

**Speaker:** Allison McMahan (Karolinska Institutet, Sweden)

**Presentation title:** Qualitative study of changes in sexual thoughts and behaviors in child sexual abuse material users linked to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Co-authors:** Kailey Roche (Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, Forensic Research Unit, Canada), Rosa Dreyhaupt (Martin Gropius Krankenhaus Hospital, Germany), Michael C. Seto (University of Ottawa, Canada) and Christoffer Rahm (Karolinska Institutet, Sweden)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic responses around the world, time spent at home increased for many. As a result, both adults and children increased the amount of time spent online for work, school and socialization. Many experts expressed concerns that this increase in online activity would lead to more opportunity for online sexual exploitation against children. External factors caused by the pandemic including school closures, reduced access to healthcare services, and social distancing, increase the likelihood of children and adolescents becoming vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. As a result, children and adolescents have less ability to report and teachers and other services have less contact and therefore fewer opportunities to spot indicators of CSA. These pandemic-related restrictions may also exacerbate potential risk factors such as increased stress, social isolation and lack of structured leisure time. A qualitative study was conducted in which we examined perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals who access child sexual abuse material (CSAM). The study recruited 18 participants who were part of the internet based Prevent It Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) clinical trial and were willing to answer questions about the perceived impact of the pandemic on their lives, including their sexual thoughts and behaviors. Key themes that were identified from the participants' answers included changes in day-to-day life, mental health, sexual thoughts, behaviors or urges, responses and coping strategies used to deal with urges, changes on the forums, positive changes, and how they could best be assisted with coping in this situation. Our qualitative analysis also suggested that the pandemic affected urges to use CSAM, therefore potentially increasing the risk of online sexual offending. These results support the need for proactive interventions for this group when it comes to possible future quarantines and lockdowns.