



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2015

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### I24 A Pilot Study Comparing Hands-On and Hands-Off Child Pornography Consumers

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the difference between hands-on and hands-off child pornography consumers. Attendees will recognize the key characteristics to highlight in order to prevent an escalation and will also be aware of the criminal history of hands-on child pornography consumers.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by assisting forensic psychiatrists and forensic psychologists to assess the risk these types of offenders pose to public safety.

**Introduction:** Child pornography is mostly considered as a hands-off offense. For more than a decade, it has been extensively described in an effort to try to understand the reasoning for downloading pornographic images or videos involving minors. For those who engage in these offenses, the motivation is not only driven by their deviant fantasies, the images are sometimes used to enhance contact with a minor. Interestingly, it was found that there are pedophiles who seek child pornography online and subsequently make contact with minors, but there are also child pornography consumers with clear pedophilic fantasies, but without any interest in acting out their urges. In that case, the main questions to ask are if they can decide at some point to assault a child and what could be the reason for the behavioral change. Therefore, it is interesting to compare both populations to know if differences can be highlighted in terms of childhood history, environment, and psychopathology.

**Methods:** A study was conducted based on a cohort of child pornography consumers with pedophilia diagnoses ( $n=34$ ). The cohort was divided into two groups: those who committed sexual offenses toward children ( $n=14$ ) and those who had never been convicted of anything other than downloading child pornography ( $n=20$ ). Emotional and relational aspects, interpretation of the index offense, and quality of the interview were compared.

**Results:** No statistically significant difference between both groups in terms of their relationship or sexuality were found; however, statistical differences regarding their attitude toward the offense ( $p=0.023$ ) and the sense of unreality they experienced during the consumption of the images online ( $p=0.019$ ) were found. With respect to the assessment interviews, statistical differences, notably in cooperation ( $p=0.001$ ) and capacity of introspection ( $p=0.019$ ), were found.

**Discussion:** This study highlights significant differences between the hands-on and the hands-off pedophile. The hands-on offenders are less integrated and seem to have more cognitive distortion than the other group. The hands-off offenders have more insight toward the victims and the consequences of the offense. If they realize their behavior is inappropriate, it would be interesting to know why they do not seek help and cannot restrain their urges to download child pornography images. This study questions the existence of a subgroup of child pornography consumers, the risk they pose to the safety of the public, and how this risk can accurately be assessed. Further studies need to be conducted to understand the triggers that lead to offenses escalating from hands-off to hands-on.

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#### Child Pornography, Risk, Hands-On Sexual Offense