

Authors of Earlier Study Dispute New Findings on Commercial Exploitation of Children

By [*Erika Mantz*](#)
UNH News Bureau
603-862-1567

September 10, 2001

Editors: David Finkelhor, 603-862-2761, and Andrea Sedlak, 301-251-4211, are available for interviews.

DURHAM, N.H. -- A University of New Hampshire researcher says a new study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children improperly uses data from a 1988 U.S. Department of Justice study and reaches flawed conclusions.

The new study, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, was released today. It based many of its estimates of the scope of the problem on data from the National Incidence Study of Missing and Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART) authored in 1988 by David Finkelhor, professor of sociology and director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at UNH, and Andrea Sedlak of Westat, Inc.

Finkelhor and Sedlak say the original NISMAART data was not used correctly. The researchers say the new report greatly overestimates the number of children who run away from households and end up on the streets or in shelters, and that the new report assumes the number of runaway children has increased, while national arrest data and a new study suggest that the number of runaway youth has actually decreased since 1988. In addition, Finkelhor and Sedlak contend the new report arrives at an inflated number by adding together categories of children such as those who run away from home and from institutions in a given year, when many of these are the same children.

"We agree that commercial sexual exploitation of

children is a serious problem," says Finkelhor, "but we are of the opinion that at the present time there is not adequate research to make an accurate national estimate."

[Back to UNH News Bureau](#)