



FOOTHILLS CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

www.foothillscac.org

The Impact of Child Pornography on Victims

Definition

- Child pornography is any kind of representation of sexually explicit or obscene images of a minor under 18 years old.

The Children

- Most children involved in child pornography have NOT been abducted or physically forced.
- Most of the time the children KNOW the pornographers, and their actions are coerced through grooming and other pressures.

The Offenders

- Viewers of child pornography on the Internet are more likely than not to be in a relationship, be employed, have an above average IQ, be college-educated, and not have a criminal record.

Victimization that Never Ends

- Victimization through child pornography means that the victimization never ends.
 - Images placed on the internet can never be fully erased or recovered.
 - Images continue to be passed from person to person indefinitely.
 - Many users of child pornography amass large collections.

Impact on the Victims

- Immediate effects on child victims:
 - Physical injury and pain, including sexually transmitted diseases;
 - Feelings of shame, unworthiness, anger, and confusion;
 - Somatic responses (headaches, stomachaches, etc.);
 - Withdrawal and isolation;
 - Anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including nightmares, flashbacks, etc.
- Long-term effects on child victims:
 - Depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other mental illness;
 - Feelings of worthlessness & low self-esteem;

- Distorted and unhealthy sexuality;
- Difficulty establishing healthy relationships;
- Risky behaviors, including substance abuse, promiscuity, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and attempts;
- Greater risk of getting ensnared in commercial sexual exploitation;
- Ongoing humiliation and lack of privacy;
 - Victims are unable to escape the reach of the images, and constantly live with the knowledge that any person they meet could have viewed the images.
- Images remaining online could impact employment, relationships, and other facets of life throughout the lifetime.
- Other negative effects of the existence of child pornography:
 - Fuels the demand for child pornography.
 - “It seems to me that we’re in this brave new world, where not only was there an actual rape, but I’m going to suggest to you there is a continuing digitized rape. Possession of the digitized recording of the rape contributes to the system, contributes to the economic benefit of those who produced this thing.” - Judge Emilio Garza
 - Existing child pornography may be used to desensitize children and normalize sexual activity in an effort by offenders to engage in sexual abuse or create new child pornography.
 - Child pornography can be the gateway to hands-on child sexual abuse, or may be used by sex offenders to reduce their inhibitions and prepare themselves to offend.
 - The existence of child pornography may normalize and increase behaviors by minors such as sexting and other risky sexual behaviors.
 - Contributes to the hyper-sexualization of children in American culture.
 - Minors internalize these cultural messages, leading to feelings of objectification, fueling negative gender stereotypes, and increasing vulnerability to sexual victimization and sexual risk-taking.

Sources

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- Richard Wortley and Stephen Smallbone, *Child Pornography on the Internet*, Problem-Oriented Guides for Police, Problem-Specific Guides Series, No. 41, a publication supported by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/e04062000.pdf>