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Examining the Criminal History and Future Offending of Child Pornography Offenders: An Extended Prospective Follow-up Study

Angela W. Eke, Michael C. Seto and Jennette Williams

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Abstract

We examined police occurrence and criminal records data for a sample of 201 registered male child pornography offenders originally reported by Seto and Eke (*Sex Abus J Res Treat* 17:201-210, 2005), extending the average follow-up time for this sample to 5.9 years. In addition, we obtained the same data for another 340 offenders, increasing our full sample to 541 men, with a total average follow-up of 4.1 years. In the extended follow-up of the original sample, 34% of offenders had new charges for any type of reoffense, with 6% charged with a contact sexual offense against a child and an additional 3% charged with historical contact sex offenses (i.e., previously undetected offenses). For the full sample, there was a 32% any recidivism rate; 4% of offenders were charged with new contact sex offences, an additional 2% of offenders were charged with historical contact sex offenses and 7% of offenders were charged with a new child pornography offense. Predictors of new violent (including sexual contact) offending were prior offense history, including violent history, and younger offender age. Approximately a quarter of the sample was sanctioned for a failure on conditional release; in half of these failures, the offenders were in contact with children or used the internet, often to access pornography again.

Keywords Child pornography - Criminal history - Recidivism - Child victims - Risk factors

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Abstract We examined police occurrence and criminal records data for a sample of 201 registered male child pornography offenders originally reported by Seto and Eke (Sex Abuse J Res Treat 17:201–210, 2005), extending the average follow-up time for this sample to 5.9 years. In addition, we obtained the same data for another 340 offenders, increasing our full sample to 541 men, with a total average follow-up of 4.1 years. In the extended follow-up of the original sample, 34% of offenders had new charges for any type of reoffense, with 6% charged with a contact sexual offense against a child and an additional 3% charged with historical contact sex offenses (i.e., previously undetected offenses). For the full sample, there was a 32% any recidivism rate; 4% of offenders were charged with new contact sex offenses, an additional 2% of offenders were charged with historical contact sex offenses and 7% of offenders were charged with a new child pornography offense. Predictors of new violent (including sexual contact) offending were prior offense history, including violent history, and younger offender age. Approximately a quarter of the sample was sanctioned for a failure on conditional release; in half of these failures, the

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The number of child pornography cases faced by police, other justice professionals, and clinicians is increasing (Bates & Metcalf, 2007; Moutons & Kyeckelahn, 2007; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2009). Wolak and her colleagues observed that arrests for child pornography offenses doubled in the United States from 2001 to 2006. This increase likely reflects dramatic growth in the number of people using the internet, the availability of child pornography online, and policing resources focused on investigating and charging child pornography offenders. Tied to this rise in number of cases, there is increasing public and professional concern about individuals who view child pornography, in particular because of the risk they might pose to directly sexually offend against a child (also referred to as “offline” offending).

Many child pornography offenders are likely to be pedophilic or hebephilic, and thus may indeed pose a risk to children because of their sexual interests in prepubescent or pubescent children (Seto, Cantor, & Blanchard, 2006). The key question is whether offenders who look at or collect child pornography images also directly offend against children. This question can be broken down into two parts: Whether offenders have a history of contact sexual offending against children and whether they will, in the future, sexually assault a child. A recent meta-analysis conducted by Seto, Hanson, and Babchishin (in press) found that approximately half of online offenders (offenders who used the internet and/or related

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