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I4 Internet Crimes Against Children: A Forensic Analysis

*Karen B. Rosenbaum, MD**, 49 W 24th Street, Ste 908, New York, NY 10010; *R. Gregg Dwyer, MD, EdD**, Medical University of South Carolina, Community & Public Safety Psychiatry Division, 29-C Leinbach Drive, Charleston, SC 29407; *J. Paul Fedoroff, MD**, Royal Ottawa Hospital, 1145 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 7K4, CANADA; and *D.J. Barton, MCJ**, South Carolina Law Enforcement, 4400 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29221

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the various internet crimes that can occur against children, the profiles of the offenders from a law enforcement perspective, and the psychiatric evaluation and treatment of the offenders. Attendees will also understand the pervasive role that the internet has played in offenses against children.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing updated information on the diagnoses, treatment, and detection of internet predators of children.

The internet has been used for the consensual exchange of sexually explicit material and sexual exploration among adults, and also, unfortunately, child pornography and other crimes against children. The internet provides perceived anonymity, ease of access, and perceived ability to hide from law enforcement behind the computer. People who misuse the internet to commit sex crimes are not all the same in terms of motivation, goals, background, demographics, psychiatric diagnosis, and risk. Someone who looks at a few images occasionally may be at a different risk for offending against a child than someone who collects thousands of images, different than those who engage in online real-time communicating with a child via chats and webcam, and different than those who solicit to meet a child in person. They likely require different interventions and prevention approaches.

There is a continuum and different risk categorizations and diagnoses of the offenders; however, these different users are often prosecuted and treated the same way. Meanwhile, producers and distributors of pornography are extremely difficult to find and often can't even be identified.

In this presentation, four perspectives on assessing and managing the problem of internet sex crimes against children will be presented. Exploration of challenges of identifying, categorizing, and treating individuals who use the internet to prey on children will be facilitated by forensic psychiatrists to include a history of the problem and case examples. The specific approaches in both the United States and Canada will be outlined by sexual behavior clinic directors. A prevention program in Canada will also be discussed.

A law enforcement profiler of offenders who use the internet as a means of communicating with children found that these pedophiles do not fit the old typology, for example of preferential vs. non-preferential attraction to children. The profiler found that many people who use the internet act differently behind the screen than if they were face to face with a child. The computer allows people who would never approach children to do so in a fantasy context. The profiler developed a typology of people who use the internet to chat with children, who are labeled the Dilettante and the Connoisseur. This presentation will include a description of this typology and its application to the field.

Internet, Predators, Children