

NCMEC Statistics Report

Aims

This Research Highlight provides an overview of statistical information provided by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the U.S. relating to the child abuse images they have dealt with since the launch of their Exploited Children's Unit in 1998 up to and including 11th November 2012.

Key Findings

Since the organisation was launched

- 4,910 children have been identified in images and safeguarded.
- The organisation has received over 35,000 requests from different police forces in the U.S. for victim identification following discovery of child abuse images by law enforcement.
- Over 76 million images/videos have been processed through the Child Recognition and Identification System (CRIS). This software enables analysts to organise images, view and tag them in order to identify the volume of particular images in the system.

Five year comparison

A five year comparison of the workload of NCMEC's Child Victim Identification Program indicates that:

- Although the number of cases processed per week remained relatively similar during the five year review period (66 per week in 2006 vs. 64 per week in 2011), a total of 28,893 cases were processed by CRIS during the review period.
- There has been a huge increase in the number of images and movies reviewed during CRIS examinations (36,614 per week in 2006 vs. 274,306 per week in 2011), with 52,919,365 reviewed during the review period.
- The number of victims identified over the five year review period has also increased (3 per week in 2006 vs. 14 per week in 2011), with 3,692 identified victims to the end of the review period.

Victim-offender relationships

- Data on victim information submitted to NCMEC by law enforcement between 1998 and June, 2012 indicates that the total number of victims identified during this period was 4,638.
- Data about the relationship between victim and offender suggests that a high percentage of offenders were known to the child before they were abused for the purposes of producing abusive imagery. 18% of cases involved parents/guardians and 27% neighbours/family friends.
- Other relatives were involved in 10% of cases, babysitters/coaches in 7%, and parent/guardian's partner in 3%.

- 15% of images were produced as the result of online enticement where victims met a perpetrator online and transmitted self-produced images, or where victims and offenders met online and images were produced as the result of an offline meeting.
- 15% of images were self-produced with victims having produced and distributed images of themselves.
- 2% were victims of commercial trafficking and 3% involved offenders who were unknown to the child (e.g., photographers, child sex tourism, runaways).
- These figures suggest that the majority of offenders are known to their victims prior to production of images, and contrasts with the societal perception of this form of offending as primarily involving perpetrators who were initially unknown or 'strangers'. This is consistent with UK research suggesting that the majority of young people are sexually abused by someone already known to them¹.

Policy Implications

The NCMEC figures have a number of implications for safeguarding children from becoming the victims of abusive imagery. They suggest that the majority of young people who become victims of this form of offending do so as the result of offline criminal activity. This highlights the need for frontline workers to ask about family and community usage of the internet and related digital technologies when carrying out risk assessments. There is also a need to embed appropriate training modules in the professional development programmes of all frontline and managerial workers throughout the Children's Workforce, as well as raising awareness of the general public that many children are made the subjects of abusive imagery within domestic settings.

Background

The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) was founded in the U.S. in 1984 with the remit of assisting in the search for missing children. Its founder was Adam Walsh whose son went missing and was later found murdered. Between 1996 and 1998 the Exploited Children's Unit was developed, and the CyberTipline commenced operation in 1998. NCMEC is now the leading organisation in the U.S. which works with law enforcement, families and other stakeholders on issues related to missing and sexually exploited children.

Source NCMEC Board Prevention Policy Committee

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¹ Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N., & Collishaw, S. (2011). *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today*. London: NSPCC. Available at: www.nspcc.org.uk/childstudy