

Chapter 2

Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors

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Understanding a Newly Emerging Problem	2-1
What Law Enforcement Is Doing	2-2
New Survey Delineates Internet Sex Crimes	2-2
The N-JOV Study: Method	2-3
The N-JOV Study: Results	2-4
Arrest Estimate	2-4
Types of Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors	2-5
Internet Crimes With Identified Victims	2-5
Internet Solicitations to Undercover Law Enforcement	2-6
Internet Child Pornography	2-6
Characteristics of Offenders and Offenses	2-7
The Nature of the Child Pornography Possessed by Offenders	2-8
Justice System Management of Cases	2-8
Multiple Law Enforcement Agencies Involved	2-8
Implications of Multijurisdictional Law Enforcement	2-13
Case Outcomes	2-13
Prosecutorial Obstacles	2-15
Discussion and Implications	2-15

UNDERSTANDING A NEWLY EMERGING PROBLEM

The Internet has quickly become an integral aspect of our society. As is often the case with new technology, young people have been among the first to embrace the Internet and use it as a tool for information acquisition, communication, and entertainment. The numbers of youth online have been dramatically rising, with an increase from 39 percent to 65 percent among 10- to 13-year-olds, and 51 percent to 76 percent among 14- to 17-year-olds between 1998 and 2001 (U.S. Department of

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Commerce, 2002). Yet, as is true with other aspects of life, the Internet can pose some potential threats to youth. These threats can range from exposure to sexual and violent material to potentially dangerous communications and relationships with adults, and even other youth, who do not have the youth's best interests in mind. Of particular concern to families, law enforcement, and policymakers are sex crimes against children that the Internet may facilitate, including child sexual exploitation and child pornography. Reports about youth who have been sexually assaulted by an adult they met online have abounded in the media. But these reports may have produced a skewed picture of the characteristics of these crimes and overall numbers of arrests.

What Law Enforcement Is Doing

Since the Internet was introduced into society in the mid-1990s, Internet sex crimes have posed challenges for law enforcement. Law enforcement officers must confront situations not anticipated in criminal statutes, master technical advances, develop new investigative techniques, and handle criminal cases that often span multiple jurisdictions. To assist, legislators have created new statutes that encompass Internet offenses, stiffened penalties, and created a national clearinghouse for reports of Internet-related crimes against children, and the CyberTipline operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children® (NCMEC). In addition the federal government has increased funding in this area, creating the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force to support state and local law enforcement and specialized Internet, child-exploitation units in federal law enforcement agencies.

New Survey Delineates Internet Sex Crimes

Unfortunately, the results of these initiatives are difficult to track. Criminal justice authorities do not collect information specifically about Internet-related crimes. The National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study was undertaken to estimate the scope and types of law enforcement activity in this area and to serve as a baseline for monitoring the growth of Internet sex crimes against minors and related law enforcement activities (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003).

Because Internet sex crimes against minors are a recent phenomenon, data about them have not been gathered in a national study. The N-JOV Study is the first national research to systematically collect data about the number and characteristics of arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors. The N-JOV Study had three goals:

- Estimate a baseline number of arrests during a one-year period so that the growth of these cases in the criminal justice system can be measured in the future;
- Provide a statistical portrait of the characteristics of Internet sex crimes against minors and description of how they are handled within the criminal justice system; and
- Organize the variety of cases into a typology useful for tracking and analysis.

This chapter discusses arrest estimates and gives an overview of the types of

crimes, characteristics of offenders, and how the criminal-justice system is handling Internet sex crimes against minors.

THE N-JOV STUDY: METHOD

The N-JOV study collected information from a national sample of law enforcement agencies about the characteristics of Internet sex crimes against minors and the numbers of arrests for these crimes during a one-year period. The goals were to design a representative national sample of law enforcement agencies that would give an overall picture of these crimes in the United States, understand how these cases emerged and were handled in a diverse group of agencies, and get detailed data about the characteristics of these crimes from well-informed, reliable sources.

Law enforcement investigators were interviewed, because these investigators have been in the forefront of identifying and combating Internet crimes and are the best sources of accessible, in-depth information about their nature. We focused on cases that ended in arrests rather than crime reports or open investigations because cases ending in arrests were more likely to involve actual crimes; had more complete information about the crimes, offenders, and victims; and gave a clear standard for counting cases. This focus helped avoid interviewing multiple agencies about the same case.

First, we surveyed a national sample of 2,574 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies by mail, asking them if they had made arrests in Internet-related, child pornography, or sexual exploitation cases. Then we conducted detailed telephone interviews with investigators who had such cases. The methodology was modeled after that used in the second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMA-2) to survey law enforcement agencies about child-abduction cases (Sedlak, Finkelhor, Hammer, & Schultz, 2002). A stratified sample of law enforcement agencies was created to get information from agencies that specialized in Internet sex crimes against minors and still allow every agency a chance to be selected in the sample. To do this, the agencies were divided into three groups:

1. Agencies that specialized in investigating Internet sex crimes against minors, including the seventy-five Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces and satellites in operation at that point in time, funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Justice, and units of four federal agencies specializing in Internet crimes;
2. A random sample of 833 agencies known to have sent staff to training classes in Internet sex crimes against minors drawn from lists provided by training organizations; and
3. A random sample of 12 percent of all other U.S. state, county, and local law enforcement agencies ($n = 1,666$) drawn from an annually updated directory of all U.S. law enforcement agencies.

Eighty-eight percent of the agencies ($n = 2,270$) that received mail surveys responded. Seventeen percent of the agencies ($n = 383$) that responded reported 1,723

arrests. Interviews were conducted on all eligible cases that had identified victims or came from agencies reporting three or fewer cases. When agencies reported four or more cases, a random sample of cases was selected for interviews. To be eligible, cases had to (1) have victims younger than 18; (2) involve arrests between July 1, 2000, and June 30, 2001; and (3) be Internet-related. Cases were Internet-related if any of the following criteria were met:

- An offender-victim relationship was initiated online;
- An offender who was a family member or acquaintance of a victim used the Internet to:
 - Communicate with a victim to further a sexual victimization, or
 - Otherwise exploit the victim;
- A case involved an Internet-related undercover investigation;
- Child pornography was received or distributed online, or arrangements for receiving or distributing it were made online; or
- Child pornography was found on a computer, on removable media such as floppy disks and compact disks or computer printouts, or in a digital format.

Of the 1,077 eligible and sampled cases, 58 percent ($n = 630$) of the interviews were completed, 26 percent did not meet eligibility requirements, 9 percent involved agencies that did not respond to requests for interviews, 2 percent involved respondents who refused to be interviewed, and 4 percent involved duplicate cases or cases that could not be identified.

A statistical technique called "weighting" was used to estimate annual numbers of arrests. Weighting takes into account sampling procedures and nonresponse, allowing use of the data to project estimated annual arrest totals with 95 percent confidence that the accurate number will fall within a specific range.

THE N-JOV STUDY: RESULTS

Arrest Estimate

There were an estimated 2,577 arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors in the twelve months following July 1, 2000. This is an estimated number with a 2.5 percent margin of error in either direction, which means that the true number is between 2,277 and 2,877 arrests.

This estimate is by no means a full measure of the number of Internet sex crimes against minors or even the number of such crimes known to law enforcement. It is only an estimate of the number of arrests for such crimes. Many sex crimes against minors, perhaps the majority, never come to the attention of law enforcement (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1999; Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1994), and many of those known to law enforcement do not culminate in arrest (Finkelhor & Cross, in press).

Nevertheless, the estimate of arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors does

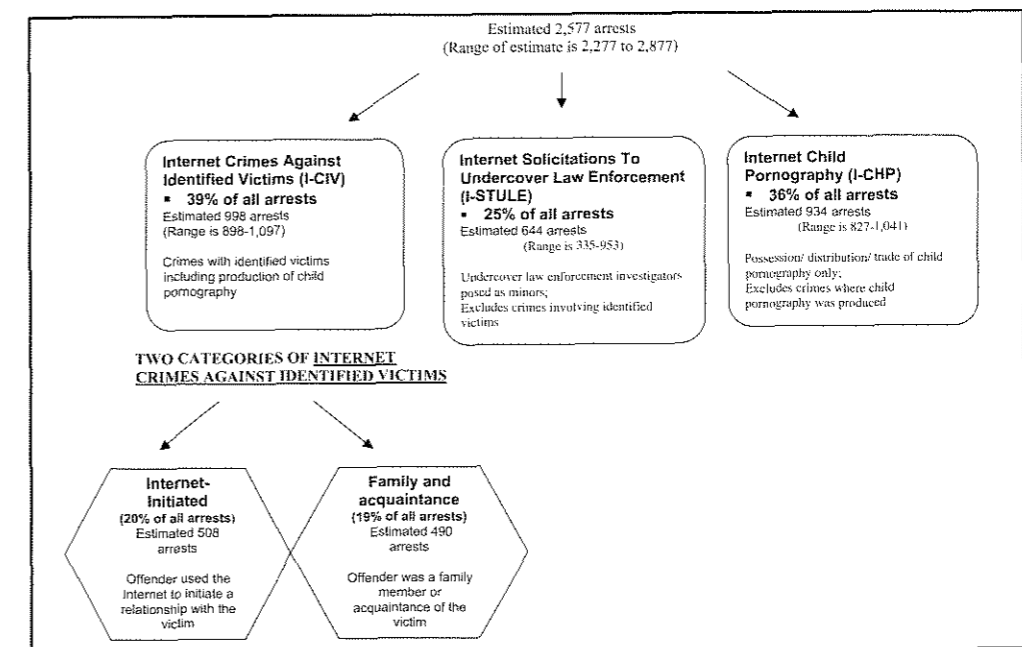
reflect a great deal of law enforcement activity only a few years after the emergence of these crimes as a public policy concern. For comparison, a rough estimate made by these authors from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) suggests that there were approximately 65,000 arrests in 2000 for all types of sexual assaults against minors. Clearly, in 2000, Internet crimes were still a small fraction of this total; however, all indications are that law enforcement activity, and consequently arrests, is growing in this particular crime domain.

Types of Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors

Internet sex crimes against minors comprise a diverse range of offenses including completed and attempted sexual assaults; illegal use of the Internet to transmit sexual material to and solicit minors; and the possession, distribution, and production of child pornography. Because of this diversity, we judged it important to try to group cases into mutually exclusive categories that shared crucial common elements in terms of the challenges posed for law enforcement investigators. This led to a three-fold classification that distinguished cases with identified victims, cases involving undercover investigations but no child victims, and cases solely involving the possession and distribution of child pornography (Figure 2.1). The categories were defined and counted as noted below.

Internet Crimes With Identified Victims. Crimes with identified victims comprise

Figure 2.1
Three Categories of Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors



the only category that has victims of Internet-related crimes who were identified and contacted during the criminal investigation. This category is referred to as identified victim or I-CIV cases. The identified victim cases included completed and attempted sex crimes, both forcible and nonforcible, production of child pornography, and illegal Internet solicitations. An estimated 998 I-CIV arrests were made, which constituted 39 percent of all arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors.

The most publicized Identified Victim cases are crimes in which offenders lure and victimize adolescents whom they meet online. However, such cases, termed "Internet-initiated episodes," only made up about half the total Identified Victim cases, or about 508 arrests. The other half of the I-CIV cases involved offenders already known to their victims, such as family members or prior acquaintances who used the Internet to communicate with identified victims; groom them or instruct them in sexual activities; produce and market pornographic images of the victims; or, in a few cases, facilitated the victimization of children by advertising prostitution involving minors. These family and prior acquaintance I-CIV cases comprise about 490 arrests.

The fact that the family and prior acquaintance I-CIV cases are almost as numerous as the more widely publicized and discussed Internet-initiated ICV cases has important implications for prevention and investigation. We need to ensure that the media, the public, and law enforcement do not assume that all Internet sex crimes against minors originate through offenders who seek out victims in chatrooms and other online venues. Sex offenders who access children in more conventional ways also use the Internet, and their computers can provide strong evidence against them and corroboration of victim testimony.

Internet Solicitations to Undercover Law Enforcement. A second distinct set of Internet sex crimes against minors involved arrests for Internet solicitations to undercover law enforcement (I-STULE). I-STULE cases are often referred to among law enforcement as proactive cases, in which law enforcement officers pose as minors, typically 13- to 15-year-olds, in chatrooms and Internet personal profiles and wait to be contacted by offenders seeking underage victims. This category encompasses only offenders who were caught in undercover investigations who were not known to have committed Internet-related crimes against identified victims. Sometimes law enforcement discovered that these offenders had sexually exploited an underage victim who was identified and contacted by law enforcement. If the crime against the identified victim was Internet related, the case was classified as an I-CIV arrest. If the crime was not Internet related, however, the case was left in the I-STULE category. Also classified as I-CIV arrests were "reactive" undercover investigations in which investigators took on the identities of identified victims (e.g., in cases in which youths reported online solicitations to law enforcement or parents found out about crimes). This means that none of the arrests in the I-STULE category involved identified victims of Internet-related crimes, and, in this sense, these crimes were attempted victimizations. There were an estimated 644 arrests, or about 25 percent of all arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors in this category.

Internet Child Pornography. A third distinct set of crimes involved offenders who used the Internet to possess, distribute, and/or trade child pornography but did not pro-

duce child pornography or offend in any other Internet-related way against identified victims or solicit an undercover investigator posing as a minor. This category is referred to as CP possession, or I-CHP cases. I-CHP possessors downloaded, distributed, or otherwise used the Internet to acquire or trade child pornography but did not, as part of their crime, use the Internet to attempt or actually molest, seduce, or take sexual pictures of individual children who they knew or had met online. Because much child pornography depicts sexual offenses against minors, it is widely acknowledged that the possession and trading of child pornography further victimizes the children depicted. Cases involving the possession or distribution of child pornography alone, without other sex crimes, however, have distinct features, among them that the victims shown in child pornography images are rarely identified by law enforcement. If offenders who possessed or distributed child pornography also used the Internet to sexually exploit identified victims, or to make solicitations to undercover law enforcement, these arrests were listed in the previous categories. The I-CHP possession category comprised 934 arrests, or about 36 percent of all the arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors.

Characteristics of Offenders and Offenses

Almost all offenders were male (99 percent), non-Hispanic white (92 percent), older than 25 (86 percent), and acted alone in the crimes they committed (97 percent) (Table 2.1). Few (11 percent) were known to be violent in any manner. Ten percent had prior arrests for sexually offending against minors. (Note: We defined "offenders" as alleged perpetrators of crimes who were arrested. As reported below, some of the N-JOV offenders were not convicted.)

Table 2.1
Characteristics of Offenders Who Were Arrested for Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors

Offender Characteristic	% (N=2,577)
Male	99%
Non-Hispanic white	92%
Age	
17 or younger	3%
18 to 25	11%
26 to 39	45%
40 or older	41%
Acted alone in crime	97%
Prior arrests for sexual offending against minors	10%
Known to be violent to any degree	11%
Possessed child pornography	67%
Distributed child pornography	22%
Solicited an undercover investigator	27%
Committed a sex crime against an identified victim	45%
Crime against identified victim was	
Internet-initiated	20%
Against a family member or acquaintance of the offender	19%
Not Internet-related	7%

While each offender was sorted into the three mutually exclusive categories described earlier—I-CIV, I-STULE, or I-CHP—the offenders in each category committed a variety of offenses (Table 2.1). Importantly, two-thirds of all offenders possessed child pornography. By definition, all the I-CHP possession arrests involved this crime. In addition, 52 percent of the I-CIV cases involved offenders who also possessed child pornography, as did 41 percent of the I-STULE cases.

The Nature of the Child Pornography Possessed by Offenders

Because federal and many state laws criminalizing child pornography apply to images of minors through age 17 and include “lascivious” images that may not depict actual sexual activity or even nudity, there has been debate about the true nature and seriousness of the child pornography for which offenders are being arrested. The vast majority of arrests in this study concerned serious, graphic forms of child pornography and images of prepubescent children.

Eighty-three percent of offenders who possessed child pornography, in all three of the categories described previously, had images depicting children between the ages of 6 and 12 (Figure 2.2). These were typically not the only images these offenders possessed, but most offenders who possessed child pornography had at least some images of prepubescent children. Most of these offenders also possessed images depicting graphic sexual activity (Table 2.2). Ninety-two percent had images of minors that focused on genitals or showed explicit sexual activity; 80 percent had pictures showing acts involving the penetration of a child, including oral sex; and 71 percent possessed images showing sexual contact between an adult and a minor, defined as an adult touching the genitals or breasts of a minor, or vice versa. About one-fifth (21 percent) had child pornography depicting violence beyond the sexual assault, such as bondage, rape, or torture.

This suggests that offenders are not being arrested for possessing marginal or ambiguous sexual images of minors, such as images where it is hard to ascertain whether the subject is a minor or where the context was casual nudity without sexual abuse to the child. Researchers cannot extrapolate from these cases to the topic of ICHP possession in general, however, because it is likely that more serious images would predominate among cases ending in arrests. Researchers also relied on the judgment of the investigating officers to characterize the pictures. Nonetheless, these results suggest that law enforcement activity concerning child pornography is encountering or targeting primarily offenders with images showing graphic abuse of young children.

JUSTICE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT OF CASES

Multiple Law Enforcement Agencies Involved

Law enforcement has responded in a variety of ways to the threats posed by Internet sex crimes against minors. Specialized units have been established in federal agencies such as the FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The U.S. Department of Justice has also funded ICAC

Figure 2.2
Age Groups of Victims Depicted in Child Pornography Belonging to All Offenders Who Possessed Child Pornography (N = 1,713)

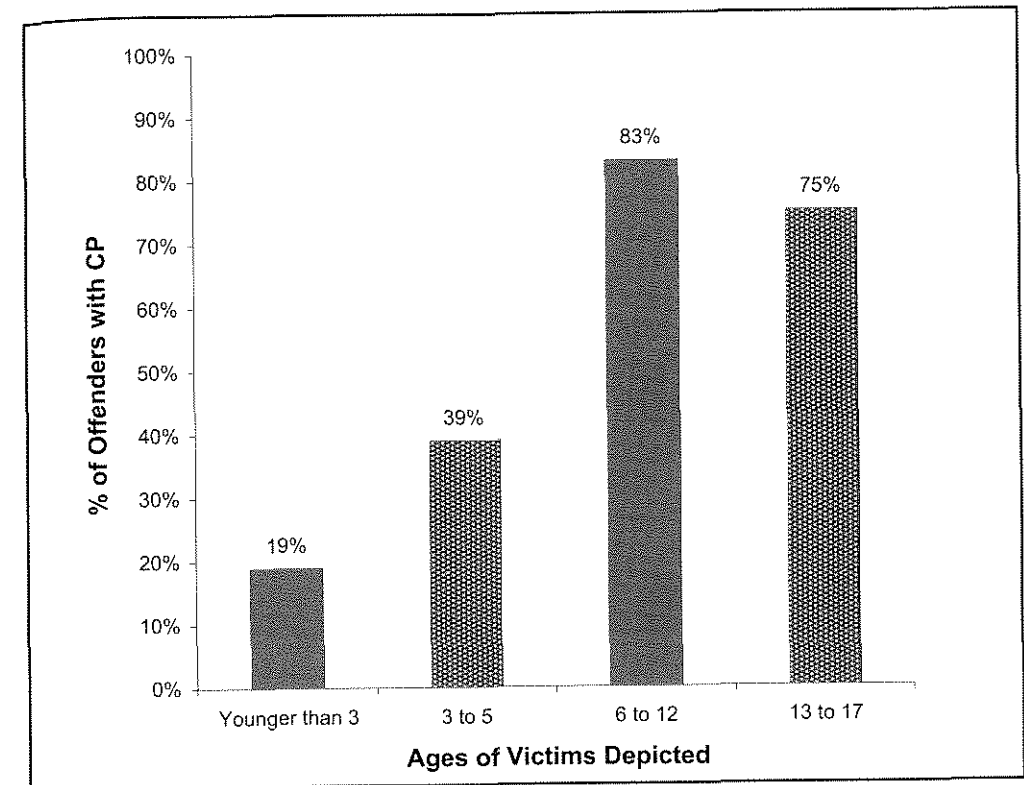
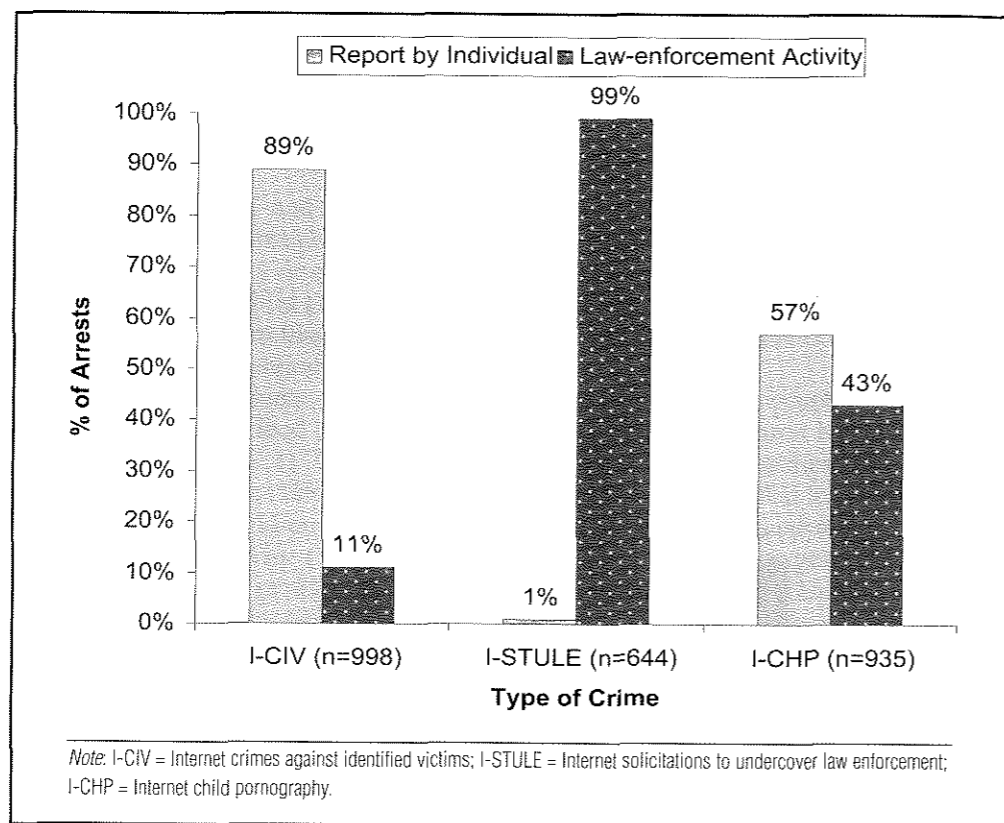


Table 2.2
Percentage of Offenders With Child Pornography Who Possessed Child Specific Types of Images With Children

Characteristics of Child-Pornography Images	% N = 1,713
<u>Images Depicted</u>	
Genitals or explicit sexual activity	92%
Penetration of a minor	80%
Sexual contact between an adult and a minor	71%
Violence	21%

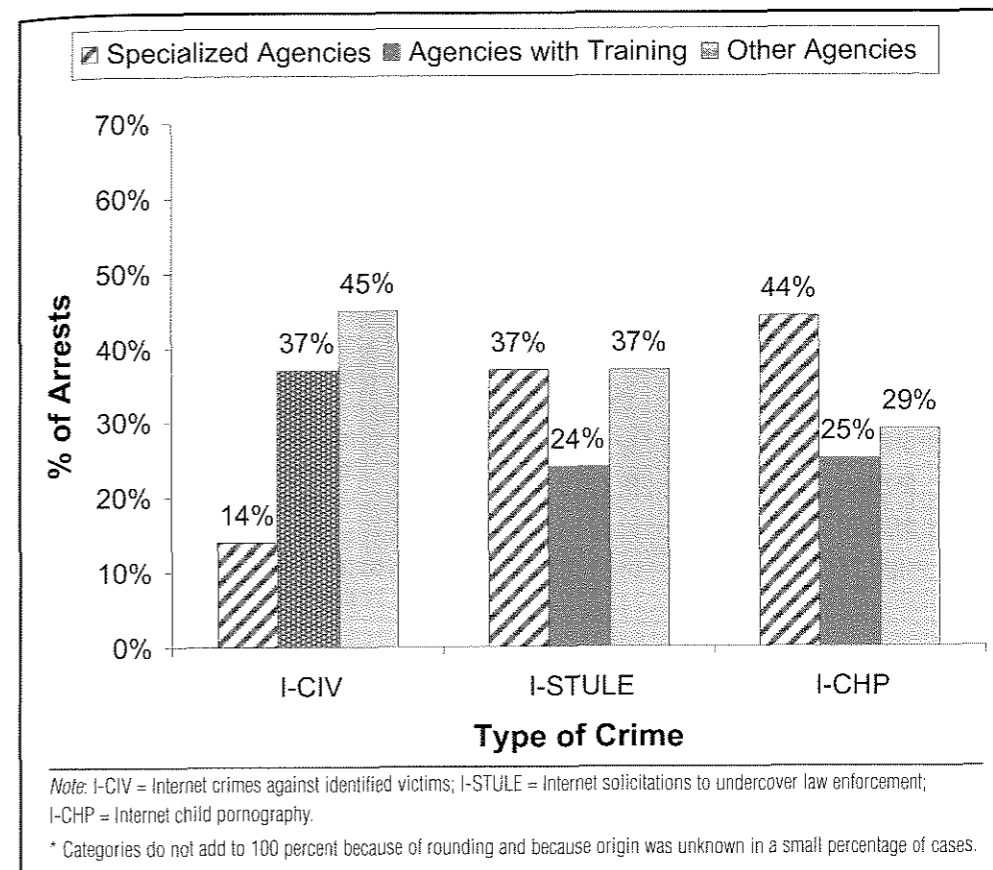
Figure 2.3
How Arrests for Internet Sex Crimes Committed Against Minors Originated in the Criminal Justice System



Task Forces around the country to develop specialized investigative and training expertise. The NCMEC has set up the CyberTipline to encourage the reporting and investigation of Internet child pornography and other online threats to children. A number of organizations, including NCMEC and the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, have been training state and local law enforcement in procedures for conducting online investigations and undercover operations and collecting evidence in Internet-related cases.

Thus it should not be surprising that the response to Internet sex crimes against minors originated from a wide variety of sources, and involved a wide variety of agencies. Overall, 55 percent of arrests in the N-JOV study were initiated by reports from non-law enforcement sources such as parents of victims and individuals who discovered child pornography. The other 45 percent resulted directly from law enforcement activity such as undercover operations; monitoring of chatrooms and web sites; and, in some cases, non-Internet-related, law enforcement activities such as drug investigations. Most arrests in I-CIV cases (89 percent) originated from reports by sources outside law enforcement (Figure 2.3); and almost all I-STULE arrests, not surprising-

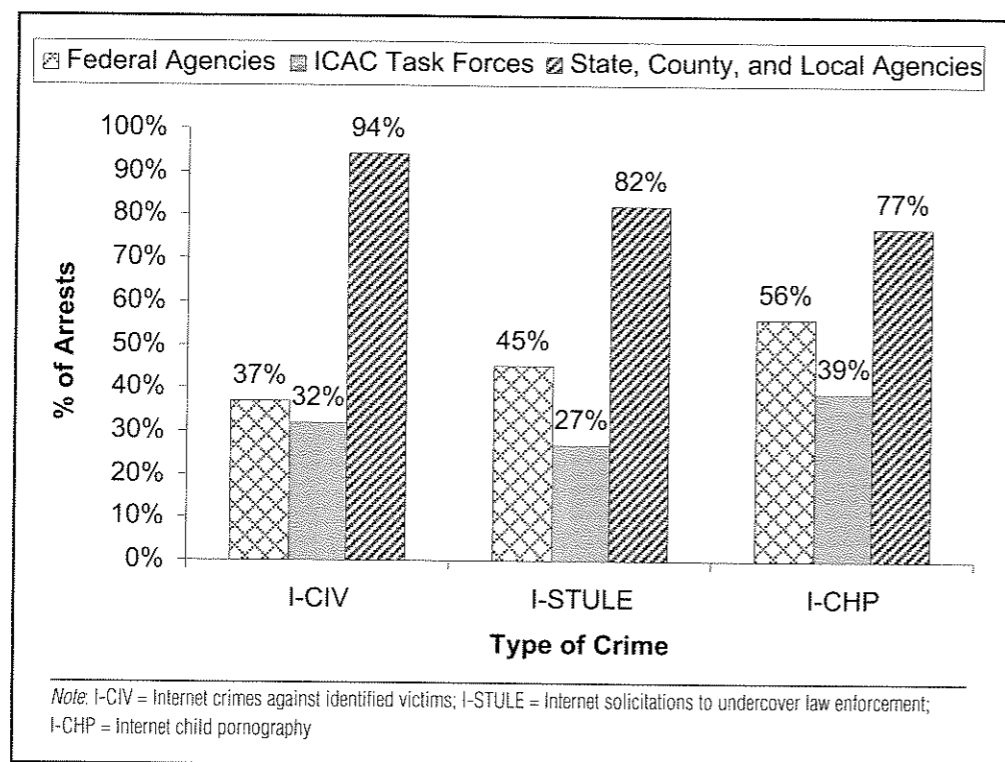
Figure 2.4
Types of Agencies Where Arrests for Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors Originated in the Criminal Justice System



ly, originated with law enforcement undercover activity, while the I-CHP possession cases began about equally from both sources.

Initial responsibility for Internet sex crimes against minors rested with the full gamut of law enforcement agencies. Cases originated in specialized agencies established to deal with these crimes, including federal agencies with Internet, child-exploitation units and the ICAC Task Forces, in 31 percent of arrests. But it was more common for cases to originate in non-specialized agencies (66 percent). From the training records maintained by organizations providing support in this area, some information about which agencies had obtained specialized training was known. Slightly more Internet sex crimes against minors originated among the nonspecialized agencies with no record of formal training (37 percent) than among those with training (29 percent). As might be expected, the specialized agencies had more involvement in cases involving the solicitation of undercover officers and I-CHP possession cases. Even in these cases, however, nonspecialized agencies and agencies outside the training network played considerable roles (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.5
Types of Agencies Involved in Investigations of Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors



One of the dramatic justice system features of arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors is the number of investigations that involved multiple agencies. Fully 79 percent of all the cases in the N-JOV sample had two or more agencies participating in the investigation, and 45 percent had three or more participating agencies. These cases were multijurisdictional for several reasons. Because of the universal character of the Internet, victims, offenders, and investigators are frequently in different locales. Investigators doing undercover work on the Internet may be anywhere in the country but need local help to effect arrests. Local agencies also frequently request assistance from federal or other authorities who have expertise in these crimes or can provide technical assistance with the work of analyzing images or computer forensics. Also, federal statutes apply to many Internet-related crimes; thus federal agencies are often involved.

Most of the cases (85 percent) involved at least one state, county, or municipal agency. But the federal role was also very evident, with federal agencies involved in 46 percent of all cases. Federal participation was most common in the I-CHP possession cases (56 percent) and somewhat less common in I-CIV cases (Figure 2.5). The ICAC Task Forces were involved in 33 percent of all cases.

The involvement of multiple agencies led to multiple arrests in 25 percent of the

Internet sex crimes against minors. In these situations crimes were committed in more than one jurisdiction. Often federal as well as state laws were broken. However, federal charges were brought in only 21 percent of cases, in comparison to 85 percent in which state charges were brought. Clearly federal agencies, which participated in almost half of all investigations, did not bring federal charges in many of those cases.

Implications of Multijurisdictional Law Enforcement

The diversified and multijurisdictional nature of law enforcement activity in this area has a number of implications. First, state and local law enforcement agencies in a wide variety of jurisdictions, many perhaps without a great deal of specialized training, are being called on to respond to Internet sex crimes against minors. The N-JOV study did not address how many of these crimes are reported to, but not pursued, by agencies that lack training, resources, or support from other agencies. This number could be considerable. Given that reality, it seems important that the specialized knowledge and skills to effectively investigate and prosecute these cases continue to be widely disseminated and made available to the full spectrum of agencies encountering these crimes. This can probably be accomplished through both direct training and consultants from agencies at the federal, state, and local level.

Second, because these cases so frequently require multiple agency involvement, an important part of the training and consultation should concern the protocols for and management of multijurisdictional investigation and prosecution such as those developed by the ICAC Task Forces.

Case Outcomes

Because this is a new area for law enforcement, the question arises whether Internet sex crimes against minors pose particularly challenging obstacles for successful prosecution. Signs of such problems might be unusually high rates of case dismissals or acquittals. However, largely successful prosecutions were found (Table 2.3). Of the cases involving state-level charges, 82 percent of offenders had pled guilty, and an additional 11 percent had been convicted at trial, while charges were dismissed or dropped in only 6 percent of cases, and only 0.3 percent resulted in acquittals. Federal cases had more offenders plead guilty, fewer dismissals, and no acquittals. The conviction rate suggests a considerable amount of successful prosecution. But we do not have data on how many offenders were convicted of original as opposed to reduced charges. Moreover, in both federal and state jurisdictions, about one-fifth of case outcomes were pending or unknown when the N-JOV interview was conducted. Figure 2.6 compares cases, by type, combining both federal and state cases. Convictions were somewhat higher for the I-CIV cases than for the I-STULE cases or I-CHP possession cases, and dismissals were somewhat higher for the I-CHP possession cases.

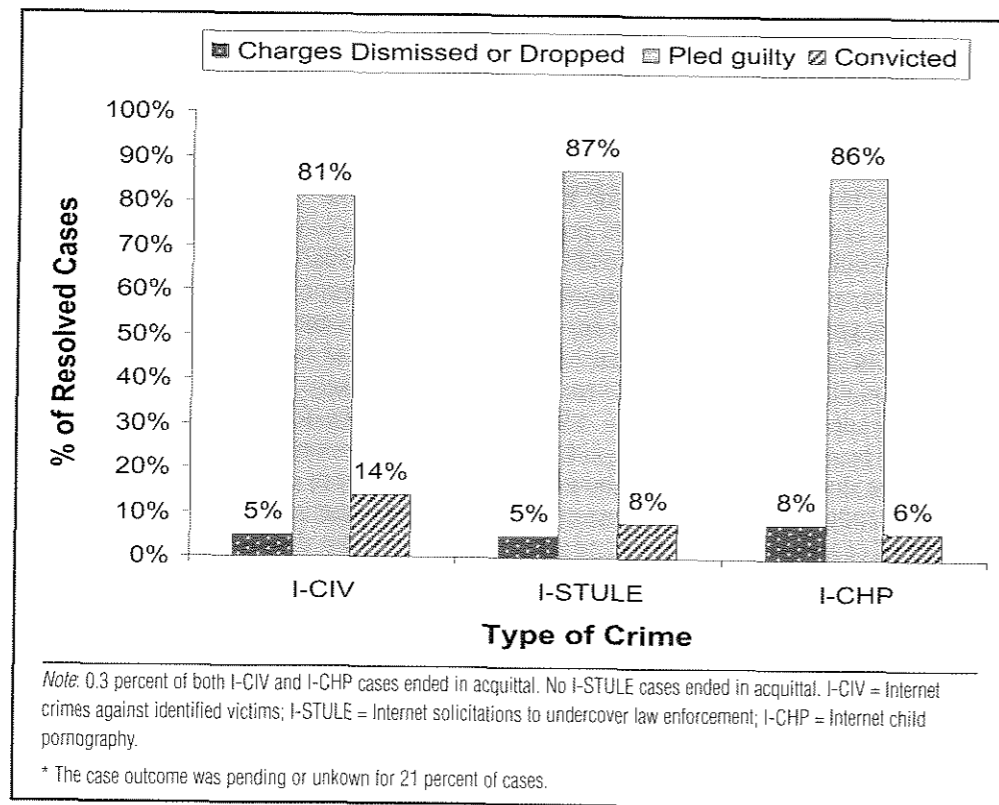
For comparison to non-Internet sex crimes, studies of the local prosecution of child-sex-crimes cases typically find an average of 22 percent of cases dismissed prior to prosecution, with offenders acquitted in 6 percent of remaining cases accepted for prosecution (Cross, Walsh, Jones, & Simone, 2003). The dismissal rates and acquittals for Internet sex crimes against minors appeared to be lower than those for con-

Table 2.3
Outcomes of Internet Sex Crimes Against Minors*

Characteristic	State Charges N= 1,694	Federal Charges N= 472
Case Resolution		
Pled guilty	82%	93%
Convicted at trial	11%	3%
Charges dismissed or dropped	6%	4%
Acquitted	<1%	—
Offender incarcerated any length of time	451%	78%
Offender became a registered sex offender	92%	78%

*The case outcome was pending or unknown for 22 percent of cases with state charges and 17 percent of cases with federal charges.

Figure 2.6
Case Outcomes by Case Type*



ventional, child-sexual-abuse prosecutions. Because of the pending status of so many cases, some tentativeness needs to be observed, but the prosecution of Internet sex crimes against minors seems to be relatively successful.

Prosecutorial Obstacles

These cases do, nonetheless, pose problems for prosecutors, and a concurrent Study of Prosecutorial Outcomes is under way to analyze and detail some of these problems. For example, it can be difficult to establish who had access to computers containing criminal evidence. Victims who engaged in potentially embarrassing interchanges with offenders may be unwilling to cooperate and provide testimony. Offenders with downloaded child pornography claim ignorance or incompetence. Offenders caught in undercover operations claim they were just playacting or victims of entrapment.

The evidence of robust conviction rates, however, suggests that prosecutors are successfully overcoming these obstacles (Figure 2.6). One advantage for prosecutors may be that in Internet sex crimes, as opposed to more conventional sex crimes that rely largely on the testimony of victims, concrete evidence of the offense frequently exists in electronic format.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There appears to be considerable law enforcement activity concerning Internet sex crimes against minors. Moreover, there is certainly much more activity than was measured by this study, because we collected data only about crimes in which arrests were made. These arrests still constitute a relatively small portion of the total law enforcement effort in the area of child sex crimes, as suggested by our estimate of 89,000 cases of sexual abuse substantiated by child protective agencies or an extrapolated estimate of 65,000 arrests in 2000 for all types of sex crimes against minors based on NIBRS data. Law enforcement activities and arrests in Internet-related crimes will almost certainly grow as Internet use spreads, although only future studies similar to this one will be able to confirm this view.

The Internet sex crimes against minors were divided into three categories that represent different challenges for law enforcement. The first category, I-CIV, is the only category that includes victims of Internet-related crimes who were identified and contacted in the course of the investigation. The I-STULE category includes attempted crimes by offenders who interacted with investigators posing online as minors, and the I-CHP possession cases involve pictured victims whose identities are usually unknown. These three categories include a wide variety of sexual offenses.

Moreover, even the I-CIV crimes were more diverse than the public might imagine based on media accounts. I-CIV cases included Internet-initiated crimes, in which the offender used the Internet to begin a relationship with the victim, as well as sex crimes committed by family members or acquaintances of victims who used the Internet in the commission of the crime. The range of crimes committed included sexual abuse and molestation, both forcible and nonforcible; production of child pornography; and the illegal use of the Internet to solicit and transmit adult and child pornog-

raphy to minors, and, in a few cases, to victimize children through the facilitation of prostitution.

Because of the diversity of crimes and types of offender-victim relationships, it is important not to promote an overly narrow or stereotyped image of Internet sex crimes against minors. Law enforcement and the public need to be attuned to the possibility of Internet connections in a wide variety of sex crime and sexual exploitation incidents.

The possession of child pornography was an element in at least two-thirds of all Internet sex crimes against minors. This child pornography was of a serious nature. Most offenders possessed images of children between the ages of 6 and 12, and these images depicted the sexual penetration of minors. It would be a mistake to contend that aggressive law enforcement of child pornography statutes is resulting in the arrests of large numbers of individuals for the possession of images on the borderline between legal and illegal because they do not depict sexual activity or the children portrayed are older adolescents who could be age 18 or older.

The study reveals that considerable portions of these arrests (25 percent) are of offenders who solicited undercover law enforcement agents but who could not be linked with identified victims of Internet-related crimes in the current investigations. These undercover investigations, in which agents impersonate youth, are a new facet of law enforcement activity in the sex-crimes-against-minors field because investigators could not deploy decoy targets until the advent of the Internet. This study shows, however, that these investigations comprise a fairly large component of the law enforcement activity in this area, and one that is resulting in a considerable volume of convictions.

Cases involving Internet sex crimes against minors are clearly complex and time-consuming. Most were multijurisdictional and involved more than one law enforcement agency. Many involved collaboration between federal and local law enforcement. Many entailed charges brought in more than one jurisdiction. These are clear arguments in favor of continuing efforts to promote collaboration among jurisdictions including multijurisdictional task forces, collaborative protocols, and training of professionals at all levels in how to conduct joint investigations and prosecutions.

In spite of these complexities, the evidence about outcomes suggests that Internet sex crimes against minors are not posing insurmountable difficulties for law enforcement. The rate of dismissed cases and acquittals is possibly lower than for other kinds of child sex offenses. This is even true in cases involving the solicitation of undercover law enforcement and the I-CHP possession cases, where no victims were identified. It suggests that whatever novelty and complexity the Internet adds to these cases may be offset by other Internet features that aid in prosecution such as transcripts of conversations between the offenders and victims or images of children stored or sent online.

In summary, this study provides some reassuring information about a new crime domain that is causing considerable concern. It created new possibilities for crime and threats to young people. On the other hand, the study gives evidence of considerable law enforcement activity in response to these threats and implementation of both novel and conventional strategies with some success. As this process of threat and response continues, it is clear that this crime domain warrants careful attention in the future.

Acknowledgments

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