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 Fedoroff. 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 authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Each of the three Law Enforcement Research Bulletins will highlight various findings from the larger project, including offender demographics, level of technological knowledge by offenders, offender access to pornography, facts about student Internet use, and implications for policy changes. These Bulletins will assist law-enforcement officers by translating research into a format that can be used by frontline officials to help combat child victimization.

FEATURED STUDY

Research-Driven Policy Recommendations

The past two decades have witnessed a vast array of federal and state legislation aimed at sex offenders, along with increases in funding to support interdiction and apprehension of suspects, improvements in technology, and various management strategies. Given the rise in investigations and prosecutions and increases in sentences, including the costly civil commitment of some offenders, it is fiscally responsible for officials to be asking whether current investigative, prosecutorial, and management practices are resulting in increased safety for our children and if the increased funding is being spent wisely in reducing the risk to children from sexual exploitation. This Bulletin features information from a study funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that examined how middle school, high school, and college students use the Internet and their relative levels of computer literacy. This study also examined the use of computers by Internet Sex Offenders and Child Molesters. To assist the policy maker, this Bulletin highlights data and research-driven information that may help chart a path toward increased safety for children and more effective use of limited resources.
computer literate. To be much more Internet-savvy and "new generation" of sex offenders is likely incarcerated sex offenders, the "new generation" of young adults (20-25 years old) entering college and the workplace, roughly the past 10-15 years. Unlike the current sex offender population (average age of 40 in our sample), the current generation of young adults (20-25 years old) entering college and the workplace, some of whom may be future Internet Sex Offenders, have grown up with the Internet. Thus, unlike most of the currently incarcerated sex offenders, the "new generation" of sex offenders is likely to be much more Internet-savvy and computer literate.

### Offender Highlights

*Data collected from 466 incarcerated and community-based offenders revealed that Internet Sex Offenders were significantly more likely than Child Molesters to*

- Be Caucasian;
- Have a higher degree of formal education;
- Be considered "professional" in terms of job status;
- Have a higher rate of mental-health problems;
- Have a very limited history of antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood;
- Have a less significant history of childhood physical or sexual abuse;
- Be somewhat older when they first began using the Internet.

### College Student Highlights

*Data collected from 1,284 college students revealed*

- Although a high proportion of the men (89%) and women (53%) reported viewing pornography, including hard-core pornography (82% of the men and 45% of the women), the proportion of men viewing pornography was consistently about twice that of the women.
- Pornography involving images of early to mid-teenagers was viewed by 14% of the men and 4% of the women.
- A higher percent of men (13%) reported being a victim of a non-sexual offense, such as fighting, property damage, and theft, in adulthood, compared with 9% of the women. Both groups reported being a victim of a non-sexual offense when older than 18, at a rate of 5%.
- 7% of the women reported being a victim of a sexual offense between the ages of 13 and 17, compared with less than 1% of the men. Similarly, more women (6%) reported being the victim of a sexual offense in adulthood than men (1%). Notably, these figures for both men and women are quite low by national standards.
- For women, there was a high positive correlation between overall pornography viewing and drug use, especially use of speed, hallucinogens, opium/heroin, and benzodiazepines.
- For men there was a high negative correlation between overall pornography viewing and drug use, especially use of speed, hallucinogens, opium/heroin, and benzodiazepines.

As all forms of pornography become increasingly and readily accessible, pornographic depictions that are presently regarded as highly deviant or extreme may become more normative and thus more socially acceptable. In other words, what we regard as "deviant" today, because it is used and/or practiced by few people, may become increasingly "normal" as more people view it. This shift toward "normalization" increases viewers, which, in turn, increases normalization. The net effect is to blur the boundary between what is deviant, and indeed what is criminal, and what is illegal but socially acceptable.

Roughly 15% of the male college students in our sample reported use of different types of more "deviant" pornography: sadism (16%), sex with animals (14.5%), urine & feces (16.5%), nude images of early to mid-teens (14%), and rape (9%). We would conclude, based on this, that the incidence of highly deviant pornography in the college student population is roughly 15%.

### High School Student Highlights

*Data collected from 2,077 high school students revealed*

- Significant differences in online behavior between girls and boys. Girls reported spending more time online instant messaging (IM) and visiting websites; Boys reported IM, playing games and were almost three times as likely to seek out pornography.
- Almost three-quarters of the boys (68%) viewed pornography on the Internet, compared to the quarter (25%) of the girls.
- Boys were also more likely to receive sexually explicit pictures than girls. (31% vs 16%)
- The girls were more likely to be sexually harassed online than the boys (13% vs. 5%).
- The overwhelming majority of high school students (88%) reported using social-networking sites; girls had a higher use rate than boys.
A scale measuring delinquent and antisocial behavior in the High School students, beginning in childhood and persisting into adolescence, was used to predict 9 different Internet-related risky behaviors. This scale predicted with a high degree of accuracy for both boys and girls. In all cases, the more the antisocial behavior, the greater the likelihood of each of these risky Internet behaviors.

Technology Highlights

Data from the Internet Knowledge Test designed to ask specific questions related to Internet technology (e.g., what is an IP address, what IM stands for, what is an URL, etc.) revealed

- College students and offenders reported the highest level of Internet knowledge with high school students having the lowest level.
- Internet Sex Offenders scored higher on knowing about Computer Recovery, URL, Spoof (using a false IP address), JAVA (program language), and IE Firefox (type of browser) items. These questions suggest that Internet Sex Offenders have a higher level of general knowledge about the working of the Internet.
- When the offender group was broken down between incarcerated and community-based offenders, the community offenders scored highest on only one question, knowledge of VOIP (Voice Over Internet Phone). VOIP is a semi-secure phone system with a very low cost of service that provides each user with anonymity.

The Demographic Perfect Storm:

(a) Dramatic changes in Internet-user demographics, including an ever-increasing number of tech-savvy younger children who have widespread exposure to and use of the Internet.

(b) Combined with an ever-increasing proportion of child molesters using the Internet as a vehicle for grooming potential victims, must be taken into consideration in effecting policy changes. These demographics will radically change the way the Internet is used by the next generation of Internet Sex Offenders, those who may be offense-prone, and those who are their potential victims. The perfect demographic storm is likely to bring to the Internet increasing numbers of sophisticated (Internet savvy) offenders and increasing numbers of younger and younger child users.

A new generation of young victims may be easier to exploit for several reasons, including:

- A general acceptance of lowered expectations of privacy;
- An increased willingness to engage in nudity and sexually oriented activity online;
- An increased willingness to share personal information online with those first met online;
- Many new ways to contact, communicate with, and track the movement of children, such as through smart phones, netbooks, interactive social networks, and gaming systems;
- Powerful communication and security tools available to non-technical users, significantly increasing the number of people capable of concealing misconduct, perpetrating crimes, and thwarting investigations.

Policy makers should also be aware of the continued lack of parental/guardian use of safety technology and lack of sophistication with respect to such technology. This study found there is a significant difference in how adults view children’s Internet use and how children are actually using the systems and technology. Significant numbers of families reported using no filtering, blocking, or log-capturing software. In instances in which software was used, the children reported that they were able to disable it. In addition, active supervision by parents and guardians of smartphone users and other mobile-communication tools continues to be limited. This reality is in sharp contrast with the perception that technology and software tools are adequate, without industry regulation, to insure Internet safety.

The advent of smart phones, social-networking sites, net computers, and extensive marketing of new communication and Internet technologies to those younger than 18 could make the next generation of offenders even younger. These easily unforeseen “techno-demographic” changes over the coming years, merging ever-increasing technological sophistication with the ever-decreasing age of users, will pose significant challenges to law enforcement. In the past, law enforcement has focused primarily on adult criminality, secondarily on juvenile delinquency, and rarely on preteen offense-related behaviors. We already see a blurring of the boundary of normal child and adolescent behavior and illegal behavior (e.g., sexting). Over time, this “ambiguity” will only increase. Moreover, increased mobility, the use of systems like Wifi, and enhanced encryption will make the search and seizure of evidence much more difficult outside of undercover investigations. Such methods may no longer be the best way to identify and pursue the most dangerous offenders. Additionally, with the power of smart phones and mobile technology increasing exponentially, it may be possible to victimize children just as effectively using equipment that is no more noticeable or difficult to obtain than that used by a techno-phobic person.

Finally, most Internet Sex Offenders are not highly trained computer users. Rather it is the availability to offenders of sophisticated communication and privacy tools with easy user interfaces, such as social-networking systems; encryption software; easy-to-use anonymizers; and shredding programs that make offenders more dangerous on the Internet. Law enforcement should consider their resource allocation to reflect this inevitable reality.