

## **Exploring the Role of the Internet in Juvenile Prostitution Cases Coming to the Attention of Law Enforcement**

MELISSA WELLS, KIMBERLY J. MITCHELL, and KAI JI

*University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA*

*This exploratory analysis examines the role of the Internet in juvenile prostitution cases coming to the attention of law enforcement. The National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) collected information from a national sample of law enforcement agencies about the characteristics of juvenile prostitution cases. In comparison to non-Internet juvenile prostitution cases, Internet juvenile prostitution cases involved younger juveniles and police were more likely to treat juveniles as victims rather than offenders. In addition, these cases were significantly more likely to involve a family or acquaintance exploiter. This analysis suggests that the role of the Internet may impact legal and social service response to juveniles involved in prostitution. In addition, it highlights the need for interventions that acknowledge the vulnerabilities of youth involved in this type of commercial sexual exploitation.*

*KEYWORDS Internet, juvenile prostitution, child pornography production, commercial sexual exploitation of children, sex trafficking*

The problem of juvenile prostitution is increasingly being considered one form of commercial sexual exploitation (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010; Mitchell, Jones, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2011; Montgomery-Devlin, 2008).

---

Submitted 23 March 2011; revised 29 June 2011; accepted 8 July 2011.

This project was made possible through Grant Numbers 2003-JN-FX-0064 and 2005-JL-FX-0047 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. We are grateful to the many law enforcement investigators who participated in this research study.

Address correspondence to Melissa Wells, Department of Social Work, University of New Hampshire, 239 Pettee Hall, Durham, NH 03824. E-mail: Melissa.Wells@unh.edu

Juvenile prostitution is characterized as one form of commercial sexual exploitation of children in that juveniles are essentially used as commodities for financial profit (Mitchell et al., 2011). This perspective asserts that in any case that involves a juvenile engaged in prostitution there are illegal sexual activities by adults, which often include mistreatment or abuse (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010). Consideration of these cases as sexually exploitative differs from historical treatment of these juveniles in that it considers the vulnerabilities of the youth involved rather than treating them as delinquents or offenders (Ashley, 2008; Halter, 2010; Milloy, 2002).

Juvenile prostitution incidents involve money exchange or financial profit and may or may not involve an online component (Mitchell et al., 2011). Analyses of juvenile online victimization identify advertising and selling victims as one of the various ways that the Internet is used to facilitate the commission of sex crimes against minors (Mitchell et al., 2005), and law enforcement officers acknowledge the use of the Internet in cases classified as juvenile prostitution (Mitchell et al., 2010). However, there has been little attention in the literature regarding specific ways that the Internet is utilized in juvenile prostitution cases or how this technology may impact outcomes for these juveniles. There are a range of ways that the Internet may be involved in juvenile victimization (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003), and research suggests that high risk youth may be more vulnerable to some types of online victimization (Wells & Mitchell, 2008).

Juveniles may become involved in prostitution activities under varied circumstances (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004), and studies have found that these youth have often experienced sexual or physical abuse, are distanced from families, have mental health diagnoses, and have more challenging life experiences than other high risk youth (Bell & Todd, 1998; Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Twill, Green, & Traylor, 2010; Tyler, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 2000). Child maltreatment and other traumatic events have been found to be associated with juveniles' involvement in "survival sex" (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999, p. 1406), such as bartering sex for money or other financial gain.

As is the case with prostitution more generally (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002), some of these juveniles may be acting independently and others may be involved with pimps or others who make a financial profit from selling the juveniles for sex. Existing literature on adult prostitution suggests that women involved with pimps may rely on their exploiters for security, love, and admiration in a way that reflects dynamics of domestic violence (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Similarly, juveniles engaging in pimp-controlled prostitution are seen as dependent on prostituting themselves or on pimps to meet basic and financial needs (Greene et al., 1999; Schaffer & DeBlassie, 1984).

However, juveniles may engage in prostitution for reasons other than money. Some young people may turn to prostitution in an effort to attract attention and love (Bell & Todd, 1998). Others may be exploited by family

members or acquaintances who intend to profit from child pornography production and distribution (Mitchell et al., 2005). Exploiters may “groom” these young people (Lanning, 2001) in such a way that illegal and exploitive activities are normalized.

Juveniles involved in prostitution are at risk for negative outcomes, including mental health disorders and sexually transmitted diseases (Edwards, Iritani, & Hallfors, 2009; Yates, Mackenzie, Pennbridge, & Swofford, 1991). Although there is debate regarding whether these juveniles see themselves as victims (Cates, 1989), it is clear that the experiences of these young people reflect those of victims of conventional child maltreatment (Mitchell et al., 2010; Yates et al., 1991).

## STUDY AIMS

This analysis examines the juvenile and situational characteristics associated with Internet use in child prostitution cases. We look specifically at cases in which there is a third-party exploiter to see if there are differences in the characteristics of those cases based on involvement of the Internet. In addition, we propose a typology of Internet use in these juvenile prostitution cases.

## METHOD

### The National Juvenile Prostitution Study Methodology

The National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) collected information from a national sample of law enforcement agencies about the characteristics of crimes involving juvenile prostitution and the number of arrests and detentions for these crimes during a one-year period. The goals of the methodology were to construct a representative national sample of law enforcement agencies that would provide an overall picture of the law enforcement response to these crimes in the United States and understand how these cases emerged and were handled in a diverse group of agencies. This study was conducted with the approval of the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board.

### SAMPLE SELECTION

We constructed a stratified national sample of state, county, and local law enforcement agencies, dividing law enforcement agencies into three sampling frames based on the number of full-time sworn officers in each agency. The first frame consisted of 137 large agencies, including all agencies in the United States with 1,000 or more full-time sworn officers and one federal agency. We did not sample from this frame; we included all agencies.

The second frame consisted of medium agencies with 50–999 full-time sworn officers. A total of 2,077 agencies fell into this category. Of these, 52% were randomly selected to participate in the study ( $n = 1,072$ ). The third frame consisted of small agencies with 1–49 full-time sworn officers. A total of 12,954 agencies fell into this category. Of these, 11% were randomly selected to participate in the study ( $n = 1,389$ ). From this, a total of 2,598 agencies were included in the stratified sample. Two hundred of those agencies were noneligible, leaving 2,398 eligible agencies for participation in the study (noneligible agencies included duplicate agencies, those with no jurisdiction to investigate juvenile-prostitution-related crimes, and those that no longer existed. (See the methodology report for more details about sample selection at [www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/JP-study-methodology-report.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/JP-study-methodology-report.pdf).)

#### MAIL SURVEY

We conducted a mail survey of the law enforcement agencies in the sample, followed by telephone interviews with investigators about specific cases. In the mail survey, we asked agencies whether, in the calendar year 2005, they had detained or arrested any juveniles (age 17 or younger) or adults (age 18 or older) in cases involving juvenile prostitution. “Detained” was defined to include cases where juveniles were held under juvenile laws for juvenile court proceedings, placed in residential care, or held for other reasons related to being minors. Eligible cases were defined as “where children or adolescents under the age of 17 were involved in prostitution. These could be cases where juveniles—either boys or girls—exchanged sex acts for money (or something else of monetary value) or cases that involved pimps, organized crime, or other situations in which one person made money or gained financially in other ways from selling a child or adolescent for sex.”

The response rate to the mail survey was 95% of eligible agencies. The majority of agencies had no cases; only 5% of responding agencies ( $n = 132$ ) reported cases ( $n = 877$ ) that fit our criteria.

#### TELEPHONE SURVEY

If respondents answered “Yes” to any of the questions in the mail survey, we asked them to list the case number (or other reference to the case) and the name and contact information for the key investigating officer for each case. We then conducted detailed telephone interviews with case investigators. To obtain about 700 eligible cases, 16% ( $n = 142$ ) of the 877 cases reported in the mail survey were not selected for the sample at random; 3% ( $n = 24$ ) of reported cases were ineligible. Of the 711 cases that remained in the sample, we completed interviews for 19% ( $n = 138$ ). Thirty-six percent ( $n = 257$ ) involved agencies who did not respond to interview requests,

44% ( $n = 313$ ) involved respondents who refused to be interviewed, and <1% ( $n = 3$ ) were duplicate cases or cases that could not be identified by the investigators. Most of the refusals involved large law enforcement agencies that could not easily retrieve the case files required for the interviews because they did not have filing systems that allowed them to identify the prostitution cases that involved juveniles.

#### DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this paper, we have adopted certain definitions that reflect some of the issues raised by the research. We call the youth in these cases “juveniles involved in prostitution,” because that term covers both youth who are prostituted by others and those who act alone. We do not refer to such youth as “victims” because we are focusing on whether and under what circumstances law enforcement views them as victims. We use the term “third-party exploiter” for those who profit financially from selling juveniles for sex. Many of the third-party exploiters in the N-JPS were pimps (both male and female), but this category also includes some offenders who worked for pimps, such as adult prostitutes. We use the term “client” for individuals who pay juveniles involved in prostitution for sex (i.e., johns, customers).

#### DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 132 of 138 cases in N-JPS involved identified juveniles. The other six cases were attempted juvenile prostitution cases or law enforcement initiated undercover operations in which the investigator posed as a juvenile. The current analysis is limited to these 132 cases in which there was an identified juvenile.

To address the first research question, chi-square analyses were conducted to explore differences in juvenile and situational characteristics based on whether or not the case involved the Internet. To explore the use of the Internet in these cases, a typology was built using data from a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. The quantitative data used for coding included whether the juvenile, exploiter, or law enforcement used the Internet. These data were supplemented with a qualitative description of the use of the Internet in each case.

#### MEASURES

Law enforcement agents reported on whether the Internet was used in these cases. Cases were coded as involving the Internet if either the quantitative

results or qualitative case summary data mentioned any type of Internet use. In the telephone survey, law enforcement investigators were asked three general questions about Internet use as well as more specific examples of possible uses if applicable. First, they were asked if the Internet was used to sell child pornography. Second, they were asked, "Did the offender ever use the Internet in any way that was related to this case? This includes using Internet features of cell phones and other types of wireless Internet technology (but not cell phones used only for phone calls)." The specific options for use in this question included (a) text messaging, (b) on a cell phone or other device, (c) other wireless Internet technology, (d) a webpage related to engaging in child pornography, (e) a blog or online journal related to juvenile prostitution, (f) a webcam, or (g) other Internet technology. Finally, if applicable, they were asked in what ways the offender used the Internet to prostitute or otherwise sexually exploit (meaning producing child pornography or other forms of sexual exploitation) this juvenile. Options for this question included (a) to advertise specific juveniles, (b) to meet and recruit clients, (c) to meet this and other juveniles, (d) to communicate with this or other juveniles, (e) to solicit pictures from this or other juveniles, (f) to distribute child pornography, (g) to communicate with other offenders, (h) to search for sex tourism websites, or (i) something else.

Law enforcement agents provided information about juvenile and situational characteristics. Juveniles were coded as male, female, or unknown. Child age was dichotomized into those juveniles age 15 or under and those who were ages 16 or 17. Since the focus of the study was on juvenile prostitution, no data were collected for individuals age 18 or older. Race was recoded to reflect juveniles who were White, Black, other race, or of unknown race. Law enforcement agents were asked if the juveniles were of Hispanic ethnicity. Two additional juvenile characteristics, a history of running away, and prior arrests or detentions were included in this analysis.

Law enforcement agents reported on situational characteristics, including whether the case began with a police action (such as an undercover investigation) or a report. Reporting sources included parents, social services agencies, and others. In order to examine how police are oriented to this crime, we divided the cases in the sample ( $n = 132$ ) into three initial categories: (a) juvenile-as-victim orientation, (b) juvenile-as-delinquent orientation, and (c) both victim and delinquent orientation. This was done by examining who was detained and ultimately charged in the case, and for what offense. Juveniles were categorized as being treated as victims if: (a) only the exploiter was arrested or (b) both the juvenile and exploiter were arrested or detained but the charge against the juvenile was not a prostitution-related charge (e.g., disturbing the peace or a drug charge). Juveniles were categorized as being treated as delinquents if they were the only person arrested or detained. Juveniles were categorized as being



treated as both a victim and a delinquent if the exploiter was arrested on a charge specific to a sexual crime against a minor (e.g., sexual assault of a minor) and the juvenile was also arrested on a prostitution-related charge. As a result of this classification, 53% ( $n = 70$ ) of juveniles were categorized as victims, 31% ( $n = 41$ ) as delinquents, and 16% ( $n = 21$ ) as both victims and delinquents. When examining the status of the juvenile by case type, we found that all of the juveniles in child sexual abuse cases were treated as victims, 66% in third-party exploiters cases were treated as victims, and 11% in solo cases were treated as victims,  $X^2(2, N = 132) = 98.38$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Next, for the 21 cases in which juveniles were treated as both victims and delinquents, we examined the case summaries more carefully to see if we could classify them into a victim- or delinquent-only category. In all 21 cases, we were prompted to change the juveniles' status from both victim and delinquent to victim only because at least one of the following occurred: (a) the initial charges against the juvenile were dropped once the investigator determined he or she was a minor, or (b) there was a specific comment from the investigator that the only reason the juvenile was charged was so they could get needed services. With these cases reclassified, 69% ( $n = 91$ ) of juveniles were ultimately classified as victims and 31% ( $n = 41$ ) as delinquents.

To assess the type of exploiter in these cases, we divided cases into three groups (Mitchell et al., 2010). The first group includes all third-party exploiters associated with an organized, commercial organization. The second group, called "abusers," includes an exploiter not associated with such an organization, such as a family member or acquaintance of the victim. These "abusers" cases can be considered similar to conventional child sexual abuse but include some level of payment for juvenile prostitution. The final group includes those "solo" cases where juveniles were thought to be acting alone, in that police were not able to find evidence of a pimp or other type of third-party exploiter.

To further examine Internet use among the sample of juveniles who did have a third-party exploiter, additional analyses were conducted with this subsample of cases. For juveniles involved with a third-party exploiter, law enforcement agents were asked whether the juvenile was involved in a prostitution group (multiple juvenile and/or adult prostitutes involved). In addition, they assessed the juvenile's feelings toward the exploiter, which ranged from no bond at all to being in love with that individual. Law enforcement agents also provided information about whether the exploiter had made promises of love or romance. Finally, the time between initial contact with the exploiter to initiating prostitution activities was calculated in days and dichotomized into one day or fewer (modal category) as compared to those of more than one day.

## RESULTS

## Characteristics of Juveniles Engaged in Prostitution

Ninety-two percent of the entire sample of identified juveniles engaging in prostitution ( $N = 132$ ) was female (Table 1). More than half of these juveniles (52%) were ages 16 or 17 and the remaining juveniles (48%) were age 15 or younger. Sixty percent of juveniles involved in prostitution were White, one-third were Black, and 10% were Hispanic. Approximately 60%

**TABLE 1** Juvenile Demographic and Situational Characteristics by Internet Use ( $N = 132$ )

Characteristics	All identified juvenile cases ( $N = 132$ )	Internet used ( $n = 35$ ; 27%)	Internet not used ( $n = 97$ ; 73%)
<i>Juvenile Characteristics</i>			
Sex			
Male	8%	9%	8%
Female	92%	91%	92%
Don't know	0	0	0
Age*			
15 or younger	48%	69%	40%
16 or 17	52%	31%	60%
Don't know	<1%	0	<1%
Race/ethnicity			
White	60%	69%	57%
Black	33%	20%	38
Other	6%	11%	4%
Don't know	<1%	0	<1%
Hispanic ethnicity			
Yes	10%	6%	11%
No	90%	94%	89%
History of running away			
Yes	62%	63%	62%
No	26%	31%	24%
Don't know	12%	6%	14%
Prior arrest or detentions			
Yes	41%	46%	39%
No	42%	37%	44%
Don't know	18%	17%	17%
<i>Situational Characteristics</i>			
How case began*			
Police action	58%	43%	64%
Report	42%	57%	36%
Police treated juvenile as***			
Victim	69%	91%	61%
Delinquent	31%	9%	39%
Type of third party exploiter***			
Pimp	58%	63%	57%
Family/acquaintance abuser	11%	26%	5%
No third-party exploiter	31%	11%	38%

Note: Differences are based on chi-square tests between cases that did and did not involve the Internet.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$



of these juveniles (62%) had a history of running away, and 41% had prior arrests or detentions.

### Characteristics of Juvenile Prostitution Cases

For the entire sample of identified juvenile prostitution cases, over half (58%) began through police action, such as surveillance, while the remainder (42%) began with a report being made to law enforcement (Table 1). Police treated the juvenile as a victim in 69% of cases and as an offender in 31% of the cases. Fifty-eight percent of these cases involved a pimp as a third-party exploiter and 11% involved an abuser who was a family member or acquaintance. Thirty-one percent of the cases did not involve a third-party exploiter. This category includes cases in which the juvenile was believed to be acting alone (23%) as well as cases that involved a client (8%) but no pimp or other known third-party exploiter.

About half (48%) of these juveniles were involved in a prostitution group with other juvenile or adult prostitutes (not in table). The juveniles were reported to have varying levels of attachment to these third-party exploiters, with over one-quarter (27%) reported as close friends or in love with the exploiter. The exploiter promised love or romance to about one-third of these juveniles. In 23% of cases, the exploiter had the juvenile involved in prostitution for one day or fewer.

### Internet Use in Juvenile Prostitution Cases

Twenty-seven percent of these identified juvenile cases involved some juvenile or third-party exploiter use of the Internet (Table 1). Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare cases involving the Internet to non-Internet juvenile prostitution cases.

#### ALL JUVENILE PROSTITUTION CASES

Chi-square analyses suggested statistically significant differences in age of juveniles for Internet cases as compared to those not involving the Internet. Internet cases were significantly more likely than non-Internet cases (69% versus 40%) to involve juveniles age 15 or younger,  $X^2(1, N = 132) = 8.02$ ,  $p = .005$ . Internet-involved cases were significantly less likely than other cases to begin with police action (43% versus 64%) as compared to reports (57% versus 36%) made to law enforcement,  $X^2(1, N = 132) = 4.69$ ,  $p = .030$ . Police treated the juvenile as a victim in 91% of the Internet cases as compared to 61% of the other cases,  $X^2(1, N = 132) = 11.25$ ,  $p = .001$ . The type of third-party exploiter was significantly different for Internet and other cases, with 26% of Internet cases involving family or acquaintance abusers as compared to 5% of other cases,  $X^2(2, N = 132) = 16.33$ ,  $p = .001$ .

## THIRD-PARTY EXPLOITER CASES

Of the 91 third-party exploiter cases, 35% involved some use of the Internet (Table 2). In those third-party exploiter cases, there were significant differences in whether the offender used promises of love or romance as a tactic, with 32% of those cases involving the Internet not known to include promises as compared to 52% of those cases with no Internet involvement,  $X^2(3, N = 91) = 12.26, p = .007$ . The time to prostitution also differed significantly,  $X^2(3, N = 91) = 8.26, p = .041$ , with 29% of Internet cases involving more than one day between contact with the exploiter and the juvenile engaging in prostitution as compared to 52% of the non-Internet cases.

## Typology of Internet Use in Juvenile Prostitution Cases

Telephone interviewers documented qualitative case summary information at the end of 32 of the 35 cases that involved the Internet. These qualitative summaries suggest that the Internet was used in three primary ways in these juvenile prostitution cases. First, the Internet was used as a component of online advertising or escort services ( $n = 21$ ). Second, cases included production or attempted production of child pornography involving the Internet with some type of payment or promise of payment for the involved juvenile ( $n = 14$ ). Finally, cases involved the use of e-mail, chat rooms, and

**TABLE 2** Third Party Exploiter Case Characteristics by Internet Use (N = 91)

Characteristics	All third party exploiter cases (N = 91)	Internet used (n = 32; 35%)	Internet not used (n = 59; 65%)
Juvenile in prostitution group			
Yes	69%	61%	73%
No	13%	10%	15%
Don't know	18%	29%	12%
Feelings toward exploiter			
No bond/casual friend	43%	32%	48%
Close friend or love	39%	55%	30%
Family	10%	13%	8%
Don't know	9%	0	13%
Promises of love/romance**			
Yes	34%	39%	32%
No	45%	32%	52%
Don't know	21%	29%	17%
Time to prostitution*			
One day or fewer	33%	36%	32%
More than one day	44%	29%	52%
Don't know	23%	35%	16%

Note: Differences are based on chi-square tests between cases that did and did not involve the Internet. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$

text messages as a means of facilitating the juvenile prostitution ( $n = 5$ ). Seven cases included more than one of these types of Internet use, such as cases in which pimps used the Internet to post pornographic pictures of juveniles as a part of online advertisement.

#### ONLINE ESCORT OR ADVERTISING CASES ( $N = 21$ )

Nineteen of the cases involved pimps advertising juveniles on websites including Craigslist and Eros.com (the remaining two cases in this category did not involve pimps). These cases varied, with some involving juveniles who were advertised only online and others who were simultaneously involved in street prostitution. In several cases, law enforcement agents reported that the juveniles were first involved in street prostitution and then used in online escort services. In at least one case, the pimp charged more for online "escort services" than for street prostitution. Pimps in these cases often set up the advertisements for these juveniles and arranged meetings, although in some cases the juvenile also communicated with clients and set up the advertisements. Some of the juveniles involved in these online escort service cases also posed for sexually explicit photos, which were posted online as part of the advertisements.

One of the two online escort service cases not involving pimps came to police attention when a law enforcement agent saw an advertisement that a juvenile had created for herself. Another case involved an older sibling and another family member advertising younger sisters on Craigslist. The older sister would post information on Craigslist and then men would contact her to arrange to meet. The uncle would drive the sister and her younger sisters to various meeting places, in some instances across state lines.

#### CHILD PORNOGRAPHY PRODUCTION CASES WITH PAYMENT OR PROMISES OF PAYMENT ( $N = 14$ )

Six of the child pornography production with payment cases involved pimps either posting images for sale online or planning to post the images online for sale. This category included one case in which a juvenile sent an exploiter a topless picture of herself, then met the same man and was paid for sex on two occasions. This category also included seven cases in which the offender was not a pimp. These offenders generally paid the juveniles (or promised to pay them) as a component of a child pornography production case, more as a form of bribery or incentive. The exploiters in these cases were family members (3 cases), a friend of a parent (1), a neighbor (1), a teacher (1), and a worker at a cultural center (1).

In one child pornography with payment case involving a family member as the offender, a father was producing pornographic pictures of his eight-year-old daughter and also having other photographers take pictures of his

child. The father received royalties from the pictures. A mother in another case used a Web cam to produce and sell live sex shows. These shows included the woman's 13-year-old daughter and another girl the same age. Customers would contact the mother directly and request certain kinds of shows, then pay directly through Pay Pal. In another family offender case, a 12-year-old girl reported to police that she had been posing for pornographic pictures for her uncle. The uncle showed the juvenile pornographic pictures on the Internet as a part of a grooming process, and she posed for at least 25 graphic sexual images. In return for the pictures, she was given small amounts of money (\$20), numerous lunches, and a handheld computer game.

Another child pornography production with intended payment case involved a juvenile who left home and was living with her father's friend. That adult took sexually explicit pictures of the girl, which he planned to sell online. He had told the juvenile that he would give her half of the money that he received.

There were also production of child pornography cases that involved the Internet and some kind of payment or offer of payment for sex. In one, a schoolteacher used the Internet to offer female students money for sex. In another case, a cultural center worker paid juveniles to participate in sexual acts and pose for graphic child pornography images.

#### E-MAIL, CHAT ROOMS, AND TEXT ( $N = 5$ )

These five cases involved the use of e-mail, chat rooms, and text messages in a juvenile prostitution case. In one instance, a pimp used an e-mail account to set up meetings between a juvenile prostitute and adults. In another, a juvenile went to a Yahoo chat room for "girls who need money." Another case involved a series of instant messages between a 15-year-old and a 50-year-old man in which the juvenile was offered money for sex. One case involved a teacher who was sending sexual text messages to students and offered one 15-year-old student \$300 to have sex with him. The teacher in that case increased the offer to \$1,000 when the juvenile declined to have sex. A second teacher case involved e-mails in which the teacher offered his male students money to pose nude (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3** Qualitative Themes Regarding Ways the Internet Was Used in Juvenile Prostitution ( $N = 32$ )

Themes	<i>n</i>	% of cases
Online escort service or advertising	21	60%
Child pornography with compensation	14	44%
E-mail, text or instant message cases	5	15%

*Note:* Cases may be counted more than once to total over 100%.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

These results suggest several ways that the Internet and other online technology may be impacting juvenile prostitution. First, among these juvenile prostitution cases known to law enforcement, those incidents with an online component involved younger juveniles than other cases. It is possible that some characteristics of the Internet make it easier for third-party exploiters to involve younger juveniles in prostitution. For instance, vague statements regarding “young girls” may allow pimps to advertise without identifying the actual age of the prostitute, whereas very young juveniles may be more obvious in street prostitution.

This may also impact the finding that that the Internet-involved cases were significantly less likely than other cases to begin with police action. Whereas street prostitution may be patrolled using traditional law enforcement approaches, identifying cases of online juvenile prostitution may require more sophisticated law enforcement surveillance. Particularly in child pornography production cases, law enforcement agents can experience unique challenges and dilemmas related to digital evidence collection and victim identification (Wells, Finkelhor, Wolak, & Mitchell, 2007).

Despite these challenges, it is likely that in cases involving the Internet, law enforcement agencies are able to use technology to collect forensic evidence not always available in conventional juvenile prostitution cases (e.g., images of the abuse). This difference may contribute to the finding that police almost uniformly treated the juveniles in the Internet cases as victims rather than as delinquents. If digital evidence allows law enforcement investigators to link a juvenile with a specific pimp or other third-party exploiter, it may be that they are more likely to perceive those juveniles as victims. If third-party exploiters post juveniles’ pictures on the Internet, it may be more obvious that they are being exploited rather than acting as a delinquent. It is also interesting to note that almost 90% of the Internet cases involved some type of third-party offender. While there were some cases in which juveniles “self-advertised,” the majority of these incidents involved some type of exploitation by an adult. In about one-quarter of the Internet cases, the exploiter was a family member or other known acquaintance.

This analysis suggests that even among those cases involving a third-party exploiter, there may be differences related to online components. For instance, the finding that the Internet cases were less likely to involve exploiters who promised love or romance suggests that some of these exploiters may develop bonds based more directly on financial gain and that perhaps these juveniles are less influenced by needs to receive attention and love (Bell & Todd, 1998).

In light of these findings, efforts should be made to ascertain whether juveniles detained for prostitution can identify any digital evidence related to

their exploitation. These findings illustrate that even stereotypical pimp cases do involve the Internet, primarily for online advertising. As is the case with other law enforcement cases with digital evidence, the Internet may facilitate police efforts in some of these cases (Wells et al., 2007). Online postings, e-mail communications, and other electronic correspondence between pimps and other exploiters may provide valuable documentation in these investigations.

Juvenile prostitution cases that involved family or acquaintance abusers may come to police attention due to a commercial component, such as sale of produced child pornography. However, these cases may also include components of more conventional sexual abuse (Mitchell et al., 2005). Therefore, sexual abuse prevention messages should address online commercial exploitation possibilities, including the commercial sale of produced images and video.

### Limitations

While this study systematically collected data from a national sample of law enforcement agencies, it does not include those juvenile prostitution cases unknown to law enforcement. Among the juvenile prostitution cases known to law enforcement, specific features of the cases involving the Internet may create unique challenges. As one example, it is possible that in some of the online escort or advertising cases, law enforcement investigators did not know the actual age of the juveniles. This limitation reflects a more global law enforcement challenge related to assessment of juvenile victim age in cases that involve pictures posted online (Wells et al., 2007). In addition, these data were collected during interviews with law enforcement agents rather than the juveniles involved in the cases, so some results may reflect the respondents' assumptions about some case components. For instance, law enforcement agents were asked to assess the type of bond that the juvenile felt with the offender as a means of determining which juveniles were close friends or in love with the offender. Future studies should include data from the juveniles themselves to capture these components. Finally, due to the low response rate, these findings should be considered exploratory.

Despite these limitations, these findings suggest that juvenile prostitution cases involving the Internet may yield compelling evidence in the form of advertisements, pictures, and chat conversations. Therefore, rather than relying solely on the statements of the juveniles involved, law enforcement and social service professionals should make efforts to ascertain whether there is digital evidence of exploitation in juvenile prostitution incidents. The presence of this evidence may contribute toward a view of these juveniles as victims of sexual exploitation rather than as delinquents.

## REFERENCES

- Ashley, J. (2008). *Child sex exploitation study probes extent of victimization in Illinois* (Research Bulletin). Chicago: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Retrieved from <http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/Bulletins/CSEC%202008%20Research%20Bulletin.pdf>
- Bell, H., & Todd, C. (1998). Juvenile prostitution in a midsize city. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 27*, 93–105. doi: 10.1300/J076v27n03\_07
- Brawn, K. M., & Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2008). Female juvenile prostitutes: Exploring the relationship to substance use. *Children & Youth Services Review, 30*, 1395–1402. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.04.011
- Cates, J. A. (1989). Adolescent male prostitution by choice. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 6*, 151–156. doi: 10.1007/BF00756114
- Edwards, J. M., Iritani, B. J., & Hallfors, D. D. (2009). Prevalence and correlates of exchanging sex for drugs or money among adolescents in the United States. *Sexually Transmitted Infection, 82*, 354–358. doi: 10.1136/sti.2006.020693
- Finkelhor, D., & Ormrod, R. (2004). Prostitution of juveniles: Patterns from NIBRS. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/203946/contents.html>
- Greene, J. M., Ennett, S. T., & Ringwalt, C. L. (1999). Prevalence and correlates of survival sex among runaway and homeless youth. *American Journal of Public Health, 89*, 1406–1409. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.89.9.1406
- Halter, S. (2010). Factors that influence police conceptualizations of girls involved in prostitution in six U.S. cities: Child sexual exploitation victims or delinquents? *Child Maltreatment, 15*, 152–160. doi: 10.1177/1077559509355315
- Lanning, K. V. (2001). *Child molesters: A behavioral analysis*. Alexandria, VA: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Milloy, M. (2002). Girls, interrupted. *Essence, 33*, 160–165.
- Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2005). The Internet and family and acquaintance sexual abuse. *Child Maltreatment, 10*, 49–60. doi: 10.1177/1077559504271917
- Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2010). Conceptualizing juvenile prostitution as child maltreatment: Findings from the National Juvenile Prostitution Study. *Child Maltreatment, 15*, 18–36. doi: 10.1177/1077559509349443
- Mitchell, K. J., Jones, L. M., Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2011). Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children: Findings from a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies in the U.S. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 23*, 43–71. doi: 10.1177/1079063210374347
- Montgomery-Devlin, J. (2008). The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland: Overview from the Barnardo's Beyond the Shadows Service. *Child Care in Practice, 14*, 381–400. doi: 10.1080/13575270802268059
- Schaffer, B., & DeBlassie, R. R. (1984). Adolescent prostitution. *Adolescence, 19*, 689–696.
- Twill, S. E., Green, D. M., & Traylor, A. (2010). A descriptive study on sexually exploited children in residential treatment. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 39*, 187–199. doi: 10.1007/s10566-010-9098-2



- Tyler, K. A., Hoyt, D. R., & Whitbeck, L. B. (2000). The effects of early sexual abuse on later sexual victimization among female homeless and runaway adolescents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 15*, 235. doi: 10.1177/088626000015003001
- Wells, M., Finkelhor, D., Wolak, J., & Mitchell, K. (2007). Defining child pornography: Law enforcement dilemmas in the investigation of Internet child pornography possession. *Police Practice & Research, 8*, 269–282. doi: 10.1080/15614260701450765
- Wells, M., & Mitchell, K. (2008). How do high-risk youth use the Internet? Characteristics and implications for prevention. *Child Maltreatment, 13*, 227–234. doi: 10.1177/1077559507312962
- Williamson, C., & Cluse-Tolar, T. (2002). Pimp-controlled prostitution. *Violence Against Women, 8*, 1074–1092. doi: 10.1177/107780102401101746
- Wolak, J., Mitchell, K. J., & Finkelhor, D. (2003). *Internet sex crimes against minors: The response of law enforcement*. Alexandria, VA: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- Yates, G. L., Mackenzie, R. G., Pennbridge, J., & Swofford, A. (1991). A risk profile comparison of homeless youth involved in prostitution and homeless youth not involved. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 12*, 545–548. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0197-0070\(91\)90085-Z](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0197-0070(91)90085-Z)

#### AUTHOR NOTES

Melissa Wells, PhD, LICSW, associate professor of social work, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire.

Kimberly J. Mitchell, PhD, research associate professor of psychology, Crimes against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire.

Kai Ji, doctoral student and community, health, and environment fellow, Sociology Department, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire.