

Understanding law enforcement knowledge and attitudes about sex dolls and sex doll ownership

Investigating law enforcement professionals’ attitudes and judgments towards people who own sex dolls.

Key details

Lead institution	Nottingham Trent University
Principal researcher(s)	Dr Craig Harper and Dr Rebecca Lievesley
Police region	East Midlands
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	September 2023
Date due for completion	December 2025

Research context

The ownership of sex dolls has become an increasingly discussed phenomenon in recent years, with legal scholars and legislators calling for increased regulation and criminalisation. In doing so, they promote an implicit – and often explicit – argument that sex dolls increase owners’ risk levels for sexual offending (see Brown and Shelling 2017, Danaher 2019). These ideas have started to gain traction in legislative contexts. For example, several states in the USA have introduced Bills to ban the importation, sale, and/or possession of child-like sex dolls, while the JUSTICE and CREEPER Acts serve similar functions at the federal level. Equivalent bills have been passed in Australia, Germany and South Korea. Although the possession of sex dolls is not illegal in the UK, those who import child-like models can be convicted under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, which is perhaps indicative of the moral basis of many of these social discussions.

We are conducting a mixed methods investigation with key stakeholders in the sex doll policy and

utility landscape. Interviews will be conducted with those involved in crafting judicial legislation, child protection and law enforcement officials. This will explore perceptions of the potential risks and benefits of doll ownership in various contexts, legislative considerations and hopes/concerns about future developments in social discussions about sex doll ownership. We will also examine attitudes toward sex doll ownership, attributions of sexual risk and views about the functional use of dolls. This mixed methods design will allow us to obtain an initial snapshot of stakeholder views about doll ownership through a large-scale survey of different professional groups, as well as delving deeper into their understandings of doll ownership, conceptualisations of the functions of dolls for owners, and beliefs about whether (and how) dolls might play a formal role in healthcare or criminal justice settings.

Research methodology

Interviews will be conducted with those involved in crafting judicial legislation, child protection, professionals involved in sex therapy or the treatment of sexual risk and law enforcement officials, as well as with doll advocates and manufacturers. In conducting these interviews, we will explore perceptions of the potential risks and benefits of doll ownership in various contexts, legislative considerations and hopes/concerns about future developments in social discussions about sex doll ownership. We will use anonymous online interviews, allowing for international participant recruitment in accordance with our past qualitative research with sex doll owners, people with sexual attractions to children and professionals working with groups who have stigmatised sexual attractions (Goodier and Lievesley 2018, Lievesley and others 2023, Lievesley and Lapworth 2021). Alongside these interviews we will distribute an anonymous online survey to these stakeholder groups to understand attitudes toward sex doll ownership, attributions of sex risk, views about the functional use of dolls in offense prevention and healthcare settings, and legislative preferences. This mixed methods design will allow us to obtain an initial snapshot of stakeholder views about doll ownership through a large-scale survey of different professional groups, as well as delving deeper into their understandings of doll ownership, conceptualisations of the functions of dolls for owners, and beliefs about whether (and how) dolls might play a formal role in healthcare or criminal justice settings. In completing this work, we will develop strategies for the tailoring of research dissemination for different groups that will allow them to access accurate information while simultaneously addressing concerns that are pertinent to specific stakeholders.

References

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Goodier S and Lievesley R. (2018). 'Understanding the needs of individuals at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse: A practitioner perspective'. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice*, 18(1), pp 77-98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2018.1432185>.

Lievesley R and Lapworth R. (2021). '"We do exist": The experience of women living with a sexual interest in minors.' *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 51, pp 879–896, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-02160-z>.

Lievesley R, Reynolds R and Harper CA. (2023). 'The "perfect" partner: Understanding the lived experiences of sex doll owners'. *Sexuality and Culture*, 27, pp 1419–1441, <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/nmuqs>.

Research participation

This research examines professional attitudes and perspectives on sex doll ownership, as well as any experiences that you might have in relation to this working with people who own sex dolls. We would like to invite you to take part in an anonymous online survey, which we anticipate will take between 10–15 minutes to complete. The research has received a favourable opinion from the Nottingham Trent University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The link to the survey is here:

https://ntupsychology.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3auYbyAEhZmS0ZM. If you would be interested in taking part in an anonymous interview about this topic, please do not hesitate to contact the research team, Dr Craig Harper (craig.harper@ntu.ac.uk) and Dr Rebecca Lievesley (rebecca.lievesley@ntu.ac.uk).

Tags

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