

INTERNET-FACILITATED COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

KIMBERLY J. MITCHELL & LISA M. JONES

HIGHLIGHTS

This bulletin summarizes findings from the Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (IF-CSEC) component of the 2006 Second National Juvenile Online Victimization study. Following are some key findings from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention-sponsored study:

- An estimated 569 arrests for IF-CSEC were made in the United States in 2006; more than half of the arrests involved the offender marketing and selling child pornography.
- Most offenders (83%) purchased child pornography or sex with a minor, but an important minority (17%) profited from the exploitation. Profiteers appeared to be more seasoned offenders who were involved in larger, organized networks of criminals, such as prostitution and human trafficking rings.
- Many offenders (39%) were acquaintances of the IF-CSEC victims, 23% were family members, and 17% were people the victims had met online. The rest were mostly pimps.
- Compared with victims of Internet sexual crimes that do not involve a commercial aspect, a greater percentage of IF-CSEC victims, as part of the current crime, were assaulted, given drugs or alcohol, and were the subject of child pornography.

INTRODUCTION

Although the exact scope of the problem is unknown, indications are that offenders increasingly use technology to solicit and advertize access to sex with minors, promote the distribution of child pornography, and combine resources to find victims and purchasers. This bulletin presents findings from the Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (IF-CSEC) component of the 2006 Second National Juvenile Online Victimization study that the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sponsored. In it, the authors provide an overview of the crime of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), outline the ways in which predators use the Internet to commit and facilitate such crimes, present national estimates of arrests for IF-CSEC, and describe the characteristics of the offenders and victims.

Sexual victimizations are serious crimes that harm a significant percentage of children and adolescents. A national study of youth (ages 2–17) revealed that 1 in 12 were sexually victimized in the past year.¹ Furthermore, the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey showed that, in 2004, the overall violent crime victimization rate for teenagers ages 12–15 was more than twice the average national rate.² The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a particularly egregious subgroup of sexual victimizations because, in addition to being sexually abused and assaulted, victims are treated as commodities and used for financial and economic gain. National estimates of the number of CSEC victims vary widely, ranging from 100,000 to 3 million,^{3,4} although definitional, practical, and ethical problems make it difficult to produce solid estimates of its incidence.⁵

DEFINING CSEC

Little clarity and agreement exists on how to best define the term “CSEC.” Most of the literature describes CSEC as the sexual exploitation of a child that occurs at least in part for the financial or economic benefit of a particular party.^{6,7} Definitions of financial benefit are sometimes expanded to include both monetary and nonmonetary gains (food, shelter, drugs).⁸ Crimes that fit this definition include the production and sale of child pornography, juvenile prostitution, and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes (both domestic and international). Other crimes that are sometimes placed under the rubric of CSEC include the mail-order bride trade, early forced marriages, and underage youth working in strip clubs. All of these crimes involve the sexual exploitation of minors, but they vary considerably in terms of their frequency, severity, and implications for prevention and intervention. Even within each category, a wide range of cases exist, some of which clearly represent a commercially driven crime, and in other cases, the commercial element is less clear.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Child pornography, for example, has an active underground commercial market, with the lures of financial gain driving a portion of the production and distribution. Offenders produce, sell, and purchase the images or videos, thus contributing to the commercial distribution. Financial exchange can include direct payment for photographs or access to a Web site or exchange forum. However, many child pornography images are also made available and traded for free. Definitions of CSEC sometimes include trading of child pornography, regardless of whether money was exchanged, given its treatment as a commodity.⁸

JUVENILE PROSTITUTION

This category also represents a wide range of situations, from a troubled teenager trading sex for money to complex and well-organized, pimp-led prostitution rings that provide sexual access to young victims.⁹ Cases of individual youth engaged in prostitution for themselves appear to largely outnumber cases of youth prostitution that pimps organize.¹⁰

Prostitution is commercial by definition, particularly when it involves exchanges of money for sex; however, youth can also exchange sex for shelter, drugs, or other needs. Further complicating the definition, a sexual offender may give money to a child victim as a bribe or an

effort to purchase the victim’s silence, with the victim having little interest or intention in “profiting” from the exchange.

CHILD TRAFFICKING

Even the term “child trafficking” is ambiguous and often inconsistently defined. Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, human trafficking has occurred if a person was induced to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion.¹¹ Any person younger than 18 who performs a commercial sex act is considered a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is present. The language defining sex trafficking appears to refer specifically to crimes that a third-party exploiter (e.g., a pimp) who profits from the involvement of the youth in prostitution commits. However, the distinction between prostitution and trafficking has been debated.¹² Furthermore, the term “trafficking” often implies that someone moves youth involved in prostitution. Not only are many youth on their own, but even those with third-party exploiters often remain in their community of residence and are not taken across state or international borders.⁹ In the United States, the organized movement of youth from community to community for sexual purposes appears to apply only to a small segment of the youth identified as involved in prostitution, according to criminal justice data.⁹

A CONSERVATIVE DEFINITION OF CSEC

In this study, the definition of CSEC was limited to cases involving sexual offenses against children or youth in which there was an exchange or an effort to exchange money and the exchange clearly occurred so that at least one party would profit financially. This definition excludes child pornography trading, sexual exchanges for nonmonetary gains, and money offered to victims as a bribe or incentive in an otherwise noncommercial sexual assault.

This narrower definition of CSEC focuses public and professional attention on the relatively small but high-risk category of child sexual victimization cases where financial profit is involved. A broader definition may aid those seeking to draw attention to the scope of the problem, but it may have the unfortunate consequence of distracting and confusing law enforcement efforts: the large number of child sexual victimization and child pornography cases with no clear financial or profit-making element would overwhelm the smaller numbers of

more serious CSEC cases. A too-broad definition could also increase the risk that sexual assault victims are given potentially harmful labels such as “prostitute.” Finally, all-encompassing definitions complicate professionals’ and researchers’ efforts to understand the unique characteristics and consequences of CSEC crimes to better target intervention and prevention activities.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN CSEC

This section explores the various ways offenders use the Internet to commit and facilitate CSEC crimes and the estimated number of arrests made in 2006 for such crimes.

Internet accessibility has made it easier to produce and sell child pornography. The Internet provides pornography producers quick and easy access to large and diverse audiences. Due to the ease of taking and sharing digital photography, it is not surprising that CSEC offenders use

the technology to facilitate their crimes. Undercover agents have even discovered parents using the Internet to sell sexual access to their children.¹³

Few details are available on CSEC offenders’ use of the Internet or the effects of new technology on rates of CSEC crimes. Anecdotally however, law enforcement personnel report that sexual offenders against children have been quick to adopt Internet technology. This could be particularly true of CSEC offenders for several reasons:

- The high-profile, online pornography market makes the Internet an easy place to advertise escort services and massage parlors that promote prostitution and to market adolescent girls alongside adults.
- The Internet is an efficient means to reach different target audiences, including immigrant groups that may be the focus of international traffickers, pedophiles, people with other extreme sexual preferences (e.g., sadism, bondage, or bestiality), and those interested in child pornography.
- IF-CSEC offenders may believe that encrypting communications and picture files, using wireless technologies that may be difficult to trace to specific locations, and using other techniques and technologies may provide ways to hide their activities.
- IF-CSEC offenders may use the Internet to connect with other offenders, for example, through networking among pimps or child pornography rings.
- Offenders may use the Internet for business aspects of CSEC—such as online banking and ordering clothes and other goods for victims—because of efficiency.
- Youth who are engaged in prostitution on their own may use the Internet to advertise their services and find clients.¹⁴

The Internet may be a source of evidence that a CSEC case involves a commercial aspect. A commercial element changes the complexion of the crime and is likely to result in more serious charges, but law enforcement officials may miss it if they do not know to look for it. Professionals should consider Internet involvement when investigating conventional CSEC crimes. Doing so may result in the recovery of additional evidence, such as online conversations and sexual images, which could lead to more successful prosecutions and help target treatment of victims and offenders.

The Second National Juvenile Online Victimization Study (N-JOV2)

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sponsored the Second National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV2) study to explore trends and characteristics of arrests for Internet crimes against children. A nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies was selected in 2000 and re-interviewed in 2006, and included:

- All Internet Crimes Against Children task forces and past satellites (or affiliate agencies), and 2 federal agencies ($n = 97$), reporting a total of 1,981 arrests.
- A random selection of agencies known to have received training in investigating Internet crimes against children ($n = 794$), reporting a total of 1,001 arrests.
- A random selection of all other agencies in the United States ($n = 1,425$), reporting a total of 340 arrests.
- Of the 2,316 agencies, 2,028 (87%) responded to the survey.

Researchers at the Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) at the University of New Hampshire conducted the study. For information on N-JOV2, including methods, survey questions, weighting procedures, prevalence estimates, and study limitations, visit the CCRC website:

<http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc/internet>

ARRESTS FOR IF-CSEC

Data were collected on arrests in 2006 for Internet crimes against children and identified an estimated 569 arrests for IF-CSEC in the United States during that year. This number represents 8% of a total 7,010 arrests made for Internet sex crimes against minors in 2006.¹⁵ As shown in Figure 1, federal agencies made 21% (an estimated 256) of the arrests, Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task forces^a or affiliates made 6% (an estimated 191) of arrests; and state, county, or local agencies made 5% (an estimated 123) of arrests.

Cases were divided into the following three categories:

- Identified victims (cases in which the police located and contacted the victims).
- Unidentified victims (cases in which the victims appeared in child pornography images, but who police were unable to identify, locate, or contact).
- No actual victims (cases in which police were working undercover and portraying themselves as minors or persons with access to minors).

Different challenges arise in cases that involve the possession of child pornography (with no known molestation on the part of the offender) in comparison with cases involving victims who have been (or are being)

harmed. Cases involving an offender producing child pornography were classified in the “identified victim” category.

Two main categories of IF-CSEC crimes were identified (see Figure 2): (1) marketing and sale of child pornography, and (2) exploitation and prostitution of children.

Marketing and Sale of Child Pornography

This category involved the sale and purchase of child pornography images online (images that the offender did not produce or request to be produced). Sixty-six cases fell into this category.

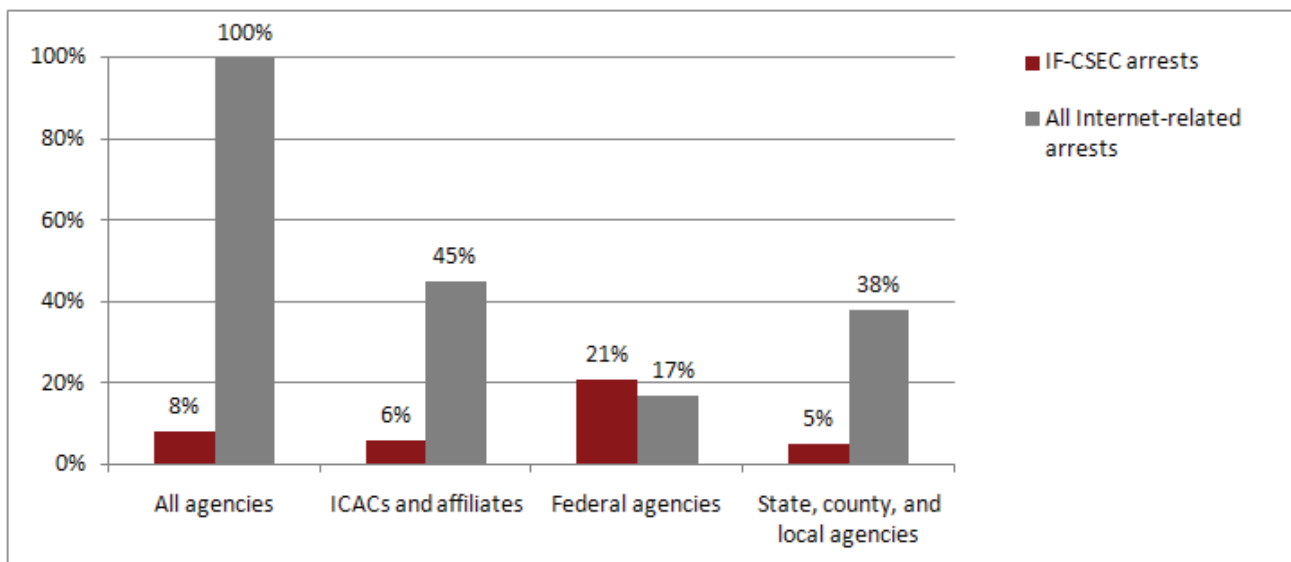
Profiteering/Selling child pornography

Cases in this subcategory included offenders who sold child pornography images that they possessed but had not produced. Six of the 66 marketing and sale of child pornography cases involved selling.

Purchasing child pornography

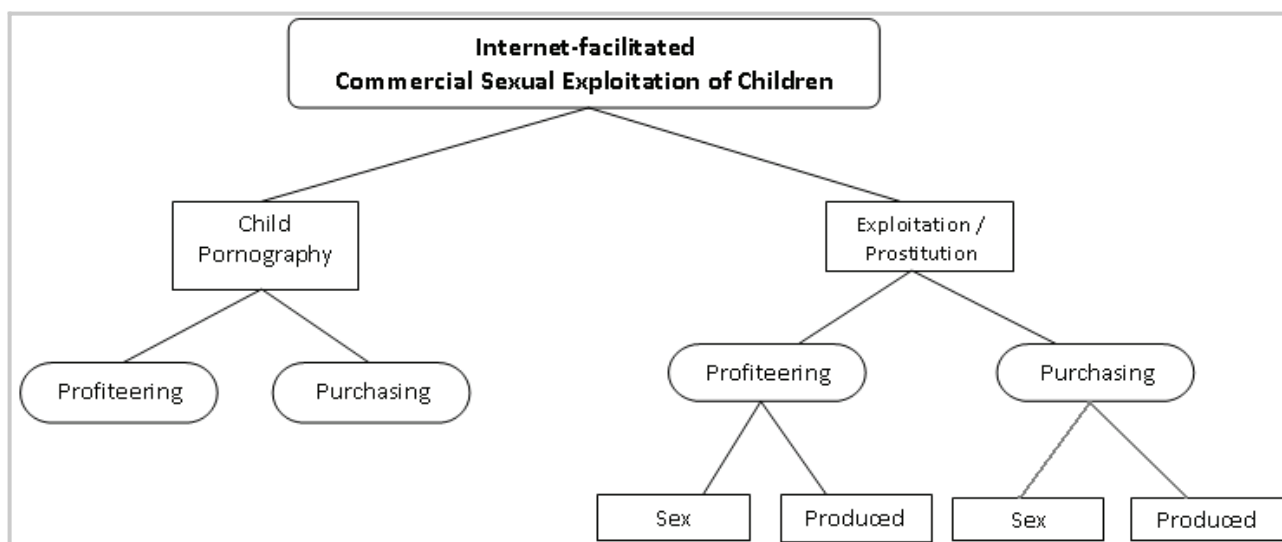
Cases in this subcategory included offenders who paid for access to child pornography Web sites and bought child pornography from others. Sixty-one of the 66 marketing and sale of child pornography cases involved purchasing.

Figure 1. Arrests for IF-CSEC Crimes, by Agency Type



ICACs = Internet Crimes Against Children task forces; IF-CSEC = Internet-facilitated sexual exploitation of children.

^a The ICAC task forces have been cited as having a significant impact on the CSEC movement (Small et al., 2008). The task forces were created to help state and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders who use the Internet, online communication systems, or other computer technology to sexually exploit children. The program is currently composed of 61 regional task force agencies and is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Figure 2. Classification of IF-CSEC Cases

Exploitation and Prostitution of Children

These cases involved arrests of offenders who participated in the sale of children for sex or in the sale of child pornography they produced. Forty-one cases fell into this category.^b

Profiteering

Twenty of the 41 exploitation and prostitution of children cases involved offenders who profited from the direct or attempted exploitation of a minor.

- **Selling children for sex.** These cases involved offenders who sold or attempted to sell child victims to a third party for sex and used the Internet to facilitate the crime. Twelve of the 20 profiteering from exploitation and prostitution of children cases fell into this category.
- **Selling child pornography the offender produced.** These cases involved the offender selling and/or advertising sexual pictures of the victim online. Ten of the 20 profiteering from exploitation and prostitution of children cases fell into this category.

Purchasing

Twenty-three of the 41 exploitation and prostitution of children cases involved offenders who purchased, or attempted to purchase, sex with a minor or purchased access to child pornography that the seller produced.

- **Purchasing sex with a minor.** These cases involved offenders who purchased or tried to purchase sex with a child. Sixteen of the exploitation and prostitution of children cases involving purchase fell into this category.
- **Purchasing child pornography that the seller produced.** These cases involved an offender who paid or attempted to pay a child or a relation of the child for sexual pictures of that victim. Thirteen of the exploitation and prostitution of children cases were in this category.

VICTIMS OF CSEC

Research on sexual exploitation suggests that there are particular groups of youth who are at greater risk for becoming victims of CSEC.^{16,17} Runaway youth, for example, are considered a high-risk group because they often lack the resources to support themselves and may resort to “survival sex” to obtain food and shelter. Other youth may become victims of CSEC when sexual abuse and assault take on a commercial component¹⁸—offenders may attempt to sell children for sex with others or try to sell child pornography they have produced.¹⁹ This section of the bulletin describes differences between victims of IF-CSEC and children whose sexual victimization has no commercial component.^c

^b Case numbers within this section do not add to 100%—some cases involved more than one of the elements discussed. For the purposes of the typology, the researchers did not create unique groupings.

^c The data presented in this section represent only cases in which police identified a known child victim. In many CSEC cases, such as those involving the sale of child pornography, children have been victimized in the images, but police have not identified them.

A subgroup of cases ($n = 316$) in the larger N-JOV2 study involved identified juvenile victims. Of these cases, 9% ($n = 37$) involved identified juvenile victims of IF-CSEC. Details about this subgroup of IF-CSEC-identified victims are provided below in relation to non-CSEC identified victims from the larger N-JOV2 study.

Demographically, there appear to be few differences between the two groups; however, echoing findings from the larger body of research on CSEC victims, IF-CSEC victims in this study appeared to suffer from more extensive problems in their personal lives. Specifically, when compared to non-CSEC victims, the researchers found that a greater percentage of IF-CSEC victims had a criminal history (33% vs. 7%), had previously run away from home (41% vs. 13%), and had a history of failing grades at school (47% vs. 14%).

Demographics of Victims

The majority of victims were female (82%), 71% were between the ages of 13 and 17, and 21% were 6 to 12 years old. Slightly fewer IF-CSEC victims than non-CSEC victims were non-Hispanic white (77% vs. 85% of non-CSEC victims), fewer IF-CSEC victims lived with both biological parents (16% vs. 45%), and more IF-CSEC victims than non-CSEC victims lived with one biological parent only (46% vs. 28%) (see Table 1).

Relationship With the Offender

In 27% of all victim cases, offenders were acquaintances of the victim, such as neighbors, relatives of friends,

teachers, family friends, and leaders or members of youth organizations. In 26% of the victim cases, offenders were family members of the IF-CSEC victim, including parents, step-parents, parents' intimate partners, and other adult relatives. For these relationships, no differences based on IF-CSEC involvement were noted (see Table 1). Fewer of the IF-CSEC victims, however, had met the offender online (17% vs. 44% of non-CSEC victims), although this relationship was eliminated after adjusting for offender and victim age. More offenders in IF-CSEC cases had some other relationship with the victim—mostly pimps, but also some strangers who approached the victims in public (20% vs. 3%).

Harm to the Victims

The majority of both IF-CSEC and non-CSEC victims experienced serious sexual assault involving penetration (72% and 69%, respectively). Compared with non-CSEC victims, more IF-CSEC victims were physically assaulted as part of the crime (16% vs. 5%), offered or given illegal drugs or alcohol (41% vs. 17%), and were the subjects of child pornography production (85% vs. 55%) (see Figure 3). These findings are in line with other research on the topic, which report that violent victimizations are common^{17,20,21} and, due to the commercial aspect of the crime, the psychological and physical risks for CSEC victims are greater than for non-CSEC victims.^{17,21,22}

Additional serious potential for harm for CSEC victims include multiple victimizations, physical violence, and HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Child Victims of Internet-Facilitated Sex Crimes

	Non-CSEC Victims ($n = 279$) %	CSEC Victims ($n = 37$) %	All Victims ($n = 316$) %
Relationship to Offender			
Met online*	44	17	42
Family member	26	23	26
Acquaintance	26	39	27
Other (e.g., pimps)**	3	20	5
Sex			
Male	18	16	18
Female	82	84	82
Age			
2 years old or younger	2	0	2
3 to 5 years old	6	0	6
6 to 12 years old	21	15	21
13 to 17 years old	70	84	71
Race/Ethnicity*			
Non-Hispanic White	85	77	84
Who was victim living with			
Both biological parents***	45	16	42
One biological parent only*	28	46	29

CSEC = Commercial sexual exploitation of children

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Note: Unweighted $n = 316$

Untreated illness, injury, and pregnancy are also concerns, particularly because access to adequate health care, for the victims, is limited.^{17,22,23} In addition, criminal repercussions associated with CSEC activities are a large problem^{17,22,25} considering that many juvenile prostitutes find themselves prosecuted as offenders. Finally, psychological disorders, such as depression and suicide attempts, are rife among commercially exploited youth.^{17,22,23}

IF-CSEC OFFENDERS

Research on CSEC is a relatively new area of study and little information exists about offenders in these crimes. One barrier to learning more about these offenders is that the category of CSEC crimes is very broad. Offender who commit IF-CSEC crimes include pimps, those who pay to access child pornography Web sites, individuals who participate in sex tours that provide youth prostitutes, and child abuse offenders who produce and sell child pornography.²⁵ Some CSEC offenders are pedophiles, still others are prostitution consumers, pornography traders, and people seeking to make easy money via the Internet.²⁶⁻²⁸ Youth who are involved in prostitution are victims of exploitation, but some jurisdictions may treat them as offenders, depending on the circumstances.⁹

This section of the bulletin describes the characteristics of offenders arrested for IF-CSEC in 2006 and outlines the differences found between offenders who attempt to profit from the child exploitation and offenders who participate as customers or purchasers.

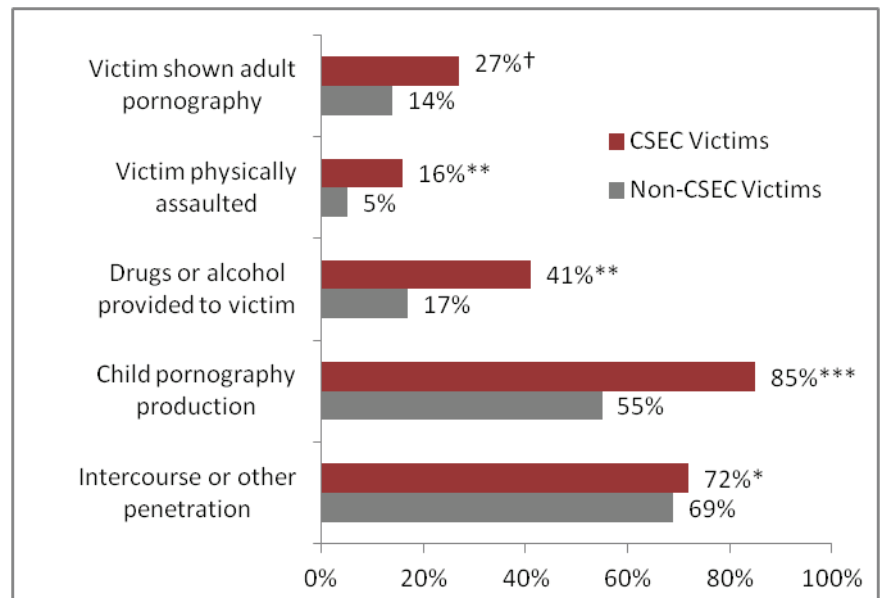
Offender Characteristics

The offenders arrested in 2006 for IF-CSEC crimes were almost all male (99%), 47% were age 40 or older, and most were Non-Hispanic White (84%) (see Table 2). They came from a variety of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds and types of communities (e.g., urban, suburban, rural). Half (51%) of the offenders were single or never married at the time of their crime, and 69% were employed full time.

Profiteers vs. Purchasers

There are two types of IF-CSEC offenders: (1) purchasers, who attempt to purchase sex or sexual material involving a minor, and (2) profiteers, who attempt to profit

Figure 3. Aggravating Features of the Crime



[†] $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

from such sales. In this study, purchasers included offenders who paid for access to child pornography Web sites, those who were caught in undercover operations where the investigator pretended to be a seller of child pornography or a minor selling himself or herself for sex, as well as those who paid or tried to pay a minor for sex or to produce sexual pictures. Profiteers included offenders who operated child pornography Web sites where members paid for access or offenders who advertised youth online for sex. Although less common, in some more complex cases, offenders were both purchasers and profiteers, e.g., an offender who operated a child pornography Web site (and thus profiting) but also paid minors for the sexual images (and thus purchasing). Another example would be an offender who profited from an online escort service and paid minors to have sex with him or her.

Of the identified IF-CSEC offenders, 17% profited from the exploitation or possession of child pornography. The remaining 83% purchased child pornography or sex with a minor. Demographically, offenders who profited from the commercial exploitation generally differed from those who purchased child pornography or sex from a minor (see Table 2). Profiteers were more likely than purchasers to be female (5% vs. 0%), younger than age 40 (71% vs. 49%), significantly more likely to be non-Hispanic Black (40% vs. 5%), less likely to be high school graduates (28% vs. 5%), and less likely to be employed full-time (37% vs. 75%).

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Offenders Arrested for IF-CSEC

	All CSEC Offenders (n=106) %	Purchasers (n=80) %	Profiteers (n=26) %
Sex***			
Male	99	100	95
Female	1	0	5
Age**			
25 or younger	14	10	35
26—39	39	39	36
40 or older	47	51	29
Race/Ethnicity***			
Non-Hispanic White	84	90	56
Hispanic White	5	5	4
Non-Hispanic Black	11	5	40
Annual Household Income*			
Less than \$20,000	9	6	20
\$20,000 to \$50,000	37	38	32
\$50,001 to \$80,000	28	32	10
More than \$80,000	14	12	26
Not sure	12	12	11
Highest Level of Education**			
Did not finish high school	9	5	28
High school graduate	41	43	29
College education or degree	29	31	22
Not sure	21	21	21
Employment**			
Full-time	69	75	37

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Other notable differences between profiteers and purchasers included:

- Crimes by IF-CSEC profiteers were significantly more likely to involve two or more offenders (31% vs. 2%) and child pornography production (56% vs. 13%).
- IF-CSEC profiteers were more likely to be known to be violent (46% vs. 4%) and have prior arrests for sexual offenses (28% vs. 11%) and nonsexual offenses (66% vs. 19%).
- Profiteers were less likely than purchasers, however, to have also possessed child pornography as part of the current crime (42% vs. 83%).

These findings suggest that IF-CSEC profiteers are a substantially more egregious and dangerous group of offenders than purchasers. Such characteristics suggest more seasoned offenders who are involved in larger, organized networks of criminals. Therefore, it may make sense for law enforcement to focus their most intensive efforts on targeting third-party profiteers when triaging CSEC crime reports. Although they account for but a small proportion of a much larger pool of sex offenders of children, these offenders pose a disproportionate level of risk and potential harm to children.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study presents data on a nationally representative sample of arrests for IF-CSEC that involve use of the Internet to commit and facilitate the crimes. The findings suggest that IF-CSEC cases represent a relatively small percentage of all national arrests for Internet crimes against children. Compared with published estimates of the thousands of commercially exploited youth, the number of cases estimated in this study ($n = 569$) may seem extremely small and seem to minimize the problem. The following considerations should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings:

- The estimates involve *arrests*, not the number of youth being prostituted or otherwise commercially exploited. It may not be typical policy for arrests to occur in these cases, so they would be excluded from this sample. An earlier study focusing specifically on juvenile prostitution estimated national arrests for these crimes at approximately 1,450.⁹
- Police records about juvenile prostitution cases may not be complete, and police recollections about

about juvenile prostitution cases and their Internet involvement may not be that salient due to heavy case loads, for example. Thus, law enforcement may not have identified all qualifying cases of Internet crimes against youth.

- It is unclear whether the CSEC problem does, in fact, number in the hundreds of thousands—most of the estimates with numbers of such magnitude are based on guesses and extrapolations.²⁹

CONCLUSION

The Internet has been cited as a functional tool for CSEC offenders because of the ease of communication with large audiences or potential buyers, the relative affordability of communication via the Internet, and the perceived anonymity of Internet communication.³⁰ The data from this study provide one of the first descriptive summaries of how offenders used the Internet in a national sample of IF-CSEC cases.

New technologies are likely to become more common in these cases, particularly in the small but significant percentage of CSEC cases involving third parties (such as pimps, traffickers, and sex rings) seeking to profit from the sexual victimization of children. Future research will be needed to verify trends in CSEC offenders' use of Internet and new technology and to document how evolving technology can help law enforcement find new avenues to identify CSEC crimes and provide the evidence for arrest and conviction.

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For Further Information

More information about the Second National Juvenile Online Victimization study and Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children is available on the Crimes against Children Research Center Web site: <http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc/internet>

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

Crimes against Children Research Center

126 Horton Social Science Center
Durham, NH 03824

(603) 862-1888 Phone
(603) 862-1122 Fax

<http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc>

