

ATSA Policy Statement on Internet-Facilitated Sex Offending

Adopted by the ATSA Executive Board of Directors on September 7, 2010

<http://www.atsa.com/internet-facilitated-sexual-offending>

“There is currently no risk measure specifically developed for use with Internet-facilitated offenders who have no official history of contact sexual offenses. Several overlapping, follow-up studies of child pornography offenders suggest these individuals present less risk for future hands-on offenses, on average, than undifferentiated samples of contact sex offenders. . . Child pornography offenders also presented a relatively low risk to commit another child pornography offense. . . Studies that have compared Internet-facilitated sex offenders to contact sex offenders have found consistent differences. These studies suggest Internet-facilitated sex offenders are less antisocial and are; therefore, less of a risk to commit a new offense or a probation violation than contact sex offenders. These studies also suggest Internet-facilitated sex offenders are similar to or score lower than contact sex offenders on measures of clinical needs including offense-supportive attitudes and beliefs, intimacy deficits, and emotional problems. At the same time, child pornography offenders are more likely to show pedophilic sexual arousal on penile plethysmograph assessment than are contact sex offenders.”

Although researchers have suggested several typologies of Internet-facilitated offenders, we currently know very little about the treatment and supervision needs of Internet-related sex offenders. These typologies include individuals who are sexually interested in children, those who are more sexually indiscriminate, those who are curious, and those who opportunistically engage in Internet-facilitated offending (e.g., an adult male who uses the Internet to gain sexual access to adolescents). Effective intervention will need to be tailored to the type of offender and the risk they present. For example, an individual who viewed child pornography out of curiosity and is a low risk to offend in the future might require little (or no) treatment and minimal supervision while a pedophilic individual who opportunistically used the Internet to gain access to victims and who is a higher risk to offend in the future would require more intensive treatment and supervision. Regulation of access to the Internet would be expected to be a central consideration in treatment or supervision. Methodologically sound evaluation research is needed to develop effective treatment programs for Internet-facilitated sex offenders.”