

C7 Enhancing Child Pornography Offender Risk Assessment Using Digital Forensics Artifacts

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) understand the current research on the heterogeneity of Child Porn Offenders (CPO); (2) be able to describe the limitations of the current sex offender risk assessments and CPO; and (3) be able to discuss how using digital forensics artifacts can improve the risk assessments of CPO.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: Our legal justice system is literally swamped with online child pornography cases. The current approach of treating all child sex offenders as one homogenous group for the purposes of risk assessments is overburdening the system and these assessments have low predictive validity for CPO. This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining how the new model will help improve the predictive validity of the risk assessments and help reduce the risk of contact victims.

While the legal justice system in the United States appears to be acutely focused on the prosecution of child pornography offenses, commonly referred to as Child Sexual Exploitative Materials (CSEM) offenses, there is surprisingly little empirical support for the classification of these types of sex offenders, the penalties, treatment, rehabilitation plans, and the use of risk assessment process/tools. The United States justice system seems to rely on anecdotal evidence at best, or at the very least, flawed stereotypes of who they believe these child pornography offenders are.¹⁻³ The goal of the legal justice system is not just to prosecute those individuals who are guilty of criminal offenses, it is also to protect those that have been victimized and hopefully prevent others from ever becoming a victim. If there is any hope of protecting against further victimization of one of our most vulnerable sectors of society, our children, then personal feelings, biases, and opinions must be put aside, and we must start understanding who these child pornography offenders are based on empirical evidence.⁴⁻⁶ What is needed are long-term studies that look at the ontology of child pornography offenders, personality and demographic characteristics of potential categories of these offenders, and the real risk that these different categories of offenders pose to society.

The focus of this presentation is to provide a model that can be used to better understand the risk that CPO pose by combining traditional child sexual offender risk assessment tools and risk assessment tools designed specifically for CPO with digital forensic artifacts. This presentation will first look at the current research that indicates that the individuals that engage in child sexual exploitative behaviors are not a homogeneous group.^{3,4,7,8} This presentation will examine how the current offender risk assessment tools used with traditional child sexual offenders do not seem to be up to the task and have poor predictive validity for CPO. Rather than trying to abandon and/or create new risk assessment tools for this population of offenders, which to date has not been very successful, it makes more sense to look at supplementing these assessment tools with data/evidence derived from digital forensics analyses.^{3,9,10} Thus, a model is provided for supplementing the risk assessment tools. This model combines digital forensic artifacts, evidence visualization, current risk assessment tools, and a better understanding of the factors that are correlated with an increased risk of CPO reoffending or progressing to more serious criminal behaviors such as contact offending.

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