

Professional responses to contemporary discourses and definitions of paedophilia

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Kieran McCartan is a senior lecturer in criminology, having a background and current research interest in social construction; 'public criminology'; social risk; media representations; public protection; and child sexual abuse.

discourse surrounding paedophilia, and its resulting definition, needs to be readdressed.

ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss professionals' contemporary definitions and understandings of paedophilia, based upon empirical qualitative research with a range of professionals working within paedophilia, or in related fields (practitioners, academics and members of the media) (N = 28). The research used semi-structured interviews, interpreted through qualitative (thematic) content analysis. The findings reveal that in general the professionals seem to have similar, but differently nuanced understandings of paedophilia. The professionals believe that the current definition of paedophilia, as a result of a number of factors including disparate professional discourses, has become problematic as it does not reflect the complexity of the issue or the population in question. This disharmony in professional discourse and public discussion has led to the broader societal discourse surrounding paedophilia to become maladaptive and not fit for purpose. Therefore the professionals believe that the current

INTRODUCTION

Paedophilia is a high-profile, complex and emotive issue which has become central to current discourses surrounding risk, child abuse, punitiveness and public protection in modern society. However, despite the high-profile nature of paedophilia, there is no overarching sense of academic and/or professional clarity/cohesiveness around it, with no widely accepted multidisciplinary or multifunctional definition (Feelgood & Hoyer, 2008; Harrison, Manning, & McCartan, 2010), and no clear coherent government policy or public understanding either (Cricher, 2002; McCartan, in press forthcoming; Thomas, 2005). This means that there are multiple discourses, both within and between different societal groups (eg, practitioners, media representatives, policy-makers, the public), surrounding paedophilia, all of which contribute to the construction of its definition (McCartan, 2009).

Social construction is the idea that society, and social norms, is a constructed reality which adapts and changes over time and through space depending on the cognition

of the individuals involved (Giddens, 1991); consequently, social reality is culturally and time-specific, not unchanging (Gergen, 1973). One mechanism through which this societal and cultural adaption occurs is through reflexive modernisation (Giddens), which argues that society and the individual constantly re-evaluate life (social, technological and scientific) in relation to new information being produced. Discourses and definitions surrounding paedophilia can, and often do change, given the nature of the actors (ie, victim, perpetrator), the context of the paedophilic activity (ie, where the abuse happens, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, explanations for the abuse), the process of the paedophilic abuse (ie, the abuse, the uncovering of the abuse and the outcome) and the reaction to as well as commentary on paedophilia (ie, professional and societal responses). In the UK, and the West in general, the current broader societal discourse surrounding paedophilia has been constructed through increased and widely disparate media coverage; greater academic research; increased, as well as more responsive, policing; increased punitive societal attitudes to crime, especially crimes against vulnerable populations; and a wider, although culturally defined, social discussion a wider, although more confined, social discussion (Davidson, 2008; McCartan, 2008, 2010; Silverman & Wilson, 2002; Thomas, 2005). This has resulted in a misperception of the realities of paedophilia by the public (McCartan, 2004), further fuelled by a lack of public engagement on the topic and an over-reliance on existing, sometimes conflicting and problematic, professional discourses (McCartan, 2009).

Generally, a paedophile is defined as a person, commonly a male, who gains sexual gratification from contact with pre-pubescent children (Feelgood & Hoyer, 2008; Harrison et al., 2010; Howitt, 1995).

However, paedophiles' are a very broad-reaching and complex group, with paedophilic tendencies not being simply defined by a single aetiology, gender, age, IQ, social background, career, social skills and/or a contact offence (see Harrison et al. for a fuller discussion), which makes treatment difficult and ultimately offender-centric (Brooks-Gordon et al., 2006). Added to these definitional complexities, paedophilia is often inappropriately discussed as child sexual abuse, not in specific terms, with explanations seeming to focus on its assumed homogeneous characteristics, instead of or in spite of its recognised heterogeneous nature (Bickley & Beech, 2001; Harrison et al.). It is problematic for the terms 'paedophilia' and 'child sexual abuse' to be used interchangeably as not all forms of child sexual abuse are similar, with different offender typologies (child sexual abuser, paedophile, incest abuser, etc) offending in different ways, both within their typologies and with other typologies. Therefore, the specific, heterogeneous and complex nature of paedophilia raises questions around the practicality and reality of an agreed, streamlined, workable definition. In order to better understand and respond more effectively to paedophilia, we need to recognise how important 'voices' in this area construct and discuss it, with one of the most important 'voices' being that of the professional (ie, treatment providers, academics and policy-makers).

Understanding and responding to paedophilia is a multi-disciplinary as well as multi-agency endeavour, with a broad gamut of different professions and a variety of different professionals involved, including, but not limited to, those involved in the treatment of paedophiles (therapists/clinical practitioners); those who investigate, prosecute, punish and monitor paedophiles (criminal justice practitioners); those who research on and around paedophilia (academics and/or therapists/clinical

practitioners); those who provide advice, guidance and support for people affected by paedophilia (NGO and/or charity practitioners); and those who report on paedophilia (media representatives). When looking at specific groups of professionals we can see that they have similar but different discourses around paedophilia.

Generally practitioners (ie, therapists, clinicians and criminal justice practitioners) and/or academics who work with, as well as research, paedophiles in treatment and management settings tend to view paedophilia in clinical terms, often basing this on evidence-based practice, research and clinical definitions (Craig, Browne, & Beech, 2008). Therefore practitioners tend to view paedophilia as a paraphilia; heterogeneous in terms of aetiology, prevalence and offending; as well as a condition that can be managed through rehabilitation. Therefore tending to view paedophilia as a paraphilia; heterogeneous in terms of aetiology, prevalence and offending; as well as a condition that can be managed through rehabilitation. Practitioners tend to see definitions of paedophilia as guidelines which can be tailored to individuals rather than strict criteria (Freund, 1994). Whereas, media professionals (ie, journalists, researchers, reporters and editors) tend to see, and represent, paedophiles in negative, pejorative and emotional terms, viewing them as a homogenous group, labelling them broadly as child abusers, with similar aetiologies, offending behaviours and an inability to respond well to treatment (Greer, 2003; McCartan, 2010; Thomas, 2005); which is in line with 'public' discourses (McCartan, 2004). Alternatively, official discourses (ie, government, legal and policy professionals) tend to view paedophilia in terms of the offending behaviour committed and its impact upon the victims (McCartan, in press forthcoming), leading official discourses to view paedophilia as a public protection and risk management issue,

therefore opting more for control, punishment and regulation rather than rehabilitation (McCartan, in press forthcoming). Although official discourses are thought to stem from, be constructed by and in reaction to current media coverage of paedophilia, public reaction to paedophilia and evidence-based research on paedophilia (Davidson, 2008; Kitzinger, 2004; Thompson, 2005), they seem to be more in line with public opinion and media discourses, rather than with practitioner discourses.

These different professional discourses surrounding paedophilia suggest that current professional understandings of paedophilia are quite broad and ambiguous, indicating that the current definitions of paedophilia should be seen loosely as a guide rather than strict criteria. The varieties of professional discourses surrounding paedophilia seem to suggest that professional understandings of paedophilia are personalised and career-centred. This professional ambiguity has contributed to the broader societal discourse, and definition, of paedophilia developing into a bite-sized, non-nuanced, stereotyped, one-size-fits-all explanation which is quite removed from the reality of the population in question (McCartan, 2010; Silverman & Wilson, 2002). Although there has been public education and 'public criminology', ie, the engagement of criminologists and related professionals with the public on topics concerning crime for the purposes of education (Groombridge, 2007; Loader & Sparks, 2010) surrounding paedophilia ((Shapeero, T. (Director). (2001, July 26). *Brass Eye Special – Paedophilia*; Long, B. (Executive producer). (2002, June 20). *The Hunt for Britain's Pedophiles: Episode 3*; Kasell, 2005; Panorama (series title). (2006, November 8) *Panorama: Exposed: The Bail Hostel Scandal*; Joffe, D. (Writer/Director). (2007, April 19). *Secret Life*)), this has often been piecemeal and inconsistent. The inherent complexity

of paedophilia means that its 'public criminology' should be broad and coherent, but unfortunately this rarely happens. Public discussions around paedophilia, and ultimately the opinions of the professional involvement in them, seem to be limited to the issue of the day, therefore focusing on specific aspects of paedophilia, not necessarily the bigger issue or how the whole debate ties together. This means that for a better informed societal understanding and more functional definition of paedophilia, it is essential that professionals engage in a clear, realistic and well nuanced public criminology (Groombridge; Loader & Sparks) around paedophilia which emphasises the wider picture, including the aetiology, offending behaviour, treatment, criminal justice responses and community reintegration of offenders.

The present research aims to address some of the inherent ambiguity surrounding current definitions and discourses concerning paedophilia, by seeking to uncover, understand and critically analyse the reality of the real-world multidisciplinary professional discourse on paedophilia and its impact on the broader societal discourse and the existing definition of paedophilia. In doing so, the research focuses on a range of professionals who work in the area around paedophilia and in related fields.

METHOD

Design

This research is inductive in nature with a grounded theory approach being used. This methodology was selected as it is the most effective approach for counteracting inconsistent/incomplete theoretical perspectives (Neuendorf, 2002) and is relevant to the current research because of the multidisciplinary and dysfunctional nature of the research sample, as well as the ambiguous and often conflicting nature

of professional discourses surrounding paedophilia.

Sampling and participants

This study will focus on professionals who work directly in the areas surrounding paedophilia and in related fields (probation, charities, NGOs, the police, members of the media, academia and therapists), as their personal attitudes and theories inform research, practice, policy and the public. These participants therefore contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the development of the broader social construction of paedophilia.

Initially, the researcher decided upon a purposive sampling technique (Robson, 2011), with an internet search for relevant participants (ie, online newspaper archives were examined for reporters who had worked on child sexual abuse stories; psych-info and web of knowledge, as well as university web pages, were used to find academics who worked in this field), which was then followed up by looking at the potential participants' employers' or companies' websites, or in some cases their personal websites. However, this approach did not work with all the participants (ie, when contacting members of the police, probation or therapists, their employers, agencies or units were contacted and then the relevant participant was suggested or volunteered). Upon closer inspection, some potential participants were disregarded because they did not work directly in the field or were not knowledgeable enough to be included in the research. Letters were then sent out to 49 potential participants, with 22 participants agreeing to take part in the study, and the remainder declining to be interviewed, not responding or agreeing in principle then not re-establishing contact. When the purposive sampling technique had been exhausted, the researcher decided upon snowball sampling, with potential participants being volunteered by existing

participants, colleagues and/or fellow researchers, to gain the rest of the participants (Robson), which resulted in another six participants. Although the snowballing

and purposive sampling had not produced the preferred sample size, resulting in only 28 participants (Table 1), the researcher decided that all possible avenues had been

Table 1: Compositions of the three different participant groups

<i>Group A Practitioners (13)</i>	<i>Group B Media (5)</i>	<i>Group C Academic[†] (10)</i>
Police Participant[s] 1, 21, 22, 24 All are police officers working nationally (1), regionally (24) and locally (21 & 22) on sex crime/ paedophile units.	Editor Participant[s] 4, 23 The editors of two local/regional newspapers; one in Northern Ireland (23) and one in England (4).	Criminologist Participant[s] 2, 9, 20 Lecturers in criminology at UK universities; researching sex crime/ paedophilia, moral panics, the media and vigilantism (2, 9, 20).
Probation Participant[s] 25, 26 Both worked in the same probation unit, dealing with child sex offenders in the community.	Journalist Participant[s] 3, 12 They report for national broadsheets; with one also working in TV and doing research (3,) and the other also writing for some redtops (12).	Psychologist Participant[s] 6, 8 Lecturers in psychology at UK (6) and Irish (8) universities; researching mainly paedophilia and the media to a lesser degree (6); as well as paedophilia and the internet (8).
Therapists Participant[s] 5, 15, 16 Working in a high secure sex offender unit (15); with the other two (5, 16) having previous experience done so, but now working independently.	TV Reporter Participant[s] 17 Reports for a national TV station [covering child sexual abuse i.e., Sarah Payne, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, and the Michael Jackson trail].	Media Studies Participant[s] 10 A lecturer in media at a UK university; researching media and sex crime.
Charities/NGO Participant[s] 11, 13, 27, 28* One participant works for national children's charity (13), one for an international one (11) and two for a regional one (27, 28).		Sociology Participant[s] 7, 18, 19 Lecturers in sociology at UK universities; researching risk (18); childhood and child protection (18); and moral panics (8).
		English Participant[s] 14 A lecturer in English at American university; researching child sexual abuse, paedophilia and literature.

Note:

*One participant (28) spanned the practitioners and the media group (used to be a reporter and then went to work for an NGO).

†Although the academic group allegiances were defined by their job titles (after they were selected based on their research criteria), some of them crossed boundaries into other academic and related fields

explored, that a sufficient number of participants had been contacted and that the interviews should begin. Each participant, regardless of sampling technique, received a letter describing the research to them; a contact date and interview format (face-to-face or via the telephone) was then established.

Materials and procedure

To better understand the personalised meanings that the professionals attach to paedophilia, and therefore how the resultant professional discourses have been formed, the researcher wanted the interviews to be flexible, in-depth and reflective; resulting in a decision to use semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2008; Robson, 2011). All the semi-structured interviews followed a similar format, with the researcher introducing each topic area, allowing the participants to respond in as much depth as they wanted, with the participants then being allowed to discuss any related issues they wished. The interview topics were developed prior to the start of the interviews from ideas and issues arising out of the literature as well as in regard to the aims of the research; these were not an exhaustive list. As such, the interviews were mainly participant-focused and participant-led (Mason, 2002), with commonalities across all the interviews, with most interviewees being asked about certain issues (ie, definitions of paedophilia, paedophilic personalities and behaviours, severity and commonality of paedophilia), certain questions that were asked within certain groups (practitioners), and to members of the same subgroups (the police), and others that focused on the individual participants, addressing their knowledge base and/or personal interest. This approach allowed the participants to talk generally about the research area, talk to their experience and reveal their in-depth, personalised knowledge on the material in question. reveal their knowledge in depth

series of results. Post transcription, the participants were contacted, wherever possible, to enquire if they wished to check the transcript of their interview and/or have a copy of their interview transcript; some did so wish but the majority did not.

Data analysis

This study used qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Miles & Hubermann, 1994; Neuendorf, 2000), or what is sometimes called thematic qualitative analysis (Flick, 2009), to examine the data. This approach was selected because it fits with the exploratory aims and objectives of the current research, in that it allows the researcher to confirm what is already known on a topic; to settle disagreements between specialists; and to reflect the attitudes, interests and values of population groups (Krippendorff). During the thematic content analysis the researcher read each interview transcription independently, highlighting and commenting on important ideas and quotes from each participant, which allowed for the establishment of a series of themes. Once these preliminary themes were established, the researcher re-read each interview to see how it related to each of the themes, consequently leading to the expansion, updating and recategorisation of some of the themes (Murphy & Dingwall, 20035). This resulted in a finalised version of themes which accurately reflected the participants' perceptions and understandings of paedophilia. The themes were then contextualised in terms of how they related to the other themes, the overall findings from the research, the existing literature and to the individual participants, subgroups (ie, therapists, police officers, journalists, criminologists) and larger groups (ie, academics, practitioners and media representatives) subgroups (ie, therapists, members of the media, academics) and larger groups (ie, academics, practitioners and media representatives) as well.

This process allowed the differences (ie, employment, attitudes, stereotypes) to emerge and to shape the discussion. It also allowed for an understanding of how each participant and each theme relate to each other, and as such how they contributed to the overall findings. Throughout the qualitative data analysis, care was taken to make sure that the themes established themselves (Hycner, 1985), particularly via the use of other researchers to independently analyse and verify the main researcher's findings.

RESULTS

The research produced a series of themes highlighting professionals' contemporary discourses around the current definition of paedophilia and their attitudes towards its effectiveness. These themes comprised, 'Professional definitions of paedophilia', 'Issues with the professional discourses and terminology surrounding paedophilia' and 'Issues with the societal discourses and terminology surrounding paedophilia'. The findings reaffirm that different professionals have different discourses regarding paedophilia, but that these are not necessarily related to their professional career, instead seeming to be tied to personal beliefs and experiences. The professionals believe that the current discourses surrounding paedophilia, especially in terms of how they relate to definitions of paedophilia, have become problematic as they do not reflect the complexity of the issue, and have become removed from the realities of the population in question.

Professionals' definitions of paedophilia

All the participants agreed that, broadly speaking, paedophilia is a sexual interest in children (Blanchard, 2010; Feelgood & Hoyer, 2008; Harrison et al., 2010; Kafka, Blanchard, Kruger, & Langstrom, 2009). However, there was some variation

between different professionals, but not in regard to professional career groupings, around the exact nature of paedophilia which reiterated issues, debates, definitions and research already existing in the field (Harrison et al.; McCartan, 2008, 2009).

'I suppose paedophilia is a paraphilia, which is a sexual, or a psychological term for sexual attraction. A paraphilia's strict definition is exclusive; it's someone who is, or being attracted to primarily, exclusively, pre-pubescent children.' (Participant 28; NGO representative)

'I have to somewhere in the back of my mind have an idea of what a paedophile is, but it's not a clinical definition, but I guess somebody who . . . I would say, for whatever purposes whether it's to do with emotional congruence or whatever, targets children for their sexual relationships and all the other inclinations you know.' (Participant 26; probation)

'But I think certainly with the work that we would do, we would say that a paedophile is somebody that has a primary sexual attraction to children. So in terms of characteristics or features of that, you are talking about somebody who has chosen never to have age appropriate adult relationships, prefers the company of children, has an emotional identification with, an attachment to children and advocates all, or quite strongly believes in you know, the sort of cognitive distortions we talked about before.' (Participant 25; probation)

'I don't think that there is a definition that is generally acceptable. I don't think that there is a legal definition; I don't think there's a medical definition. So I think it's a sort of omnibus catch-all thing that is really for widely regarded inappropriate behaviour towards children, rather than actually being a specific

definition.’ (Participant 20; academic, criminology)

The practitioners and policy-makers agree that paedophilia is a psychological and/or a behavioural condition, and in doing so they are using traditional, common and well-known discourses from the clinical field (Beech, Craig, & Browne, 2009; Howitt, 1995; Ireland, Ireland, & Birch, 2009); however, this stance was not echoed by the academics. As a group, the professionals have diverse definitions of paedophilia using different language to explain it, for instance, some discuss paedophilia in terms of attraction and emotional congruence; whereas others argue that paedophiles target children; some professionals believe paedophilia is a specific condition whereas others do not; and some professionals believe that paedophilia has no strict, workable definitions whereas others believe that it does. These variations in the professional discourse surrounding paedophilia and the language that they use suggest two very different understandings of paedophilia; with the first being that paedophilia is a sexuality, partially innate, linked to poor judgement-making and therefore can be dealt with through rehabilitation; whereas the second suggests that paedophilia is a rational choice, a criminal act and should therefore be responded to through punishment. Interestingly, the professionals seem to suggest that the most important part of understanding paedophilia is the realisation that all paedophiles are heterogeneous and therefore should be considered individually, meaning that overarching definitions and/or groupings may not be relevant and/or appropriate (Bickley & Beech, 2001; Feelgood & Hoyer, 2008; Harrison et al., 2010).

Interestingly, definitions do not necessarily attach to the careers which the professionals are engaged in and the expectations attached to them, with some

of the practitioners and academics rejecting the clinical definitions, whereas some of the policy-makers embrace them. Instead this seems to reflect personal opinion, obviously based upon direct experience and the professional’s daily working, with the practitioners having more one-on-one contact with paedophiles, child sexual abusers and sex offenders and therefore having a broader, and possibly more nuanced, understanding of the realities of these individuals. This is reflected in the fact that academics tended to see paedophilia in broader, more generalist terms, with a lecturer in English arguing that the current definition and discourses surrounding paedophilia are more social and cultural in construction and use than medical, legal or psychological.

‘... one way to look at paedophilia is that as its function in our world today, it’s not so much a natural condition as it is a cultural gesture, or a manipulation that we badly need in our culture to do a lot of work for us. That is that paedophilia is a term, a gesture, an activity, a criminal offence, a way of understanding activities in the world which we desperately seem to need and return to over and over again. So it strikes me best to see it as a type of cultural obsession.’ (Participant 14; lecturer in English)

This particular discourse reinforces the socially constructed nature of the current definition of paedophilia in the discourse (Kincaid, 1998; McCartan, 2008, 2009). However, this is problematic as paedophilia is more than just a simple, abstract social construction because it involves physical and sexual abuse which is emotionally, physically and psychologically damaging to the victims; meaning that the neutral/abstract language used by this professional seems to be at odds with the reality of the situation. This, however, may be explained by the fact that the professional in question

engages with paedophilia on a cultural, literature-based and abstract level rather than on a physical offender-centred one. However, this argument does raise questions about the way that the social discourse of paedophilia is discussed and maintained, but it fails to recognise that there are very personalised reasons for why individuals take part in paedophilic behaviour and that these cannot be explained away in merely socially abstract ways.

The fact that the professionals do not necessarily reflect the existing discourses promoted by their professions but rather present individualised understandings, compounds the ambiguous nature of discourses surrounding paedophilia and the resultant definition. Thus it is important to realise that professional discourses are contradictory because, although professionals state that you cannot have a one-size-fits-all, generalisable explanation, they are only able to provide a basic, generalised, overarching discourse which is non-nuanced and riddled with ambiguity. Hence, professional discourses surrounding paedophilia may only act as a guide, not an exact definition and therefore should be used appropriately when constructing the wider societal discourse.

Issues with the professional discourses and terminology surrounding paedophilia

All the professionals sampled agreed that the current official definitions of paedophilia were problematic, believing them to be too restrictive, too simplistic and not fully defining or explaining the population in question. This has implications for the definition of paedophilia and ultimately the broader societal discourse surrounding paedophilia.

‘The term itself is not one that I am particularly comfortable with using, for a couple of reasons really, but primarily

because it encourages typologies of offenders and my work really encourages me away from doing that really, but once you put someone in a box like a paedophile . . . Focuses and narrows your consideration of the extent of their sexual interest and in my experience there are people that do have an exclusive sexual interest in pre-pubescent children, but that’s not always . . . not always the case. The other reason why I don’t like the term is recently it’s become a term that represents all child sex abuse, it’s sort of quite inaccurate in that respect.’ (Participant 19; therapist)

‘I don’t think that paedophilia is a useful term; we’ve lost what it actually might mean in terms of its danger and it’s now a catch-all term.’ (Participant 20; academic, criminologist)

‘It [paedophilia] does not fully cover the full range of behaviours that are correctly carried out within the full remit of its offenders; it doesn’t cover the full spectrum.’ (Participant 3; journalist).

The language and sentiment used by this cross section of professionals was indicative of the overall sample, arguing that current definitions and professional discourses surrounding paedophilia were not effective for appropriately defining, understanding or categorising individual offenders. This is unsurprising coming from practitioners and academics, but is surprising coming from media professionals as previous research indicates that media representatives tend to see paedophilia in one-dimensional, stereotypical terms (Critcher, 2002; McCartan, 2010; Silverman & Wilson, 2002). This finding suggests that some media professionals may be able to offer a realistic insight into paedophilia, being able to discuss its complexities and uniqueness, and reinforces that there need to be improvements in media coverage of paedophilia. Even

though the media practitioners here argue that paedophilia has become negative and misconstrued, they did help to create and maintain this social discourse; but this may be explained by the possibility that even though individual reporters may understand paedophilia when they report it, they do so in line with general societal perspectives and/or editorial norms.

The belief among professionals that the current professional discourse and definitions around paedophilia do not appropriately deal with the individual uniqueness of the offender is salient; which reinforces the dual need for definitions of paedophilia to be flexible while simultaneously rigid.

‘[S]ex offenders against children are not spottable, generally, socially from any other group of people . . . I think that it’s a bit dangerous just to think that paedophiles are psychologically and socially radically different from the rest of us.’ (Participant 6; psychologist).

‘[A] lot of the men that I work with have borderline learning disabilities as well, so you’ve got a cognitive impairment. They tend to be lacking in social skills, they have very limited emotional intelligence and very poor empathy skills as well.’ (Participant 5; therapist)

‘[O]k you can’t excuse what they have done, but this, this and this may have led them to become like that, you know. They may have had a really awful life . . . and they have just sort of become this person.’ (Participant 15; therapist).

Hence, the practitioners stress interdependence between different aspects of the individual paedophiles’ aetiology, background, characteristics and behaviours with the need to look at them all in tandem in order to understand the individual paedophile. While doing this they emphasise,

through careful, almost sympathetic language, the individualistic and complex explanations for why different people develop paedophilic tendencies (Harrison et al., 2010).

The fact that the professionals sampled emphasise the need to adapt existing professional discourses and definitions surrounding paedophilia reiterates the need for a streamlined professional discourse and emphasises the role of professional discourses in the construction of the broader societal discourse and the construction of a realistic definition of paedophilia, thereby acknowledging that paedophilia is difficult to effectively pigeonhole. This condemnation of the current discourses around paedophilia feeds into a rethinking of the current definition of paedophilia and its replacement with a more flexible, functional definition which is more congruent, realistic and relevant. This seems to be occurring with changes to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) definition of paedophilia to paedhebephilic disorder (Blanchard, 2010; Kafka et al., 2009) and a growing ‘public criminology’ in this area.

Issues with the societal discourses and terminology surrounding paedophilia

The professionals sampled believe that because of issues with the existing terminology and variations within the professional discourses, the term ‘paedophilia’ has lost its meaning, especially in wider societal discourses. This leads the professionals to suggest that the societal understanding and use of the term ‘paedophilia’ has become completely divorced from the clinical and professional discourse.

‘. . . the downside is that the word paedophile is now used; it is used in the playground as a form of abuse for Christ’s sake. It has become distorted the same

way that schizophrenic did in the 90s, the same way that spastic did in the 70s and 80s. They have become terms of abuse they have become part of a vernacular rather than giving us the ability to understand.' (Participant 5; therapist).

'... when you say paedophile to someone, the typical person in the street, they get this image of this monster, this psychopath who has done you know all these unexplainable things to children, and in some cases you know, fine they are like that, and in a lot of cases they are not.' (Participant 15; therapist)

'[A] lot of people think that paedophilia is an unhelpful word because it has been hi-jacked and demonised, and therefore it needs to be used less.' (Participant 3; journalist).

The professionals' negative, critical and harsh response to current societal discourses on paedophilia emphasises feelings of despair, anger and frustration at the recognition that the current definition of paedophilia has become misused in recent years, having a negative impact upon its effectiveness. The professionals seem to be suggesting that although professional definitions of paedophilia help create the broader societal definition, in recent years these two definitions have become wildly disparate, leading to the broader definition being out of step with reality. However, research does not support this (McCartan, 2004, 2010) instead indicating that the public have a reasonable understanding of the term 'paedophilia'. Professionals feel that they have a clear sense of how the broader societal definition of paedophilia has developed, through popular punitiveness, media coverage, public disengagement and professional ambiguity.

'... the issue that most news editors and news organisations face, they are sending

out general reporters to cover quite a specialist area. If you're working from a hack on a weekly newspaper through to somebody on the [name omitted] or [name omitted] news, when a story breaks to do with child paedophilia, or sorry child sex abuse or anything connected with it, like paedophilia, or internet pornography it is usually a junior, a reporter with no specialist knowledge of it that is covering it.' (Participant 28: NGO/media participant).

'... people may not understand paedophilia, and to be quite honest I can completely understand that because it's something in itself that is very difficult to explain to people and even the experts don't have a clear understanding.' (Participant 13; NGO representative)

'[T]he fact that you have all these organisations, the NSPCC, and if you read their literature that's available for the masses, for most of the masses won't pick up a book on paedophiles, on sexual abuse, and you can't blame them for that.' (Participant 2; criminologist).

The participants reinforce the socially constructed nature of the broader societal discourse of paedophilia (McCartan, 2009), recognising their role within it; in doing so they are emphasising that poor, incomplete and fragmented education around paedophilia by professionals has significantly contributed to the construction and maintenance of the current inappropriate discourse of paedophilia (McCartan, 2011). Thus, these simplistic, one-dimensional explanations of paedophilia need to change through a more coherent, consistent professional discourse surrounding paedophilia, emphasising its complex and heterogeneous nature. This suggests that the term 'paedophilia' needs to be changed so as to redefine it and make it fit for purpose again, which is happening to a certain degree with the

changes being proposed to the definition of paedophilia in the DSM-V (Blanchard, 2010; Kafka et al., 2009). Hence, there needs to be a clearer, more distinct, and more accessible public criminology as well as greater public engagement around the topic which would lead to a more realistic societal discourse, one that fits with the professional discourse and is fit for purpose.

CONCLUSION

This research indicates that professionals have a common overarching, but not a unilateral discourse around paedophilia. These professionals believe that paedophilia has become a difficult concept to use in its current form as it does not reflect the complexity of the population that it addresses. This means that it is difficult to view this phenomenon, and/or population, in a 'one-size-fits-all' paradigm (Harrison et al., 2010). Therefore our current definition of paedophilia may be limited in its usage and applicability, instead indicating that it may be more useful as a guide rather than an exact diagnostic tool. This leads to a suggestion that the current definitions used in regard to paedophilia have lost their meaning both in professional and societal discourses, therefore needing to be replaced, thereby reiterating an emphasis on the person-centred approach used in clinical practice as being the only realistic way to fully understand, explain and educate around paedophilia, allowing a realistic societal discourse and appropriate definition to develop. The professionals believe that paedophilia needs to be readdressed in the light of new understandings and developments in the area, which is currently being done (Blanchard, 2010; Kafka et al., 2009), meaning that we can counteract and question traditional social science notions that

the paedophile is an 'other' and somehow separate from society (Cohen, 2002; Silverman & Wilson, 2002; Thomas, 2005). It seems that the current social representations of paedophilia should be altered by professionals through their engagement in 'public criminology', through a variety of social and cultural mechanisms, whereby they offer a more realistic unified description of paedophilia which is coherent, easy to follow and non-academic, but empirically based.

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