



139 Characteristics of Child Pornographers: A Description of a Cohort Subjected to Forensic Evaluation

Sebastien Prat, MD*, and Carol Jonas, PhD, CHRU de Tours, Hospital Trousseau, Tours, FRANCE

After attending this presentation, attendees will obtain information about child pornographers, online sex offenders, and hands-off offenders. The goal of this study is thus to identify the characteristics of people who are drawn to child pornography.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by displaying the characteristics of an offense which increased because of the Internet. The characteristics of the classical pedophile is not what we find in child pornography.

Introduction: Child pornography is a form of sexual exploitation of children. It depicts erotic or sexual scenarios with children, either explicitly or implicitly, nurturing individuals' deviant fantasies or facilitating a move toward pedophilia. Seeking and collecting images is never a matter of chance, and the collecting process and the way the pornographer considers his collection need to be better understood. It is these psychopathological issues and the risk of the person acting out his fantasies that need to be analyzed. The use of telecommunication facilities, particularly the internet, has allowed child pornography to be distributed more widely.

Today, access to pedophilic material no longer requires direct contact between supplier and consumer. The phenomenon has increased through the use of peer-to-peer networks, which make it easier to receive images. Exchanges between collectors permit them to become part of groups that gives them a virtual social life. Some believe that downloading images does not make them criminals because they were not present at the time of the abuse. Understanding the phenomenon of child pornography is complicated, because it is sometimes a matter of deviance without leading to actual abuse, and it is this virtual aspect that appears to be encouraged by Internet. It has probably increased certain deviant behaviors that were previously limited due to inhibition.

The main question facing law enforcement agencies is the level of danger posed by child pornographers. In essence, judges need to know the likelihood that sexual abuse will occur. A number of elements indicating a risk of child sexual abuse have been identified, including participation in a virtual community, sharing images, and possession of new images, but more elements are needed for a better understanding of this problem.

Material and Method: This study was based on pre-sentencing forensic psychiatric assessments carried out at the request of the courts. The forensic psychiatric assessments have been conducted by different forensic psychiatrists in France. The main criterion for inclusion was the possession, distribution, and/or production of pornographic images of minors, and that the subjects acknowledged the charges.

Various psycho-socio-demographic elements were studied based on evidence gathered from forensic psychiatric assessments and data from the literature (e.g., sex, academic level, marital status, job, social integration, childhood, type of offense, attitude toward the offense, criminal record, addiction to images, pedophile tendency, sexuality, introspection, medical history, dominant personality traits, diagnosis, therapy).

Discussion: Child pornography is a complex phenomenon. It generally fulfills a fantasy of a pedophile nature. Different profiles of child pornographers have been proposed which help understand underlying deviant motivations, which are not always related to pedophilia. Internet offenders can be divided into those who seek online contact and those who purchase offline contacts. While the socio-demographic characteristics of these subjects have been identified, further psycho-socio-criminological elements are needed to determine the profiles in greater depth.

The sample matched the descriptions found in the literature. Subjects were almost exclusively male with an average age of forty years, which is consistent with studies that have generally reported an age range of 25 to 50 years. They appear to be younger than offline offenders. In this study, the inclusion of a 15-year-old indicates that child pornography is not just about age.

Over 80% had a diploma, and over 50% had studied at university. Half of the cases had a stable job. Overall, the data suggest that all the subjects had a sufficient level of education to pursue a career and fit into society. However, a third of the cases felt that they were not well integrated, although half of those had a stable job. Moreover, they did not consider that living with a partner was a factor of good social integration.

There is no data in the literature about the sexuality of child pornographers. Most individuals in the study were heterosexual men, and most expressed poor sexual satisfaction, although more than half lived with a partner. Most of the homosexuals in the study were single and expressed more sexual dissatisfaction than the heterosexual subjects. Living with a partner does not necessarily lead to sexual satisfaction.

Forensic Psychiatry, Child Pornography, Sex Offenders