

Dombert *et al* report that the overall frequency of use of child sexual abuse images in their sample was 2.4 per cent (n = 209).

If we were to apply the same level of self-report data to the male UK population as Dombert *et al* identified in a representative sample of the German population and applying standard statistical techniques to calculate a confidence interval, this would equate to an estimate that there may be between 450,000 and 590,000 males aged 18–89 in the UK who have at some point viewed and used child sexual abuse images<sup>32</sup>.

From our review of the evidence we have not identified a UK equivalent to the Dombert *et al* study. However, we consider our estimates to be informed by the best evidence we have available, even if it is international. Further, as outlined earlier, there are multiple lenses through which we need to look in order to assess the scale of the challenge; applying Dombert *et al*'s findings to the UK may give us one such lens on the scale of the challenge.

The estimates presented above differ significantly from previous estimates that have been published in the UK. In 2013, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) estimated that approximately 50,000 UK-based individuals were involved in downloading and sharing indecent images of children (IIOC) during 2012. In 2016, the National Police Chief's Council reported that they fear that up to 100,000 people have viewed indecent images of children online<sup>33</sup>. The article states that “three years ago it was estimated that half that number sought out child abuse images on the internet, but officials fear the figure has doubled with forces arresting an increasing number of sex offenders”.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) is working with academic and other partners (including the NSPCC) to develop a methodology that will review the previous estimates, seeking to quantify the scale and prevalence of UK online offending more fully. It is important that all the evidence is considered and that we get a full and accurate assessment of the nature of the threat in the UK.

A fuller and more accurate assessment of the nature of the threat in the UK is to be welcomed. The NSPCC hopes to have contributed to this assessment by critically reviewing the evidence available and piecing this together with other pieces of evidence, such as for example, police-recorded offences and also the increasing number of URLs hosting child sexual abuse imagery that the Internet Watch Foundation identify. We acknowledge that this is not the final word

<sup>32</sup> Please note that estimates have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.

<sup>33</sup> Inews essential daily briefing, 16 October 2016 <https://inews.co.uk/essentials/news/health/thousands-look-for-child-abuse-images-online/>