

# Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Findings From a Nationally Representative Sample of Law Enforcement Agencies in the United States

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## Abstract

This article explores the variety of ways in which the Internet is used to facilitate the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and provides national incidence estimates for the number of arrests involving such technology-facilitated crimes in 2006. The National Juvenile Online Victimization Study is a nationally representative longitudinal study of more than 2,500 local, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies across the United States. The current article utilizes Wave 2 data, which surveyed arrests in 2006 for Internet-related sex crimes against minors. Detailed data were collected via telephone interviews with investigators about 1,051 individual arrest cases. Findings show that an estimated 569 arrests for Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children (IF-CSEC) occurred in the United States in 2006. Offenders in IF-CSEC cases fell into two main categories: (1) those who used the Internet to purchase or sell access to identified children for sexual purposes including child pornography (CP) production (36% of cases), and (2) those who used the Internet to purchase or sell CP images they possessed but did not produce (64% of cases). Offenders attempting to profit from child sexual

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exploitation were more likely than those who were purchasing to have (a) prior arrests for sexual and nonsexual offenses, (b) a history of violence, (c) produced CP, (d) joined forces with other offenders, and (e) involved female offenders. Although the number of arrests for IF-CSEC crimes is relatively small, the victims of these crimes are a high-risk subgroup of youth, and the offenders who try to profit from these crimes are particularly concerning from a child welfare perspective.

## Keywords

commercial sexual exploitation, children, law enforcement, Internet, sex offenders

Sexual victimizations are serious crimes that harm a significant percentage of children and adolescents. A recent national study of youth (ages 2 to 17) revealed that 1 in 12 children had experienced a sexual victimization in the past year (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005). Furthermore, the 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 (Catalano, 2005). The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a very serious and disturbing type of sexual victimization because, in addition to being sexually abused and assaulted, victims are treated as commodities and used for economic gain.

Descriptions of CSEC cases in the literature encompass a wide range of crimes, including the victimization of juveniles through prostitution, the production and distribution of child pornography (CP), and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. The literature describing CSEC crimes cites estimates of victims in the United States that range from 100,000 to 3 million (Barnitz, 1998; End Child Prostitution Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Exploitation [ECPAT], 1996), although existing estimates tend to be based on methodologies with significant limitations and flaws (Melrose, 2002). Recent anecdotal reports suggest that the Internet and related technologies are being used by CSEC offenders to facilitate their crimes and that these Internet-facilitated crimes may pose new challenges for law enforcement. This article represents the first effort to systematically collect data on how the Internet is being used to facilitate CSEC crimes across the United States.

## Existing Definitions of CSEC

There is a lack of clarity and agreement in the use of the term *CSEC* by professionals in the fields of psychology and sociology. 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 (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Gragg, Petta, Bernstein, Eisen, & Quinn, 2007). Definitions of financial benefit are sometimes expanded to include both monetary and nonmonetary (food, shelter, drugs) gains (Estes, 2001). Crimes that fall into this definition typically include the production and sale of CP, 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 mail-order bride trade, early forced marriages, and participation of underage youth in strip clubs. Taken together, 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. Furthermore, even within each category, there is a wide range of cases, some of which clearly represent a commercially driven crime, and other cases in which the commercial element is less clear.

CP, for example, has an active underground commercial market, with lures of financial gain driving a portion of CP production and distribution. Offenders contribute to commercial distribution of CP by producing, selling, and purchasing the images or videos. Financial exchange can include direct payment for photographs or payment for access to a CP website or exchange forum. However, many CP images are also made available and traded for free by CP offenders. Definitions of CSEC sometimes include trading of CP, regardless of whether or not money was exchanged, given its treatment as a commodity (Estes, 2001).

Juvenile prostitution is perhaps the crime most individuals initially think of when they hear the term *CSEC*. However, this category also represents a wide range of case types from a troubled teenager trading sex for money to complex and well-organized pimp-led prostitution rings that provide sexual access to young victims (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010). Cases of individual youth engaged in prostitution on their own appear to largely outnumber cases of organized youth prostitution by pimps (Curtis et al., 2008). Prostitution is commercial by definition, particularly when it involves exchanges of money for sex; however, youth can also exchange sex for other needs such as shelter and drugs. Further complicating the definition, money may be given to a child victim by a sexual offender as a bribe or as an effort to purchase the victim's silence, with little interest or intention by the victim to "profit" from the exchange.

Even the term *child trafficking* is often ambiguous and inconsistently defined. Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), human trafficking has occurred if a person was induced to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion (Kyckelhahn, Beck, & Cohen, 2009). Any person under age 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 specifically refer to crimes committed by a third-party exploiter (e.g., pimp) who profits from the involvement of the youth in prostitution. However, there seems to be some debate about the distinction between prostitution and trafficking (Weiner & Hala, 2008). Furthermore, the term *trafficking* often implies that the youth involved in prostitution are moved around by someone. 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 (Mitchell et al., 2010). 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, based on criminal justice data (Mitchell et al., 2010).

For this article, we have chosen to use a more conservative definition of CSEC than has been used in other literature on this topic. Specifically, we limit the definition of CSEC to cases involving sexual offenses against children or youth in which certain criteria were met: (a) There was an exchange or effort to exchange money, and (b) that exchange clearly occurred in order for at least one party to profit financially. This definition excludes CP trading not involving payment, sexual exchanges for nonmonetary gains, and money offered to victims as a bribe or incentive in an otherwise noncommercial sexual assault. We believe that a narrower definition of commercial sexual exploitation will focus public and professional attention on the relatively small but very high-risk category of child sexual exploitation 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 smaller numbers of very serious CSEC cases would be overwhelmed by the large number of child sexual victimization and CP cases with no clear financial or profit-making element. A too-broad definition could also increase the risk that sexual assault victims are given potentially harmful labels such as “prostitute” in cases where such terms do not apply. Finally, over-encompassing definitions complicate efforts by professionals and researchers to understand the unique characteristics and consequences of CSEC crimes and make it more difficult to focus intervention and prevention efforts.

## **Internet Sex Crimes Against Children**

Internet crimes against children have received a great deal of publicity and caused much concern among parents, law enforcement agencies, lawmakers, educators, and other child advocates. The main types of Internet-based sex crimes against children involve offenders who meet victims online (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2004; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2009b; Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008), technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation by family members and acquaintances of victims (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005), conducting online undercover operations (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2005; Wolak et al., 2009b), CP production (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005b), and CP possession and distribution (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005a; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). The domain of technology-facilitated crimes against children has been characterized by two features: rapid growth and changing dynamics. In terms of growth, in 2000 there were an estimated 2,577 arrests for technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation crimes of all types (Wolak et al., 2003). By 2006, the estimated number of arrests had almost tripled to 7,010 (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2009a). Arrests of online sex crime perpetrators (i.e., sex offenders who used the Internet or related technologies to meet victims) increased more than threefold between 2000 and 2006 (Wolak et al., 2009b). Most of the arrests (83%) and the vast majority of the increase involved offenders who solicited undercover investigators. In 2000, an estimated 1,713 offenders were arrested for crimes that included CP possession or distribution (Wolak et al., 2005a). By 2006, there were more than twice as many arrests, an estimated 3,672 (Wolak, Finkelhor, &

Mitchell, in press). Arrests involving the production of CP also increased significantly, from an estimated 998 in 2000 to an estimated 1,493 in 2006 (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Jones, under review).

In addition to the rapid growth in numbers of cases, new offender tactics have emerged. An example is the increasing use of video. Although webcams were rarely used in the course of these crimes in 2000, among offenders arrested in 2006 for an online sex crime against an actual youth, 27% used video communications to interact with victims (Wolak, 2009b). Among CP possessors, there was a significant increase in the number who had CP in video format, from 39% in 2000 to 58% in 2006 (Wolak, 2009a). And in 5% of cases, there was evidence that CP possessors had used the Internet to watch live sexual activity involving minors.

Another example of changing dynamics is the role of technology in CSEC. Few details are available on CSEC offenders' use of the Internet or the effects of new technology on rates of CSEC crimes. However, CSEC offenders may be quick to adopt Internet technology for several reasons. First, the high-profile online adult pornography market makes the Internet a good place to promote prostitution through advertising of escort services and massage parlors. Young adolescent girls may be marketed in such places alongside adults. Young girls may be used because they may be more tractable than women, easier to control, and healthier. Second, the Internet is an efficient means of reaching large and diverse audiences such as immigrant groups that may be the focus of international traffickers, pedophiles looking for access to very young children, people with extreme sexual tastes (e.g., sadism, bondage, bestiality), and those interested in CP. Third, CSEC offenders may believe the Internet offers ways to hide their activities, for example, by encrypting communications and picture files and using wireless technologies that may be difficult to trace to specific locations and users. Fourth, the Internet may make it easier for CSEC offenders to make connections with other offenders, for example, networking among pimps or CP rings (Holt, Blevins, & Burkert, 2010).

Current information about how the Internet is being used by CSEC offenders is purely anecdotal. Systematic research is lacking. This information is important for law enforcement and others working to combat CSEC because (a) the commercial element changes the complexion of the crime, likely resulting in more serious charges; (b) the commercial element could be missed in some cases if law enforcement is unaware and does not look for it; (c) the Internet may be a source of valuable evidence that a crime has a commercial component; (d) the Internet may be a valuable source of identifying and collecting evidence about networks of offenders; and (e) Internet use could be especially prevalent among a particularly concerning subgroups of offenders—those who network with other offenders and may have the most victims (e.g., pimps, traffickers, sex rings).

## Current Article

The current article presents data on a nationally representative sample of arrests involving Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation (IF-CSEC) cases coming to the attention of U.S. law enforcement agencies in the year 2006. First, we calculate

the national 1-year prevalence of arrests for IF-CSEC. Second, using a combination of qualitative case summaries and quantitative data we explore the different ways the Internet is used to facilitate the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. As part of this descriptive analysis, we explore how central a role the Internet played in the commercial aspect of the sex crime and describe some of the differences across case types. Finally, we explore the offender, victim, and case characteristics of CSEC cases. CSEC offenders are compared based on whether they were involved as profiteers or purchasers.

## Method

### *National Juvenile Online Victimization Study*

The data for this study were drawn from the National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study. The N-JOV study was undertaken to examine characteristics and monitor the growth of Internet sex crimes against minors and related law enforcement activities. The N-JOV Study agency sample was designed to yield a nationally representative sample of Internet-related child sexual exploitation cases ending in arrest. We used a stratified sample of agencies because such cases do not occur with equal probability among the more than 15,000 U.S. law enforcement agencies. The N-JOV Study is the first national research project to systematically collect data about the number and characteristics of arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors at two separate time points (years 2000 and 2006) within the same agencies. We surveyed a national sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies by mail asking if they had made arrests in Internet-related CP or sexual exploitation cases in the calendar year 2006. Then detailed telephone interviews were conducted with investigators about specific cases (unweighted  $n = 1,051$ ). Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of investigators, and we asked them to have case files present for reference when interviews were conducted. This study was conducted with approval from the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board.

### *Sample and Procedures*

*Phase 1 national mail survey.* Mail surveys were sent to a nationally representative sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies (i.e., police departments). We created a stratified sample, dividing law enforcement agencies into three sampling frames, on the basis of their expertise and training in conducting such investigations. All agencies included in the Wave 1 study were also eligible for Wave 2 participation. Overall, 87% of the eligible agencies ( $n = 2,028$ ) responded to the mail surveys in Wave 2; 20% of the agencies ( $n = 458$ ), plus 2 federal agencies that responded electronically, reported 3,322 arrests, with 60 first frame agencies (consisting of Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces [ICACs],<sup>1</sup> former satellites agencies affiliated with ICACs, agencies working with civilian groups such as Perverted Justice, and two federal agencies) reporting 1,981 cases, 239 second frame agencies reporting 1,001 cases, and 161 third frame agencies reporting 340 cases.

To be eligible, cases had to (a) have victims younger than 18, (b) involve arrests in the year 2006, and (c) be Internet-related. Cases were Internet-related if any of the following criteria were met: (a) an offender–victim relationship was initiated online; (b) an offender who was a family member or acquaintance of a victim used the Internet to communicate with a victim to further sexual victimization, or otherwise exploit the victim; (c) a case involved an Internet-related proactive undercover investigation; (d) CP was received or distributed online, or arrangements for receiving or distributing were made online; or (e) CP was found on a computer hard drive, on removable media such as floppy disks and compact disks, on computer printouts, or in a digital format.

*Phase 2 case-level telephone interviews.* Phase 2 of the study consisted of follow-up telephone interviews with law enforcement investigators to gather information about case, offender, and victim characteristics. Of the 3,322 cases reported by law enforcement, 8% ( $n = 276$ ) were ineligible and 42% ( $n = 1,389$ ) were not selected for the sample (described in more detail below). Of the 1,657 eligible cases, 64% ( $n = 1,063$ ) of the telephone interviews were completed by six trained interviewers between June 2007 and August 2008. Of those eligible but not completed, 27% involved investigators that did not respond to requests for interviews, 7% involved respondents who refused to be interviewed, and 2% involved duplicate cases or cases that could not be identified. A total of 12 completed interviews were duplicate cases after completion and thus dropped from the data set, resulting in 1,051 completed interviews.

We designed a sampling procedure for case-specific interviews that took into account the number of cases reported by an agency, so we would not unduly burden respondents in agencies with many cases. If an agency reported between one and three Internet-related cases, we conducted follow-up interviews for every case. For agencies that reported more than three cases, we conducted interviews for all cases that involved identified victims and sampled other cases. (The term *identified victims* denotes victims that were identified and contacted by law enforcement in the course of the investigation.) For agencies with between 4 and 15 cases, approximately half of the cases that did not have identified victims were randomly selected for follow-up interviews. In agencies that reported more than 15 cases, approximately one-quarter of the cases with no identified victims were randomly selected. In some agencies, we could not find out which cases had identified victims, so we sampled from all cases, using the sampling procedure described previously. More information about how the N-JOV Study was conducted can be found online at <http://unh.edu/ccrc/internet-crimes/papers.html>.

## Definitions

Three clear criteria had to be met for cases to be classified as involving CSEC in this study:

1. A child (age 17 or younger) was sexually abused or exploited (or an attempt was made to do so) either directly or through the dissemination of CP by an offender.



2. The crime involved an explicit exchange of money (crimes in which sex offenders bought the cooperation of victims through gifts or in which CP images were freely traded were excluded). (Appendix A lists the questions that identified whether cases involved explicit exchanges of money).
3. The Internet played a role in the crime, regardless of whether the Internet role was critical to the crime (e.g., online advertising of juveniles for sex) or peripheral (e.g., as a means of communication between a pimp and juvenile).

### *Instrumentation*

*Phase 1 national mail survey.* The IF-CSEC cases described in this article were reported by law enforcement agencies in response to the following mail survey questions.

1. Between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2006, did your agency make any arrests in cases involving the attempted or completed *sexual exploitation of a minor*, and at least one of the following occurred? (a) The offender and the victim first met on the Internet; (b) the offender committed a sexual offense against the victim on the Internet, regardless of whether or not they first met online; and/or (c) the offender was involved in prostitution or other form of commercial sexual exploitation of a minor that involved the Internet in any way.
2. Between January 1, 2006, and December 31, 2006, did your agency make any arrests in cases involving the possession, distribution, or production of CP, and at least one of the following occurred? (a) Illegal images were found on the hard drive of a computer or on removable media (e.g., CDs or disks) possessed by the offender, (b) the offender used the Internet to order or sell CP, (c) there was other evidence that illegal images were downloaded from the Internet or distributed by the offender over the Internet, and/or (d) money was paid for access to a Web site that featured CP.

If respondents answered “Yes” to any of these questions, we asked them to list the case number, or other reference, and the name of the key investigating officer or most knowledgeable person for each case they reported. Also, we emphasized that all agencies should return surveys, even if they had no cases to report.

*Phase 2 case-level telephone interview.* The telephone survey instrument was developed specifically for the N-JOV study. Questions were developed through interviews and consultations with law enforcement personnel. Completed surveys were also pilot tested with police before the actual data collection began. These questions covered a number of different aspects of the case, including how the case was initiated in their agency, specific case characteristics, offender characteristics, victim characteristics, and case outcomes. All case-level telephone interviews were conducted using a computer-assisted interviewing program.



The victims described in this article are *primary* victims; that is, they played a more central role in the crime than others when more than one victim was involved. Primary victims were chosen on the basis of the following criteria: (a) The victim who directly used the Internet; (b) If more than one, then the victim most seriously victimized; and (c) If still more than one, the youngest. About 70% of the cases involved only one victim.

Similarly, the offenders in this article are *primary* offenders—95% of cases involved only one offender. When more than one offender was involved, the primary offender was chosen on the basis of the following criteria: (a) The offender who directly used the Internet; (b) If more than one, the offender who committed the most serious crime; and (c) If still more than one, the youngest.

### *Weighting Procedures and Prevalence Estimate*

Weights were constructed to reduce bias resulting from variations in selection probabilities, response propensity, and nonresponse (Kish, 1992). The weights corrected for the probability that an agency or a case would be selected for the sample, given that the sample was stratified (some agencies had a higher probability of selection) and based on the sampling procedure we used for cases (number of cases reported by an agency and whether the case involved an identified victim). Cases that had lower probabilities of selection were given greater weight; thus, the weighted distribution of cases reflects the population of agencies and cases from which the sample of cases was selected. Weights also adjusted for unit nonresponse (Kalton, 1983). The cell weighting method (Särndal, Swensson, & Wretman, 1992) of nonresponse adjustment was used, where the overall sample (i.e., responding and nonresponding) was partitioned into a number of nonresponse adjustment cells with similar agency or case characteristics. The ratio of the sum of weights for all cases to the sum of weights for respondents was then used as a nonresponse adjustment factor. Generally speaking, the cell weighting method of nonresponse adjustment represents a significant improvement in this regard, but it is acknowledged that some nonresponse bias may remain. The fact that there are small differences between weighted and unweighted estimates is encouraging, as it suggests little correction was required. The complex survey design takes into account and calculates standard error based on actual sample size, not estimated.

Four variables were constructed to reflect the complex sample design. First, each case was given a weight to account for its probability of selection for both the mail survey and telephone interview samples. The weights were adjusted for agency nonresponse, case-level nonresponse, duplication of cases among agencies, and arrests by one federal agency that did not participate in case-level interviews. Second, a primary sampling unit (PSU) ID was created to account for the clustering of cases. Third, a stratum variable was created in order to reflect the sampling frame from which the agency or case was selected. Finally, overall probabilities of selection were provided in order to calculate finite population correction factors, which accounted for the sample being selected without replacement. Further details about our weighting procedures can be found in our methodology report at: <http://unh.edu/ccrc/internet-crimes/papers.html>.

## Coding

Cases were coded in terms of whether or not a commercial element was involved on the basis of a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Coding to determine which of the total 1,051 N-JOV cases from Wave 2 had a CSEC component was conducted independently by two of the authors with 99% agreement ( $Kappa = 0.93, p < .001$ ). In addition, among the 106 CSEC-involved cases, each case was coded for two important characteristics: (a) how explicit the financial arrangement was; and (b) how integral a role the Internet played in the transaction. The financial arrangement was considered explicit if money was requested in return for the commodity (i.e., sex with a child or to gain access to a CP website). This explicit request had to occur prior to the exchange. Crimes in which sex offenders bought the cooperation of victims through gifts or CP images were traded for other images were excluded. The Internet was considered to play an integral role in the crime if it was critical to the crime occurring, for example, if juveniles were involved in prostitution where the Internet was the place where they were being advertised (e.g., Craig's List) or if the entire exchange of money for access to CP occurred via a website. On the other hand, a child prostitution ring may be running through newspaper ads or through a business fronting for prostitution and the only Internet-related component of the crime may be that the juveniles use e-mail to communicate with pimps or clients—in this case the Internet role would be considered peripheral. Again, double coding indicated a high percentage of agreement (86% and 90% agreement for the two categories respectively). Kappa was not calculated here due to the presence of zero values for at least one of the weight variables. All discrepancies were resolved through discussion by the coders.

IF-CSEC offenders were first classified according to whether their crimes involved completed or attempted direct offenses against youth victims (i.e., selling minors for prostitution, selling CP they produced with known victims, paying for sex with minors) or whether their crimes involved the attempted or completed selling or purchasing of CP they possessed but did not produce. (Some of these crimes involved undercover operations in which law enforcement investigators were posing online as minors or as buyers or sellers of CP.) Second, IF-CSEC offenders were classified as either profiteers or purchasers. Profiteers gained, or tried to gain, financially by selling sex or CP images. Purchasers paid, or tried to pay, money for CP images or sex with a minor. In a few cases, offenders met the criteria of both a profiteer and a purchaser; these offenders were coded as profiteers for the purposes of quantitative analyses only.

## Analyses

Using weighted estimates, we first present the estimated number of arrests for IF-CSEC in the United States in 2006. Next, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings, we describe the various ways the Internet is used to facilitate the CSEC. Next, using weighted chi-square tests, we examine differences (e.g., demographic characteristics,

criminal history) between IF-CSEC offenders who were profiting from the exploitation as compared with those who were on the purchasing end. Finally, we examine victim characteristics (e.g., demographic and aggravating features of the crime) between identified victims of IF-CSEC crimes and identified victims of non-CSEC Internet sex crimes.

Chi-square comparisons were performed on weighted data. Because applying standard chi-square calculations to weighted data could result in the underestimation of standard errors, we used SPSS Complex Samples statistical software, which takes into account the variations in selection probabilities inherent in stratified samples when it performs chi-square tests. We did not adjust for multiple comparisons. Although such adjustments can reduce the possibility of Type I error, they may increase Type 2 error (Perneger, 1998). Furthermore, in exploratory studies without prespecified hypotheses such as this one, there is typically no clear structure in the multiple tests, so determining an appropriate multiple test adjustment can be difficult or even impossible (Bender & Lange, 1999). Rather we included *p* values so that readers can assess significance.

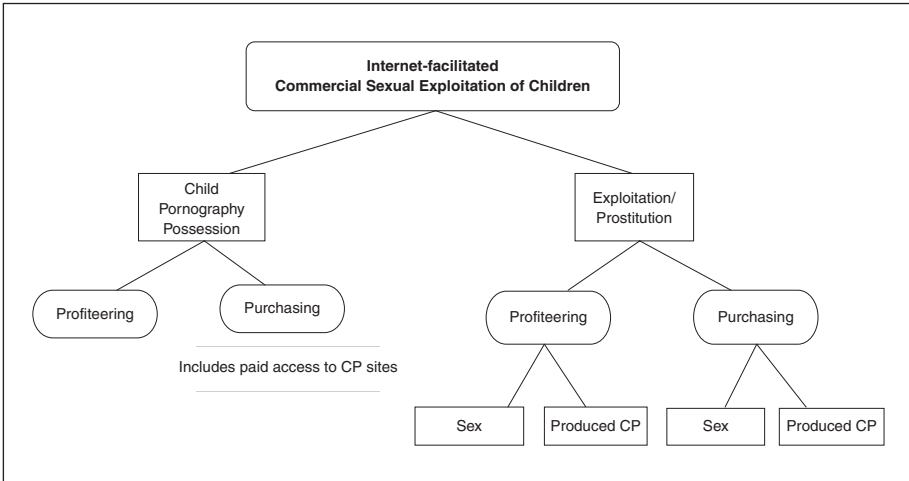
## Results

### *Number of Arrests for Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors*

There were an estimated 569 arrests (unweighted  $n = 106$ ) for IF-CSEC in the United States in 2006 (95% confidence interval [CI] range: 440 to 699). This estimate does not measure the full number of youth victimized in IF-CSEC crimes, but rather the number of *arrests* made by law enforcement in cases involving IF-CSEC in a 1-year period. This represents 8% of all arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors, which constituted approximately 7,010 arrests in the same time frame (Wolak et al., 2009b). Agencies making these arrests covered the spectrum of agency types seen in the United States—33% were made by ICAC or affiliates (estimated  $n = 191$ , 95% CI: 86 to 296); 45% were made by federal agencies (estimated  $n = 256$ , 95% CI: 224 to 287); and 22% were made by state, county, or local agencies (estimated  $n = 123$ , 95% CI: 74 to 172). Furthermore, 65% of CSEC cases began through some law enforcement action (e.g., undercover investigation), 22% came to police attention through a report, and 13% of respondents did not know how the case came to police attention.

### *Use of the Internet in CSEC crimes*

We identified two main categories of IF-CSEC crimes: (1) completed or attempted direct offenses against known victims (i.e., selling minors for prostitution, selling CP they produced with known victims, purchasing sex with a minor), and (2) completed or attempted sales or purchases of CP that offenders possessed but did not produce (see Figure 1 for a depiction of the full typology, described later in more detail).



**Figure 1.** Diagram of types of Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation cases coming to the attention of law enforcement.

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, an offender could be paying a juvenile to produce sexual pictures and then selling those pictures online to other offenders.

*Completed or attempted direct offenses against victims (exploitation/prostitution).* Thirty-six percent (unweighted  $n = 41$ ) of IF-CSEC cases fell into this category. All of these cases involved arrests of offenders who participated in the sale of children for sex or CP they produced.

*a. Profiteering.* Thirty-two percent (unweighted  $n = 20$ ) of the 41 direct offenses against victims involved offenders who were profiting from the direct or attempted exploitation of a minor. The exchange of money was explicitly stated in 81% of these types of cases. The Internet played an integral role in 67% of these exploitation cases; 53% involved undercover investigations.

*i. Selling children for sex.* These cases involved offenders who sold or attempted to sell child victims to a third party for sex (i.e., prostitution) and used the Internet to facilitate the crime; 57% (unweighted  $n = 12$ ) of the direct offenses against victims for profit cases fell into this category. The exchange of sex and money was explicitly stated in all cases. The Internet played an integral role in most cases (83%); 50% of these cases involved undercover operations. The following is an example of such a case:

*This case involved two male offenders in their early 20s who were caught in an undercover police sting while pimping out women using Craig's List. Investigators uncovered a 15-year old girl advertising herself as being 19. Her pimp had taken some sexually explicit photographs of her to post with her ad.*

*ii. Selling CP the offender produced.* These cases involved the offender selling and/or advertising sexual pictures of the victim

online (i.e., CP production); 50% ( $n = 10$ ) of the profiteering cases fell into this category. The payment for sexual pictures was explicitly stated in all of these cases. The Internet played an integral role in these types of crimes as well—in 91% of cases. None of these cases involved undercover operations. The following is an example of such a case:

*This case involved a father who had taken sexual pictures of his 8-year-old biological daughter and also sexually molested her. He was profiting from these images by posting them on a website that others had to pay to access.*

a. *Purchasing.* Seventy-four percent (unweighted  $n = 23$ ) of the 41 direct offenses against victims involved offenders who were purchasing, or attempting to purchase, sex with a minor or access to CP produced by the seller. The exchange of money was explicitly stated in 100% of these types of cases. The Internet played an integral role in 85% of these exploitation cases; 59% involved undercover investigations.

i. *Purchasing sex with a minor.* These cases involved offenders who purchased or tried to purchase sex with a child; 80% (unweighted  $n = 16$ ) of the direct offenses against victims by purchase cases fell into this category. The exchange of sex and money was explicitly stated in all cases. The Internet played an integral role in most cases (86%); 74% of these cases involved undercover operations. The following is an example of such a case:

*The offender in this case was a client who was purchasing sex with what he thought was a 20-year-old female. The 16-year-old victim and her pimp/boyfriend were advertising her prostitution services on Craig's List. The ad included graphic images of the victim.*

ii. *Purchasing produced CP.* 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 (i.e., CP production); 56% (unweighted  $n = 13$ ) of the purchasing cases fell into this category. The payment for sexual pictures was explicitly stated in 100% of these cases. The Internet played an integral role in these types of crimes as well—in 79% of cases. Half of these cases involved undercover operations. The following is an example of such a case:

*The offender in this case was a 60-year-old man who was a distant relative of one of the victim's guardians. He visited her home, often staying overnight. The second victim, also a 13-year-old girl, was spending the night at her friend's house when the pictures were taken. The second victim's mother found some money that her daughter had hidden and asked where she got it. She told her she got the money for posing for nude pictures at her friend's home. The offender gave the girls US\$100 to split between them for posing for the pictures as well as US\$40 to split for flashing their breasts.*

**CP Possession.** The second major category of IF-CSEC cases we identified was arrests involving the purchase and sale of CP images online (images that the offender did not produce). This included paying for access to CP websites and trying to buy or sell CP in the context of an undercover operation. About 64% (unweighted  $n = 66$ ) of the commercial cases fell into this category. An important distinction within this type of case is that juvenile victims were involved, but they were not identified by investigators; 42% of these cases involved undercover operations to some extent. Two subcategories were identified: (1) offenders who were purchasing CP, and (2) those who were selling CP (but not producing their own for this purpose). There was one case involving an offender who was both a buyer and a seller. As such, the numbers of cases within each of the following two subcategories add to more than 100% of the aforementioned unweighted  $n$  of 66.

- a. *Selling CP.* Cases falling into this category included offenders selling CP images that they possessed but had not produced; 9% (unweighted  $n = 6$ ) of all CP cases involved selling CP. The exchange of CP images for money was explicitly stated in all of these cases. Also in all cases, the Internet played a central role in the crime. Undercover operations were involved in 71% of these cases. The following is an example of such a case:

*This case involved a 32-year-old male offender who police found had established and was operating his own for-profit CP website. They discovered more than 300,000 images of boys and more than 6,000 images of girls engaged in sex acts and various states of nudity on his several computers. The offender was not found to have produced the images.*

- b. *Purchasing CP.* Cases falling into this category included offenders who were paying for access to CP websites and buying CP from other individuals; 93% (unweighted  $n = 61$ ) of the CP cases involved purchasing. The exchange of money was explicitly stated in 100% of these cases, and the Internet played an integral role in the commission of these crimes (97% of cases). In 40% of these cases, undercover operations were involved. The following is an example of such a case:

*This case involved a 39-year-old male who was a convicted sex offender. He was arrested for failing to register as a sex offender and police found more than 6,000 images on his computers as well as 46 printed images he had in a box. The children in the images were mostly prepubescent girls, some of whom were infants. He'd gotten all the images from websites, some of which he paid for.*

### CSEC Offender Characteristics

CSEC offenders were almost all male (99%), 47% were aged 40 or older, and most were non-Hispanic White (84%; see Table 1). They came from a variety of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as well as types of communities (e.g., urban, rural); 21% were married at the time of the crime and 69% were employed full-time.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of CSEC Offenders Arrested for Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors

Characteristic	All CSEC offenders (n = 106) % (n)	Purchasers (n = 80) % (n)	Profiteers (n = 26) % (n)	$\chi^2$
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	99 (104)	100 (80)	95 (24)	4.84****
Female	1 (2)	0	5 (2)	
<b>Age</b>				
25 or younger	14 (17)	10 (9)	35 (8)	8.29***
26-39	39 (41)	39 (29)	36 (12)	
40 or older	47 (48)	51 (42)	29 (6)	
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
Non-Hispanic White	84 (84)	90 (70)	56 (14)	19.43****
Hispanic White	5 (7)	5 (5)	4 (2)	
Non-Hispanic Black	11 (15)	5 (5)	40 (10)	
<b>Annual household income</b>				
Less than US\$20,000	9 (9)	6 (6)	20 (3)	7.89*
US\$20,000 to US\$50,000	37 (36)	38 (30)	32 (6)	
US\$50,001 to US\$80,000	28 (26)	32 (24)	10 (2)	
More than US\$80,000	14 (18)	12 (7)	26 (11)	
Not sure	12 (17)	12 (13)	11 (4)	
<b>Highest level of education</b>				
Did not finish high school	9 (10)	5 (5)	28 (5)	10.75***
High school graduate	41 (37)	43 (29)	29 (8)	
Some college/ technical training	15 (19)	16 (15)	10 (4)	
College graduate	10 (14)	11 (11)	9 (3)	
Postgraduate degree	4 (5)	4 (4)	4 (1)	
Not sure	21 (21)	21 (16)	21 (5)	
<b>Community of residence</b>				
Urban	27 (30)	25 (20)	38 (10)	6.11*
Suburban	45 (43)	49 (35)	24 (8)	
Large town	7 (10)	7 (7)	6 (3)	
Small town	12 (12)	10 (9)	25 (3)	
Rural	9 (11)	9 (9)	6 (2)	
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single, never married	51 (55)	49 (40)	58 (15)	1.42
Married	21 (27)	22 (22)	17 (5)	
Living with partner	13 (8)	12 (4)	17 (4)	
Separated/divorced/widowed	15 (16)	17 (14)	9 (2)	

(continued)



**Table 1. (continued)**

Characteristic	All CSEC offenders ( <i>n</i> = 106) % ( <i>n</i> )	Purchasers ( <i>n</i> = 80) % ( <i>n</i> )	Profiteers ( <i>n</i> = 26) % ( <i>n</i> )	$\chi^2$
Employed full-time	69 (71)	75 (61)	37 (10)	10.19***
Registered sex offender at time of crime	9 (10)	9 (9)	7 (1)	0.10
Prior arrest for a sexual offense	14 (18)	11 (11)	28 (7)	3.31**
Prior arrest for sex offense against minor	10 (13)	10 (10)	9 (3)	0.01
Prior arrest for nonsexual offense	27 (30)	19 (14)	66 (16)	16.28***
Any female offender involved	4 (7)	1 (3)	14 (4)	6.60***
Known to be violent (ever)	11 (16)	4 (4)	46 (12)	26.57***
Problem with drugs or alcohol at time of the crime	25 (22)	23 (13)	36 (9)	1.40
Possessed child pornography	76 (78)	83 (69)	42 (9)	13.50***
Produced child pornography	21 (32)	13 (15)	56 (17)	16.64***
More than one offender	7 (15)	2 (4)	31 (11)	20.02***

Note: unweighted *n* = 106; CSEC = commercial sexual exploitation of children. *Ns* are unweighted and percentages are weighted. *Ns* and percentages may not be proportionate because results are weighted to reflect selection probabilities and some cases have more influence than others. Some percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

\**p* ≤ .10. \*\**p* ≤ .05. \*\*\**p* ≤ .01. \*\*\*\**p* ≤ .001.

Arrests for IF-CSEC crimes involve both offenders who purchase sex or sexual material involving a minor (purchasers) and those who profit from such sales (profiteers). Purchasers included offenders who were paying for access to CP websites, those who were caught in undercover operations where the investigator was portraying a seller of CP 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. Those who were profiting include offenders who were operating CP websites where members had to pay for access, or ones who were advertising girls online for sex. Although less common, in some more complex cases offenders had roles in both purchasing and profiting from the exchange. For example, an offender who was operating a CP website (and thus profiting) was also paying minors for the sexual images (and thus purchasing). Another example would be an offender who was profiting from an online escort service and also paying minors to have sex with him.

Seventeen percent of IF-CSEC offenders were making a profit off the exploitation of a victim or selling possessed CP; the remaining 83% were purchasing CP or sex with a minor. Demographically, offenders who profited from the commercial exploitation differed from those who purchased (see Table 1). Profiteers were slightly more likely to be women (5% vs. 0%), younger (71% were under the age of 40 vs. 49% of purchasers), non-Hispanic Black (40% vs. 5%), not a high school graduate (28% vs. 5%), and *less* likely to be employed full-time (37% vs. 75%). Profiteers also differed from purchasers on a number of other characteristics, including being more likely to have prior arrests for sexual (28% vs. 11%) and nonsexual (66% vs. 19%) offending, having a history of violence (46% vs. 4%), being more likely to have produced CP (56% vs. 13%), involving more than one offender in the current crime (31% vs. 2%), and being more likely to have any female offender involved (14% vs. 1%). Profiteers were *less* likely than purchasers to have also possessed CP as part of the current crime (42% vs. 83%).

### *Victim Characteristics*

A subgroup of cases in the larger N-JOV study (unweighted  $n = 316$ ) involved identified juvenile victims, meaning those victims identified and contacted by police. Of these cases, 9% (unweighted  $n = 37$ ) involved identified juvenile victims of CSEC. Details about this subgroup of CSEC-identified victims are provided in relation to non-CSEC-identified victims from the larger study.

*Victim demographics and relationship with the offender.* The majority of victims were female (82%), 71% were between the ages of 13 and 17, and another 21% were between 6 and 12 years of age; 18% lived in an urban community, and victims were from a diverse range of household income levels. There were few demographic differences between CSEC and non-CSEC victims. Slightly fewer CSEC victims were non-Hispanic White (77% vs. 85% of non-CSEC victims), fewer lived with both biological parents (16% vs. 45%), and *more* CSEC victims lived with one biological parent only (46% vs. 28%) (see Table 2).

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 all victim cases, offenders were family members of the victim, including parents, stepparents, parents' intimate partners, and other adult relatives. For these relationships, no differences were identified on the basis of CSEC involvement (see Table 2). Fewer of the CSEC victims, however, had met the offender online (17% vs. 44% of non-CSEC victims), although this relationship was not significant after adjusting for offender and victim age. More offenders in CSEC cases had some other relationship with the victim, mostly pimps but also some strangers who approached victims in public (20% vs. 3% non-CSEC victims).

*Aggravating features of the crime.* The majority of both CSEC and non-CSEC victims experienced some sexual assault (67% and 73%, respectively), most commonly intercourse or other penetration (see Table 3). However, several notable differences were seen in terms of other aggravating features of the crime. Specifically, compared to

**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of Victims of Internet Sex Crimes

Characteristic	All Victims ( <i>n</i> = 316) % ( <i>n</i> )	Non-CSEC victims ( <i>n</i> = 279) % ( <i>n</i> )	CSEC victims ( <i>n</i> = 37) % ( <i>n</i> )	$\chi^2$
<b>Relationship to offender</b>				
Met online	42 (120)	44 (115)	17 (5)	7.72*
Family member	26 (84)	26 (75)	23 (9)	0.13
Acquaintance	27 (92)	26 (78)	39 (14)	2.25
Other (e.g., pimps)	5 (20)	3 (11)	20 (9)	15.32**
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	18 (57)	18 (52)	16 (5)	0.07
Female	82 (259)	82 (227)	84 (32)	—
<b>Age</b>				
2 years old or younger	2 (5)	2 (5)	0	3.65
3 to 5 years old	6 (18)	6 (18)	0	—
6 to 12 years old	21 (78)	21 (69)	15 (9)	—
13 to 17 years old	71 (214)	70 (186)	84 (28)	—
Not sure	< 1 (1)	< 1 (1)	0	—
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
Non-Hispanic White	84 (267)	85 (241)	77 (26)	12.45*
Hispanic White	5 (15)	6 (14)	2 (1)	—
Non-Hispanic Black	3 (11)	3 (8)	4 (3)	—
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1 (3)	1 (3)	0	—
Asian	1 (3)	< 1 (1)	5 (2)	—
Other/mixed race	4 (7)	3 (6)	6 (1)	—
Not sure/not ascertainable	2 (10)	2 (6)	6 (4)	—
<b>Community of residence</b>				
Small town /rural	40 (126)	39 (114)	45 (12)	2.80
Suburban/large town	42 (125)	43 (111)	28 (14)	—
Urban	18 (65)	17 (54)	27 (11)	—
<b>Annual household income</b>				
Less than US\$20,000	11 (35)	11 (30)	13 (5)	1.11
US\$20,000 to US\$50,000	30 (99)	30 (87)	34 (12)	—
US\$50,001 to US\$80,000	13 (45)	14 (43)	7 (2)	—
More than US\$80,000	19 (42)	19 (36)	18 (6)	—
Not sure	27 (95)	27 (83)	27 (12)	—
<b>Who was victim living with</b>				
Both biological parents	42 (126)	45 (119)	16 (7)	9.01**
One biological parent only	29 (94)	28 (76)	46 (18)	4.09*
One biological parent and stepparent	18 (55)	18 (51)	14 (4)	0.39
Foster parent or legal guardian	5 (17)	5 (16)	2 (1)	0.41

Note: Unweighted *n* = 316; CSEC = commercial sexual exploitation of children. *Ns* are unweighted and percentages are weighted. *Ns* and percentages may not be proportionate because results are weighted to reflect selection probabilities and some cases have more influence than others. Some percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

\**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .001.

**Table 3.** Illegal Sexual Activity and Aggravating Features of the Crime

Characteristics	All victims (n = 316) % (n)	Non-CSEC victims (n = 279) % (n)	CSEC victims (n = 37) % (n)	$\chi^2$
Any illegal sexual activity <sup>a</sup>	72 (227)	73 (202)	67 (25)	0.44
Most severe sexual activity				
Intercourse or other penetration	69 (160)	69 (140)	72 (20)	10.82**
Oral sex	11 (25)	12 (24)	2 (1)	
Fondling/inappropriate touching	17 (32)	17 (31)	12 (1)	
Noncontact	2 (6)	1 (4)	7 (2)	
Something else	1 (4)	1 (3)	7 (1)	
Aggravating features				
Child pornography production	58 (195)	55 (164)	85 (31)	9.45****
Coercion	27 (91)	27 (78)	28 (13)	0.002
Use of violence or threats of violence	7 (22)	6 (17)	14 (5)	2.79*
Offered or given illegal drugs or alcohol	19 (62)	17 (47)	41 (15)	8.92***
Abducted	3 (6)	2 (4)	6 (2)	1.56
Illegally detained	5 (17)	5 (14)	9 (3)	0.73
Physically assaulted	5 (16)	5 (10)	16 (6)	6.84***
Physically injured	4 (11)	3 (8)	11 (3)	3.86*
Offered or given adult pornography	15 (59)	14 (48)	27 (11)	3.16*
Prior history				
Physical or sexual abuse prior	13 (40)	12 (33)	22 (7)	2.18
Failing grades at school	17 (58)	14 (45)	47 (13)	20.49****
Ran away from home	15 (49)	13 (37)	41 (12)	15.86****
Criminal history	9 (26)	7 (18)	33 (8)	20.28****

Note: Unweighted  $n = 316$ ; CSEC = commercial sexual exploitation of children. Ns are unweighted and percentages are weighted. Ns and percentages may not be proportionate because results are weighted to reflect selection probabilities and some cases have more influence than others. Some percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

a. We use the term *illegal* sexual activity because in some states, minors were old enough to consent to the sexual activity (i.e., in the United States the age of consent for sexual activity ranges from 14 to 18, depending on the state). Although all offenders were arrested for a sexual crime against a minor, in these cases, the crime involved child pornography, which is illegal in the United States under federal law as long as it depicts an individual under the age of 18.

\* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

non-CSEC victims, more CSEC victims were involved with CP production (85% vs. 55%), offered or given illegal drugs or alcohol (41% vs. 17%), and physically assaulted (16% vs. 5%) as part of the crime. In addition, more CSEC victims had a history of

failing grades at school (47% vs. 14%), running away from home (41% vs. 13%), and criminal conduct (33% vs. 7%).

## Discussion

This study presents data on a nationally representative sample of arrests for CSEC involving use of the Internet to facilitate the crimes. The findings suggest CSEC cases represent a relatively small, but notable, percentage of all national arrests for Internet crimes against children. Data are not currently available on the total number of CSEC arrests nationally indicating what proportion involve the Internet; however, the results of this study suggest that new technology, such as the Internet and other digital media, is being used as an integral way to facilitate many CSEC crimes. For example, the Internet was frequently used for storage and transmission of digital images in crimes involving the sale of CP. The Internet was also used for advertisement and communication by offenders offering to sell access to children for sex or CP production. Compared with non-CSEC Internet exploitation cases, CSEC cases involved victims in riskier and more troubled home environments. CSEC offenders who were profiting from the exploitation of a minor were a particularly concerning subgroup of offenders in comparison to those involved as purchasers.

For some advocates concerned about the problem of juvenile prostitution, the number of cases estimated in this study (569) may seem extremely small and a minimization of the nature of the problem, given published estimates of thousands of youth involved. Several considerations need to be kept in mind when interpreting the national estimate provided here. First, this is an estimate about *arrests*, not about the number of youth being prostituted or otherwise commercially exploited. It is well recognized that juvenile prostitution is not generally a law enforcement priority and is not well investigated in many areas. In a previous study examining the number of arrests for juvenile prostitution of any sort nationwide, we were able to estimate approximately 1,450 arrests (Mitchell et al., 2010). Second, police records about juvenile prostitution cases may not be complete and police recollection about juvenile prostitution cases and their Internet involvement may not be very salient. Therefore, a considerable number of qualifying cases may not have been identified under the methodology utilized here. Finally, it is not entirely clear that the juvenile prostitution 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 (Stransky & Finkelhor, 2008).

### *The Internet Is Used in Diverse Ways to Facilitate CSEC Crimes*

The data from this study provide one of the first descriptive summaries of how the Internet was used by offenders in a national sample of Internet-related CSEC cases. More than half of IF-CSEC arrests involved the purchase or sale of CP. The Internet was used in these cases to establish websites requiring paid access to view and download CP, to communicate with potential buyers and sellers, and to send buyers

pornographic images via e-mail. The Internet was also integral to the second category of cases: the purchase or sale of completed or attempted direct sexual offenses against victims. Such cases involved offenders who were selling sex with a minor through online venues such as Craig's List, use of the Internet to sell CP images the offender had produced, or use of the Internet or e-mail to facilitate the purchase of CP images to be produced by a minor or other third party (e.g., parent of minor). The Internet provides quick access to potential customers, which was not possible prior to its advent. Combined with the ease of taking and sharing digital photography, it is not surprising that some offenders are taking advantage of this technology for such criminal undertakings.

### *Third Party Profiteers Are a Particularly Concerning Subgroup of CSEC Offenders*

We identified a particularly concerning subgroup of offenders—those who were profiting from the exploitation of children. Although CSEC involves offenders who may be both profiting from and purchasing the sexual commodity, we found that it is the profiteers who should be the primary targets of investigations. These offenders were more likely to have prior arrests for both sexual and nonsexual offenses, more prone to violence, and more likely to produce CP, join forces with other offenders, and involve female offenders. Our findings also indicated that Blacks made up a substantial proportion of the profiteers. The current finding is noteworthy given that, in general, Internet sexual crimes are disproportionately committed by White men (Wolak et al., 2003), and the overrepresentation of African American offenders among the profiteers is worthy of future study.

Taken together, such characteristics suggest more seasoned offenders who are leading or involved with larger, more organized networks of criminals. As such, arrests of such offenders may have far-reaching effects for destroying whole networks of CSEC. In a world of finite dollars dedicated to law enforcement and overworked investigators, it may make sense to focus the most intensive efforts on targeting third-party profiteers when prioritizing crime reports.

### *The Victims of IF-CSEC*

Some youth are at particular risk for CSEC, such as runaway youth (Deisher, Robinson, & Boyer, 1982; Klain, 1999). Many of these youth find shelter with friends or relatives, but if they end up on the streets, they may lack the resources to support themselves and be forced to engage in “survival sex” to obtain shelter and other basic human needs. Other youth are at risk for CSEC at the hands of family members and acquaintances (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004). It appears IF-CSEC victims are similar to more conventional CSEC victims in a number of ways. IF-CSEC victims were less likely than non-CSEC victims of Internet crimes to live with both biological parents and more likely to have lived with only one biological parent. They were also more

likely to have failing grades in school, a history of running away from home, and prior involvement with the criminal justice system. IF-CSEC victims also appear to have elevated rates of harmful consequences and aggravating features of the experience. IF-CSEC victims were more likely than non-CSEC victims of Internet-related sex crimes to be a victim of CP production, to be offered or given illegal drugs or alcohol, and to be physically assaulted as part of the crime.

### *Money Offered Directly to Victims as Part of a Child Sexual Assault*

No case in our sample of Internet-related offenses included an arrest for a situation in which youth themselves sought monetary profit from sexual involvement with adults in a direct way, such as self-initiated prostitution. As we described previously, there are a number of reasons why cases of juvenile prostitution were underrepresented in our sample of arrest cases. However, there were a number of cases (69 arrests; 95% CI: 31-108) in which money was paid or offered directly to victims as a part of a bribe or effort to buy the victims' cooperation. These cases were similar to non-CSEC sexual abuse and assaults. For example, sometimes the exchange of money was very small (as little as US\$1) and occurred after the crime had been committed, not prespecified as part of the exchange for sex or sexual pictures or sought by the victims. The data support that these cases were different from the other cases defined as CSEC. The exchange of money for sex was less likely to have been explicit in these cases (35% involved explicit requests but only *after* the crime occurred). The role of the Internet was also much more peripheral in these cases (only 27% of cases involved the Internet as an integral role in the crime). These cases represent an example of why it may be misleading to define CSEC so broadly that it dilutes the meaning of the term and perhaps labels victims as involved in prostitution or commercial sex acts, when it is an inaccurate descriptor. More research is warranted.

### *CP Trading*

Trading CP could be considered a commercial process where goods are exchanged instead of bought and sold, but to keep the definition consistent, only cases where money was exchanged or discussed were included in our analyses. But should all distribution of CP be included as part of the larger picture of commercially bought and sold CP? We believe it should not. Only a small percentage of CP distribution cases from the larger N-JOV study—10%—involved an exchange for money. Given the large amounts of free images available, purchasing could be indicative of an offender with a need for a particular type of image or one who has moved beyond the “amateur” classification. If CSEC is defined to include all CP exchanging and distributing (without payment) it would expand the number of CSEC cases. But the volume of such moneyless cases is so large and they so outnumber the cases involving money exchange that this would create serious conceptual problems. First, it would make the typical CSEC appear to not involve actual financial exchange, and the majority of cases



would not correspond with the stereotypical idea people might have of what “commercial” means. Second, it would end up making samples of CSEC cases very similar to samples of CP possession and distribution, and important distinctions between these two problems would be lost. It seems to make better sense to limit CSEC to refer to cases where actual money is being paid out and received for access to children and CP and the emphasis put on offenders who are trying to profit from the sexual abuse of children. This identifies a unique and serious problem that appears to have some special dynamics, particularly in regard to the serious criminal nature of the offenders involved in the profiteering side.

### *Implications*

- *The concept of CSEC needs to be expanded to include Internet-facilitated crimes.* Much social activity is migrating to the Internet, so it should not be surprising that this is true for crime in general and CSEC in particular. This means, of course, that efforts to prevent and prosecute CSEC need to migrate to the Internet, and the current study suggests that law enforcement is cognizant of this need. These efforts, however, are still in their early phases, and more research and practice is warranted to develop better methods to identify and investigate IF-CSEC in all its forms.
- *Investigators and clinicians should ask more systematically about the commercial aspects of sex crimes they may encounter.* Professionals are encouraged to consider and ask about the possibility of Internet involvement when investigating conventional CSEC crimes. Such questions may result in better evidence in the forms of chat conversations, social networking sites, and sexual images that could lead to more successful prosecutions and provide more targeted avenues for treatment of offenders.
- *More study is needed about the special features and character of IF-CSEC.* Because the technology is still relatively new, many people are concerned that the Internet may facilitate and expand the problem of CSEC. There is evidence that it has expanded the market for sexual images of children, possibly bringing in new kinds of offenders and clients. The Internet may also have expanded the ability of law enforcement to detect CSEC. However, it is not yet clear whether IF-CSEC is an important, distinct, and enduring subcategory of CSEC. For example, as the Internet becomes more integral to social life in general, the category of IF-CSEC may become no more important than the category of telephone- or automobile-facilitated CSEC, a feature of some minor importance but not a key conceptual distinction.
- *A conservative definition of CSEC is warranted.* A definition that limits the concept to activities organized for a financial gain or profit has some advantages for focusing the research and practice in this field. There is sometimes a tendency to define crimes broadly to emphasize their widespread nature. But in the case of CSEC, we believe there are advantages to not confounding

CSEC with broader problems such as the exchange of CP or the bribing of children for sex in fairly conventional family and acquaintance sexual abuse cases. The present research confirms the notion that the addition of a true commercial element with moneymaking motives does alter the character of a sex crime, and it does appear to signal criminal activity that is more serious and thus, perhaps, a higher priority for investigation.

- *Keep Internet crimes in perspective.* There is current excitement about the use of the Internet in conducting investigations, but we should be careful not to allow this excitement to result in neglect of the investigation of more conventional CSEC. There is some evidence that law enforcement in many areas is relatively uninvolved in the identification of youngsters who are prostituted in conventional environments such as on the streets and in hotels and massage parlors (Mitchell et al., 2010). Investigations utilizing the Internet need to expand in tandem with more traditional techniques for identifying CSEC.

## Limitations

Although this study has a number of strengths, a few limitations must be noted. First, because most sex crimes against minors are never reported to the police (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 1999) and many of those known to law enforcement do not culminate in arrest (Finkelhor, Cross, & Cantor, 2005), this sample cannot be said to represent the characteristics of all Internet-related victimizations that occurred during this period but only those that ended in the arrest of an offender.

Second, some errors and biases may have been introduced because the respondents were law enforcement investigators. Police were regarded as the best sources for in-depth information about the nature of Internet-related crimes because their professional responsibilities require them to gather extensive information about these cases. However, the information they provided could be biased by training, professional attitudes, or the adversarial nature of their roles in some of these cases.

Third, these numbers are estimates based on the sample of cases that were the subject of the interviews. Although the study was designed to yield a nationally representative sample of cases involving Internet-related sex crimes against minors, sometimes samples can be randomly skewed. The margin of error could be larger than calculated.

Fourth, the information in this study was gathered from law enforcement investigators, so the information about victims is based on their impression at the time of the crime. Gathering information from mental health and victim service professionals or victims themselves would provide much more insight into this victim population in terms of their mental well-being and both the short- and long-term impact of involvement in these crimes. Fifth, some of the unweighted cell sizes are small due to the low endorsement of certain behaviors in the commission of these crimes (e.g., victim physically injured during the crime). As such, instability of some estimates is possible.

Finally, the data may not be completely representative of all law enforcement agencies in the United States as some jurisdictions may not have been able to find

every case in their files or memory. And we used a stratified sample of agencies because such cases do not occur with equal probability among the more than 15,000 U.S. law enforcement agencies. At the same time, the current sample is far more diverse than the typical criminal justice system studies because it is based on such a broad sample of agencies in different parts of the country and across multiple levels of law enforcement. In comparison, the majority of criminal justice data come from smaller studies of offenders that are based on, for example, one state or prison samples.

## Conclusions

Cases of commercial sexual exploitation currently represent a relatively small percentage of overall arrests for Internet crimes against children. However, data from this study indicate that IF-CSEC cases, particularly those where offenders were profiting from the exploitation, involve more serious assaults and older and apparently more dangerous offenders. Although no data are available on what percentage of total CSEC arrests involve the Internet, results suggest that, across the cases reviewed, the Internet is being used in diverse but central ways to facilitate these offenses.

## Appendix A

### *Questions Used to Identify Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minor Cases*

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#### Commercial sexual exploitation questions

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##### Offender profiting

Did the offender post or otherwise distribute pictures or information about the victim online?

- Were the pictures or information posted or distributed on a sexually oriented website that required payment for access (e.g., a child pornography [CP] site)?

Did the offender prostitute, advertise, or otherwise make the victim available to others for sexual purposes (at any point)?

- Did the offender ask for money or anything else in exchange for access to the victim?

Did the offender distribute any of the produced images?

- Did the offender distribute the produced images through a posting on the web to a subscription- or membership-only area?
- Did the offender ask for money or anything else in exchange for any of the produce images (including paid subscriptions to a website)?

Did the offender distribute the CP she or he possessed?

- Did the offender distribute the images through a posting on the Web to a subscription- or membership-only area
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**Appendix A (continued)**

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- Did the offender ask for money or anything else in exchange for any of the possessed images (includes paid subscription to a Web site)?
- Offender purchasing

Did the offender ask the victim to take sexual pictures of him or herself or other minors?

- Did the offender offer to pay or give the victim anything in exchange for any of these sexual pictures?

Did the offender offer to pay or give the victim anything to perform sex acts (at any point) (excludes pictures)?

- What did the offender offer to pay or give the victim?

Did the offender ask someone (not the victim) to take sexual pictures of V or other minors

- Did the offender offer to pay or give this person anything in exchange for any of these pictures?

Did the offender ask a third party for sexual access to the victim (at any point; excludes pictures)?

- Did the offender offer to pay or give this third party anything in exchange for any of this sexual access?

Did the offender ask the undercover agent to take sexual pictures of the minor being impersonated or other minors?

- Did the offender offer to pay or give the undercover agent anything in exchange for any of these sexual pictures?

Did the offender offer to pay or give the undercover agent anything to perform sex acts with the minor being impersonated (at any point; excludes pictures)?

- What did the offender offer to pay or give the victim?

Did the victim offer himself or herself to others for companionship, dating, or sexual activity?

- Did this offer include requests for money or anything else?

Did the victim offer or sell sexual pictures of himself or herself to others?

- Did the victim ask for money or anything else in exchange for these sexual pictures?
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