

The Internet and Children: Part 2

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In part 2 of this Internet article series I will discuss the findings in the *Online Solicitation of Children: A Report Regarding the Use of the Internet to Facilitate the Commission of Sex Crimes Including Recommendations for Ensuring Child Safety*. This report was created by the Texas Council of Sex Offender Treatment in September 2006 for the Texas Legislature.

To get a clear understanding of this problem we must first understand the basic dynamics and weed through the myths of the internet. We must first be aware and understand that the threat of online solicitation is real. The internet has allowed sex offenders easy access to children and other vulnerable populations throughout the world. To believe that your child is safe from these individuals on the internet is naïve. Children are trusting, naïve, curious; they make the perfect target. Data indicates that 1 in 6 children will be propositioned on line. I would not be shocked to learn that these numbers are too low. That is what the internet provides; a door to every home in America.

Any child that is on the internet is at risk for coming across some sexually explicit material. This material may be intended to prey upon a child or just to introduce a child to the subject of sex. Either way the child is harmed. Whether the sexually explicit material is wanted or not by an individual, it is there. This leads to an automatic problem. A majority of this material is never reported. Most children that do come across sexually explicit material or are solicited on line will never tell an adult out of fear of getting in trouble themselves. There is another hidden problem that effects the reporting of such material.

With all the coverage that the media is placing on these internet offenders, there are many stereotypes that are being used. Stereotypes such as “predators” and “pedophiles” are terms that are used to gain attention to the problem and to sensationalize the issue. The scary truth is there are over 500,000 registered sex offenders nationally. Yet, the research is clear, only ten percent of offenders are true predators. A majority of offenders are opportunists. They will go after whatever is easiest for them. In most cases that is a family member.

This is also true for internet sex crimes. In the National Juvenile Online Victimization study, in roughly 78% of internet abuse cases, the abuser was some type of a family member. Though we are exposed to constant images of sex travelers, the truth is that a majority of the time it is a family member who is engaging a child into sexual exploitation over the internet. When a family member is involved in these actions, the chances of a child reporting the incident is very slim.

In an upcoming article, we will begin the discussion of the victims of internet sex crimes and the internet offender.