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Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.

Executive Director, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Child Pornography: Basic Facts About a Horrific Crime

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It's usually a news headline. "A well regarded community member was arrested today and charged with possession of hundreds of photos of child pornography on his computer." Viewers are appalled. The individual who was named, if employed, is usually placed on leave pending the outcome of the investigation. Sometimes there is a follow up story about the outcome, but often, it just fades into the fabric of the steady diet of horrible news stories that we take in almost every day.

The focus is on the perpetrator. But, what about the children whose photos or videos he has in his possession? What circumstances occurred whereby they were used for pornography? Who did this to them? How are these photos distributed? Who is trying to help these children? I can't answer all these questions in one blog, this is one of several I'll write on this topic, but here are some background facts that may startle you.

It's important to have a practical understanding of what child pornography is and how it's distributed.

The [Crimes Against Children Research Center](#) is an excellent resource on trends concerning the crime of child pornography. A [recent report](#) states that "child pornography is the visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct includes acts such as intercourse, bestiality and masturbation as well as lascivious exhibition of the genitals or pubic area. Possession of child pornography is a felony under federal law and in every state. The federal statutes that criminalize child pornography possession define 'child' as age 17 or younger." A staggering statistic in this report stated that peer to peer (P2P) users (those who share images) were more likely to have images of very young children and violent images. Of P2P users arrested in 2009, 33 percent had photos of children age three or younger and 42 percent had images of children that showed sexual violence.

Child pornography is one of the fastest growing businesses online, with estimated annual revenue of \$3 billion. According to the [Association of Sites Advocating Child Protection](#), child pornography is usually distributed two ways. It's either commercial child pornography that is distributed for profit, or non-commercial child pornography that is offered free or traded among offenders, like the P2P networks. ASACP [estimates](#) that the United States has the largest share of commercialized child pornography websites with close to 50 percent of the global volume. Websites that distribute commercial child pornography offer thousands of images and videos. Most children exploited are pre-adolescent. Some children appear to have been subjected to physical as well as sexual violence.

In December 2012, the United States Sentencing Commission issued a report to Congress regarding Federal Child Pornography Offenses. This report, a multi-year undertaking, examined many aspects of child pornography, ranging from trafficking of material involving the sexual exploitation of a minor to possession; offender characteristics; to how offenders are prosecuted, sentenced, incarcerated and supervised once released. I will only give a few highlights here, as the entire report can be read [here](#).

- **All** child pornography offenses, including possession are extremely serious because they result in perpetual harm to the child and validate and normalize the sexual exploitation of children.
- Child pornography victims are harmed initially during the production of the images and the perpetual nature of their distribution on the Internet causes significant additional harm to victims.
- Child pornography offenses are international crimes. The images are transmitted across the world to offenders who redistribute them. Once an image is on the Internet it's virtually impossible to eradicate all copies. **The harm to victims is lifelong.**
- The constant demand for new images of children by child porn "communities" further contribute to the production of new material and thus the sexual abuse of children.
- For some offenders, child pornography is a risk factor for other sex offending against minors.
- Approximately one in three offenders had engaged in one or more types of criminal sexually dangerous behavior predating their prosecutions for non-production offenses.

I could go on, but I believe this is enough to take in during one reading. Child pornography must be stopped. It's a very difficult battle, but those investigating and prosecuting offenders are making inroads. **If you know of anyone producing, promoting or possessing child pornography, please report them through the [Cyber Tipline](#).**

Please stay tuned for my future blogs describing the plight of the children who are victimized, the offender characteristics and the law enforcement efforts to save these children from this vicious and dangerous crime.

For more information on keeping your child safe and for information about The NYSPCC's Wine Dinner Gala on November 19, 2013, click [here](#).