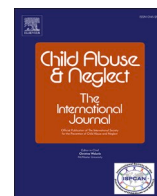




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Innovations from the launch of the child sexual abuse reduction research network

Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) is a significant and multifaceted global problem. Extant research has sought to better understand and tackle the various dimensions of CSAE. Considerable research has focused on victims - how to prevent their abuse, identify them once they are being abused, and support them after the abuse. Elsewhere, work has focused on the perpetrators of CSAE, including factors driving offending, the mechanisms to deter offending, and techniques for effective treatment and prevention. More recently, there is a movement focused on the psychological impact and work-related stress experienced by those working CSAE cases, from the investigator, forensic technician, prosecutor, and judges. However, despite this growing body of research, CSAE is constantly changing as technologies evolve, resulting in substantial knowledge gaps pertaining to offender risk assessment as well as the role of AI in creating or investigating CSAE. Moreover, an often-overlooked group are the friends and family of victims and offenders who receive little to no support from the criminal justice system. Most importantly, we must acknowledge that this body of work takes place within a system governed by laws and policies which vary by jurisdiction and country.

While current research efforts offer important insights into this crime type, they typically operate within silos with minimal sharing of knowledge and resources between researchers and practitioners. To foster greater innovation and collaboration among these stakeholders, we launched the Child Sexual Abuse Reduction Research Network (CSARRN) to connect these otherwise isolated agendas. The Network's mission is to bring together scholars, practitioners, government agencies, and private and not-for-profit organisations to develop new, unified, yet interdisciplinary approaches to addressing CSAE. Requests to join the network can be made via the QR code listed at Fig. 1.

The launch of the Network was accompanied by an inaugural international conference, hosted by the University of Adelaide in December 2023. The conference generated extensive interest, with over 40 abstract submissions, and more than 100 registrations from delegates representing all sectors (law enforcement, government, non-profit organisations, private sector, and academia), and hailing from North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific. The final conference program included presentations covering a diverse range of subject areas, including offending behaviours, investigatory methods and approaches, advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning, offender-based interventions and preventative measures, offending patterns and pathways, as well as victim and practitioner support programs. Further information about the 2023 (and future) conference programs can be accessed at www.CSAresearch.org. The articles that form this special issue were directly drawn from these conference proceedings following peer-review. Other works presented were published prior to the conference (see Bennabhaktula, Alegre, Karastoyanova, & Azzopardi, 2022; Bennabhaktula, Timmerman, Alegre, & Azzopardi, 2022; Brewer et al., 2023; Gannoni, Voce, Napier, Boxall, & Thomsen, 2023; Movahedi & Frank, 2023; Paton et al., 2023; Westlake et al., 2022).

This marks just the beginning. Since our Adelaide conference, the Network has grown, and plans to make the conference an annual international event are underway. To this end, a second conference will be hosted in the Netherlands by Leiden University in December 2024. We anticipate these collaborative opportunities will flourish in the years ahead, facilitating the exchange of knowledge across government, law enforcement, private sector, and academia.

We look forward to meeting again in Leiden later this year.

Bryce Westlake, Lead Guest Editor

Kathryn Seigfried-Spellar, Guest Editor

Russell Brewer, Guest Editor

Katie Logos, Guest Editor

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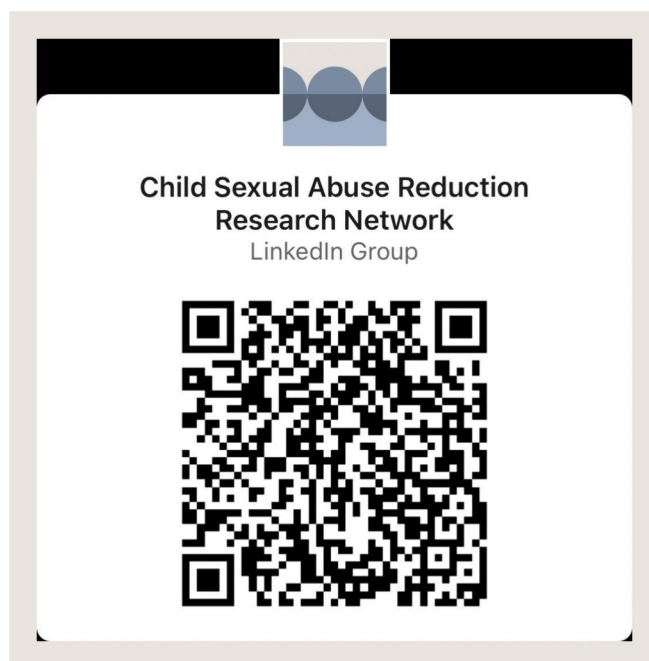


Fig. 1. CSARRN LinkedIn group.

Sarah Napier, Guest Editor
Julia Davidson, Guest Editor

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