

The Internet Part 3

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In this ongoing discussion of internet sex offenders and the threat they pose upon our children, we will focus on the victims of these internet crimes. This information was provided by the Online Solicitation of Children a report created by the Texas Council of Sex Offender Treatment.

Besides online solicitation or as we see on television as the sex travelers, there are numerous other crimes that are committed on the internet. The End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes International reports that internet sex crimes include: the distribution, production, and use of materials depicting child sexual abuse; exposing children to harmful images that can lead to psychological harm; and online solicitation.

Out of all these forms of internet sex crimes, the one that can lead to the most harm is child pornography. Sadly, a majority of the images on the internet do depict actual sexual acts involving minors. Not only are these children being sexually abused, there is physical evidence of this on the internet. These images do not come off the internet. These individuals face a lifetime of revictimization due to the distribution of videos, photographs, and computer images.

Children are the easiest targets of sexual abuse over the internet due to their vulnerability and naivety. As was stated in a previous article, family members make up the majority of children targeted on the internet by the offender. A child in the family provides the offender with the opportunity to target someone that is known and who the child trusts. Several risk factors are seen in the targets of internet sex offenders; these include: those whom have already been abused, the lonely, those with low self-esteem, those with sexual identity issues, and those who feel alienated from their parents.

In the past, females were the main target of sexually explicit images, but with the rise of the internet, boys have been the main target of these images. The National Juvenile Online Victimization study stated that 82% of victims of family offenders were under the age of 12. 93% of family offender victims are female; however, 49% of acquaintance victims were males. A 2005 survey conducted by the Crimes against Children Research Center reported that out of 1500 youths, 70% of girls were targeted for sexual exploitation.

It was estimated that in 2005 there were 77 million children online. These numbers will just continue to grow as the internet becomes easily accessible and technology makes it easier to communicate with others. With more children online the number of sexual offenses conducted over the internet will increase. In the part 4 of this ongoing series, the focus will be on the internet offender.