



Annex - CSA Scale

Methodology 2023

The NCA's National Assessments Centre is working alongside internal and external stakeholders, including industry, government partners and academia, to employ an academically validated method for assessing the scale of CSA offenders. This is known as the 'Mark and Recapture Method'. This method allows for statistical inference and caveated intelligence assessment to be made regarding this population using two data samples:

- **Sample 1** - Individuals who are child sex offenders (CSOs) and were active on the UK Sex Offenders Register as of 31 March 2020 (rounded figure of 75,000). Length of time spent on the active Register is dependent on offence committed and sentence imposed, so includes a range of offender types at different stages of management. This does not include any offenders added to the Register as a result of investigations after 31 March 2020 and is therefore independent of Sample 2. All of these individuals were adults. This reflects the known, marked population size.
- **Sample 2** - The proportion of CSOs who were identified committing CSA offences via proactive online investigations between 01 April 2020 and 30 September 2022. All of these individuals were adults. Within the dataset, we identified that approximately one in ten of the individuals detected were CSOs, meaning nine out of ten had not previously been identified as posing a risk to children. This reflects the recaptured population size.

If we are identifying approximately 10% of known CSOs through proactive online investigations, it stands to reason that the known population size (Sample 1) is representative of 10% of the total CSO population size.

When making a statistical estimation, there is always uncertainty around the estimate as the number is based on a sample of the population, rather than counting the entire population. To account for this, we use 95% Confidence Intervals to provide a range of values that we are confident the estimate will fall between. An extrapolation of our data gives us an indicative range of 680,000 to 830,000 of UK based adults posing varying degrees of sexual risk to children. Our confidence in the validity of this figure is further informed by available intelligence and subject matter expertise.

The population that the estimate relates to has been defined as 'UK-based adults who pose varying degrees of sexual risk to children'. Mark and Recapture is a statistical estimation of an unknown population, and is a snapshot in time. Therefore it is not possible to assess how many of the estimated population are actively offending at any given time. We are unable to calculate the different levels of risk posed by the 680,000 to 830,000 individuals as the level of risk will vary by a number of protective and/or risk factors including behavioural, socio-economic, and offending opportunities, which will be unique to each individual and will intermittently increase or decrease over time.

Archived CSOs have not been included in the Scale calculation. These are nominals who cease to be active under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) when their period of registration expires. Furthermore, we excluded offenders who were under the care of HM Prison Service, as their incarceration almost certainly prevented them from posing an active risk to children until their release.

This methodology is used where it is impractical to count each member of a population and is grounded in academic literature. It has successfully been used in the estimation of the victim population for modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK and has been academically peer reviewed.

The application of the methodology used in a similar context can be reviewed in 'Silverman B (2014), Modern Slavery: an application of Multiple Systems Estimation'. [Click here](#) to view.

The Mark and Recapture methodology is replicable and enables continued development for future iterations of the National Strategic Assessment. However, the scale calculation is based upon a sample of the population and estimated population sizes will vary between the current and previous samples (natural sample variation), hence why the estimated scale values cannot be compared.

While the first dataset includes both online and physical offenders, the second dataset focusses on online offenders, who may or may not be involved in physical offending. The final figure is therefore skewed towards online offending. Furthermore, the final figure does not account for online offenders such as non-UK offenders targeting UK victims, or peer-on-peer offenders (who have been sanctioned by alternative procedures). It is also only representative of offenders who have been detected by law enforcement. Therefore, it is highly likely that the number of offenders targeting or able to target children in the UK is higher than estimated.

We are unable to calculate the different levels of risk posed by offenders, as the figure is an extrapolation based upon current offenders who themselves range in risk. While we could explore the risk levels of identified offenders from the samples used, these will not be reflective of the extrapolated numbers. Additionally, every offender will have varying behaviours and life factors which will intermittently increase or decrease their risk.

This is an annex from the National Strategic Assessment for Serious and Organised Crime 2023, which can be found [here](#).



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