with the profile of child sexual offenders generally (likely because they account for the majority of the sample), the only significant predictors of non-sexual and sexual reoffending among CSAM offenders were the extent of prior child sexual offending and Indigenous status. Other common predictors of non-sexual reoffending, such as age and prior offending, did not emerge as important. International studies have similarly struggled to identify reliable predictors of reoffending in CSAM offenders (eg Eke, Helmus & Seto 2018), highlighting the need for further research of this offender population. Additionally, this could reflect the highly opportunistic nature of CSAM offending. Importantly, identifying predictors of sexual reoffending in the current study was also made difficult by the small number of CSAM offenders who reoffended.

The current study addresses an important gap in research on child sex offending, examining a large sample of offenders, including CSAM offenders, adding to the small number of Australian studies. The findings are critical to understanding the nature and patterns of their offending, and informing the scale and targeting of treatment and criminal justice responses.

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