



## Child Pornography's Crime Fighters Bear Scars Of Traumatic Investigations, New UNH Research Shows

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**EDITORS AND REPORTER: The bulletin "Work Exposure to Child Pornography in ICAC Task Forces and Affiliates" is available at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/>. If you cannot download the bulletin, contact Lori Wright at [lori.wright@unh.edu](mailto:lori.wright@unh.edu).**

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DURHAM, N.H. – Law enforcement officers who are exposed to child pornography as part of their investigative work report experiencing mental health problems that impact both their work and home lives, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire Crimes against Children Research Center.

"Many people may not be aware of how many law enforcement personnel are exposed to disturbing images of children being sexually victimized when they investigate child pornography crimes. This is a new kind of stress for police that needs to be addressed," said Janis Wolak, senior researcher at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center.

The research is presented in the bulletin "Work Exposure to Child Pornography in ICAC Task Forces and Affiliates." The research was conducted by Wolak and Kimberly Mitchell, also a senior researcher at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center.

"Some law enforcement executives may not realize how distressing it can be to view the evidence in these cases; it can include hundreds of pictures and videos. This bulletin is designed to raise awareness and understanding and provide some helpful suggestions from agencies that are confronting this problem," Wolak said.

Researchers surveyed more than 500 Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force commanders and liaisons to ICAC affiliates. Participants represented local, county, state, and federal law enforcement from across the United States. All respondents had been exposed to child pornography during investigations of crimes involving child sexual exploitation.

The researchers found:

- About half of the survey participants were concerned about the psychological impacts of work exposure to child pornography.
- 35 percent of ICAC Task Force participants and 10 percent of those from affiliates had seen problems arising from work exposure to child pornography.
- Close to 40 percent of participants thought more mental health services were needed in their agencies.

- Few agencies gave information about possible related stresses to personnel who viewed child pornography.
- Some participants said their work was not supported and respected within their agencies.
- Lack of forensic capacity, obsolete equipment, and training were concerns for some agencies.
- Most participants found their work satisfying, but with some reservations.

A number of respondents reporting experiencing personal, family, and marital, and work-related problems as a result of their exposure to child pornography.

Personal, family, and marital problems included insomnia, stress, depression, and weight gain that seemed related to exposure to child pornography. Some had seen effects on family relationships, including relationships with children. One respondent reported being hyper-vigilant around children and always suspicious of adult males, while another reported a colleague, who was about to become a father, crying after viewing child pornography.

Others said seeing explicit, disturbing sexual images affected sexual and marital relationships.

Work-related problems included anger, loss of objectivity, and drops in productivity. One respondent said, "In general, everyone seems to be shocked and disgusted at what they have to view. This usually turns into anger at the suspect."

"We need to find out more about who is most at risk for negative affects and what agencies can do to alleviate distress for those doing this important work," the researchers said.

The research was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, through the ICAC Training and Technical Assistance Program.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence against children. Visit the center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

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