These Law Enforcement Research Bulletins are based on a larger research project conducted by Drs. Robert Prentky, Ann Burgess, Elizabeth Dowdell, Neil Malamuth, and Paul Fodoroff. This project was supported by Grant No. 2006-JW-BX-K069 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The larger research project, in its entirety, examined multiple prongs related to improving Internet safety and reducing online sexual victimization. The first prong targeted known offenders, those charged with an Internet-related sexual offense, and those with a hands-on sexual offense. Understanding the heterogeneity of Internet Sex Offenders, their backgrounds, their criminal offenses, and their motivations could have an impact on investigative techniques as well as sentencing guidelines. Our objective was to help reduce victimization by identifying risk-relevant characteristics of Internet Sex Offenders, develop information to be used by Internet safety programs based on the knowledge gleaned from offenders, and add to the existing literature by differentiating among Internet Sex Offenders in an empirically informed way. The second prong was to solicit information from students ranging from middle school to college. This task was aimed at understanding how some children become victims of Internet Sex Offenders while others do not. The results from this phase of the project will hopefully inform and improve Internet-safety programs for school systems. The third prong focused on the role, limitations, and importance of technology. This was achieved by examining electronic communications between offending adults and their child victims, as well as offending adults and undercover law enforcement officers. As part of the third task we also examined the effectiveness of widely used filters. By understanding the boundaries of technological sophistication among diverse samples we can more effectively develop different types of filters.

Each of these three Law Enforcement Research Bulletins will highlight various findings from the larger project, including demographics, access to pornography, facts about student Internet use, level of technological knowledge, and implications for policy changes. These Bulletins are geared to meet the needs of law enforcement officers by translating research into a format that can be easily used by frontline officials who face ever-increasing challenges when it comes to preventing harm, not merely apprehending offenders. It is with respect for the role law enforcement plays in these investigations and our indebtedness for their work that this information is offered.

FEATURED STUDY

Those who investigate and prosecute offenders who commit Internet crimes against children are continually called upon to respond to changes in the methods used by offenders, who may be quite adept at using computer and Internet technology to exploit children. We can do nothing about the advance of cyber technology or the cyber sophistication of some child molesters. However, we can improve considerably our understanding of the offenders, or would-be offenders (those who are offense prone) who use the Internet as a vehicle for identifying, locating, grooming, and assaulting children. All evidence thus far suggests that those who possess child pornography are a highly mixed group of individuals, differing markedly in their risk to assault children. If we are to make headway, we must learn far more about the entire group of child pornography possessors, and how to discriminate among them with respect to risk. It is with this goal in mind, the offender prong of this research project was directed.
This study examined data from a sample of 466 offenders divided into three groups – (1) Internet-Only Sex Offenders, (2) Child Molesters who had no Internet sex offense, and (3) Child Molesters who also had an Internet sex offense (referred to as “dual” offenders).

The information noted below may be used by officers to help shape interviews with suspects and suggest new areas for interviewing people under investigation.

The Study identified characteristics with possible investigative significance.

The research supports some commonly held beliefs about these offenders:

- The majority of both groups were not married.
- The majority of both groups (87.7% and 89.6%) reported using drugs and alcohol, with Internet Sex Offenders less likely to be charged with a drug offense as an adult and less likely to report that drug use had a serious impact on their lives.
- A significant number of investigators have long been aware of mental-health concerns in these cases. These concerns have led to suicide prevention efforts after arrest, or safety precautions during the execution of search warrants. In this study, more than 50% of the Internet Offenders reported being diagnosed with some mental-health disorder by a professional.
- Conventional pornography use is commonplace among Internet Sex Offenders.

Some general characteristics of the two groups:

- Internet Sex Offenders and Child Molesters both reported that they began using the Internet, on average, at 28 years of age.
- Peak pornography use in any format for both Internet Sex Offenders and Child Molesters was between 19 and 30 years of age.
- Internet Sex Offenders reported spending twice as much time online in any given day, an average of 8 hours, compared with an average of 4 hours for the Child Molesters.
- Almost all of the Internet Sex Offenders (95.6%) and two-thirds of the Child Molesters (69%) reported using the Internet for sexual purposes, including but not limited to viewing pornography, meeting possible sexual partners, and chatting sexually online.
- A higher portion of Internet Sex Offenders reported exposure to child pornography when they were juveniles.

The table below shows the percentage of each group that ever used various types of Internet pornography:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVER USED</th>
<th>INTERNET SEX OFFENDERS</th>
<th>CHILD MOLESTERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Images of Children, age 11 to 14</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images of Children, 10 or younger</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child &amp; Child involved in sex acts</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child &amp; Adult involved in sex acts</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Less than one-third (29%) of the Internet Sex Offenders and the Child Molesters (23%), reported they visited child/teen chat rooms.
- Similarly, 32% of the Internet Sex Offenders and 26% of the Child Molesters reported using social-networking sites.
- 20% of the Internet Sex Offenders, compared with 9% of the Child Molesters, reported disguising their identities when they visited child/teen chat rooms.
The changes in social networking, cyber-technology, and Internet access, make it reasonable to conclude there will be significant changes in the way Internet-based criminal activity is manifested, not the least of which will be a more diverse and increasing Internet-savvy population of future offenders.

As noted, the data collected in this study paint the portrait of an Internet Sex Offender as Caucasian; well educated; part of a higher socio-economic group; heterosexual; unmarried; and having a high degree of Internet involvement, perhaps bordering on what might be called, for lack of a better term, “addiction.” In addition to these not surprising demographic and descriptive characteristics, is one rather unique and, in our research, highly robust finding: Individuals with a child-sexual interest, as evidenced by use of child pornography, but no known hands-on offenses involving children (Internet-only) have a relative absence of antisocial behavior, except, of course, for their illegal possession of child pornography.

Comparison of 3 groups of Sex Offenders

113 Internet-only Sex Offenders (IO)
Included men who reported an Internet-related sexual offense, such as child pornography charges and/or soliciting a minor over the Internet.

176 Child Molesters (with NO Internet sex offense) (CM)
Included men who reported a charge or arrest for a sexual offense involving a child and NO Internet related offenses.

60 Child Molesters who also had an Internet sex offense (“Dual”)
Included men who reported an Internet-related sexual offense, such as possession of child pornography or soliciting a minor over the Internet AND a hands-on sexual offense.

How our three groups of offenders compare:

As children, a very high proportion of the “dual” offenders (Child Molesters with an Internet sex offense) (79%) reported having low self-esteem, compared with 55% of the IO and 61% of the CM offenders.

As children, the CM-only offenders were likely to have been antisocial – more likely to have been labeled delinquent, more likely to have engaged in vandalism, more likely to have been suspended or expelled from school, and more likely to have committed a sexual assault (48%, compared with 33% of the “dual” offenders and 12% of the IO offenders).

As adults, almost three-quarters (71%) of the “dual” offenders reported having low self-esteem (compared with 51% of the other two groups) and over half (55%) reported sexual frustration, compared with 45% of the IO offenders and 34% of the CM-only.

Risk Prediction with Offenders:

Given that all of the offenders in these three groups have indicated, to one degree or another, some child sexual interest, we posed the question:

What is the likelihood that someone charged with an Internet-related sex offense is also a hands-on child molester?

A series of analyses produced two prediction scales: An Antisocial Behavior (AB) scale and an Internet Preoccupation (IP) scale. The AB scale had 13 items, and IP scale had 10 items. The items in each of these two scales are available from the authors. The items that comprise the AB scale are listed on the last page of this Bulletin. For additional information on how these items were coded or the items that comprise the IP scale please contact the author(s).

In predicting WHO will commit a hands-on sexual offense against a child:

The key factor is the presence of a history of non-sexual antisocial behavior, from childhood into adulthood.

A history of preoccupation with the Internet was relatively unimportant in predicting who is a Child Molester when there is a high level of antisocial behavior.

We found that:

- A slight increase in the Antisocial Behavior (AB) scale (just 1 point) led to 33% increase in the probability of being a Child Molester.

- Similarly, a 2-point increase in the Antisocial Behavior (AB) scale led to a 66% increase in the probability of being a Child Molester, and so forth.

- When there is a High level of Antisocial Behavior, the level of Internet Preoccupation is relatively Unimportant:

  For Example, if an individual has a score of 13 on the Antisocial Behavior Scale (the highest possible score), the probability is: .90 that he is a Child Molester when the IP scale is 0, and .90 when the IP scale is 7 (the highest possible IP score).

- When there is a Low level of Antisocial Behavior, the score on the Internet Preoccupation scale becomes more important:

  As the score on the IP scale goes up, the probability that the individual is a Child Molester goes down. For Example, if someone has a 1 on the AB scale AND a 7 on the IP scale (the highest score), the probability of being a Child Molester is quite low (19%).

As the score on the IP scale goes down, the probability that the individual is a Child Molester goes up: For Example, if someone only has a 1 on the AB scale AND a 1 on the IP scale, the probability of being a Child Molester is quite high (74%).
Based on these results, the two scales together can be used to predict very well who falls into each of these 3 groups. For purpose of illustration, we will focus on the degree of Internet preoccupation:

*When IP is very low,* it is more likely that the individual is a Child Molester, and the likelihood increases as the amount of antisocial behavior increases.

*When IP is quite high,* the probability of being an Internet-Only Sex Offender or Dual increases enormously. The significant difference between the Internet-Only Sex Offender and Dual groups is, once again, antisocial behavior. As antisocial behavior increases, the probability of being a Dual increases, and, conversely, the probability of being an Internet-Only Sex Offender decreases.

Among Internet-Only Sex Offenders, What is the Probability of Being a Child Molester?

If someone is already known to be an Internet Sex Offender, what is the likelihood that he is also a Child Molester? Of perhaps at high risk of being a Child Molester? We try to answer this question in the table below.

As the Antisocial Behavior Scale increases from 0 to 13, the probability increases. For example, if someone is an Internet Sex Offender, and his score on Antisocial Behavior Scale is 2, then the probability is 0.36. If his AB scale score is 10, then the probability jumps to 0.74.

By marked contrast, individuals with a child sexual interest who commit hands-on offenses against children often have a track record of antisocial behavior that extends back to childhood. The relative absence of antisocial behavior in Internet-Only Sex Offender places an added burden on investigators, since Internet Sex Offenders may appear to be “stealth” offenders, flying under (or off) the investigator’s radar screen. When criminal history is known, however, this “marker” provides for a relatively easy discrimination between possessors of child pornography who are lower risk to commit a hands-on offense against a child and possessors of child pornography who are at high risk to sexually assault a child OR have already committed such an offense.

These findings have little import at the earliest stage of investigation when no one has been charged with an Internet sex offense. When one or more individuals have been charged, however, a thorough background check on all known delinquent and antisocial behavior should provide strong evidence that the individual may have committed a hands-on sexual assault of a child in the past, in conjunction with the governing offense, or is at high risk to do so. These findings may assist law enforcement, as well as prosecutors, in preparing questions for interviews and depositions, as well as gathering background evidence, including background interviews.

### ITEMS INCLUDED ON THE ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR SCALE:

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<tr>
<th>Antisocial Behavior Scale</th>
<th>Probability of Being a Child Molester</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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**ADDITIONAL READINGS**


**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

about this study please contact Dr. Robert Prentky at rprentky@fdh.edu.

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