

Risk Assessment of Child Pornography Offenders: What Is and What Should Be

Relative to contact offenses, child pornography crimes represent a relatively newer type of crime. There is little psychological research addressing the risk of child pornography offenders to reoffend either with additional pornography offenses or by escalating to contact offenses with child victims. In many cases, 'experts' in the mental health field may misrepresent the limited data available during trials or sentencing phases. This workshop examines the risk factors that should be considered in a mental health risk assessment of child pornography offenders in comparison to a risk assessment of a contact child sex offender.

The presentation looks at ongoing research by the author related to all federal offenders from a recent year with both types of offenses in their history. In addition, the literature available in the field of psychology is explored and explained as it relates to relative risk of reoffending in general as well as how it informs risk of individual offenders. Topics include types of images, degree of violence of images, background of offenders, online activities of offenders, and other variables that impact an individual's risk to reoffend.

This workshop is directed primarily at attorneys who work these types of cases. Investigating law enforcement agencies will also benefit from the presentation as the information gathered in the early stages of the investigations is critical to a positive outcome in the courtroom. Professionals in the field of mental health, law, and law enforcement frequently work together various stages in these cases, and child pornography offenses offer a unique opportunity for inter-department and multi-disciplinary cooperation.

The presentation utilizes professional experience, personal research studies, other available research, and video of interviews of sex offenders (contact offenders and child pornography offenders) and victims. Some data presented stems from a recent (2015) publication by Dr. Turner and prosecuting attorneys for the United States Attorney General's Office Project Safe Childhood branch which examines a sample of defense expert reports used during sentencing of federal child pornography offenders. Based on consulting requests and increasing testimony provided by the author across the nation, there is an increasing need for this type of information.