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Law Enforcement Responses to Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crimes: The National Juvenile Online Victimization Study, 2000 & 2006

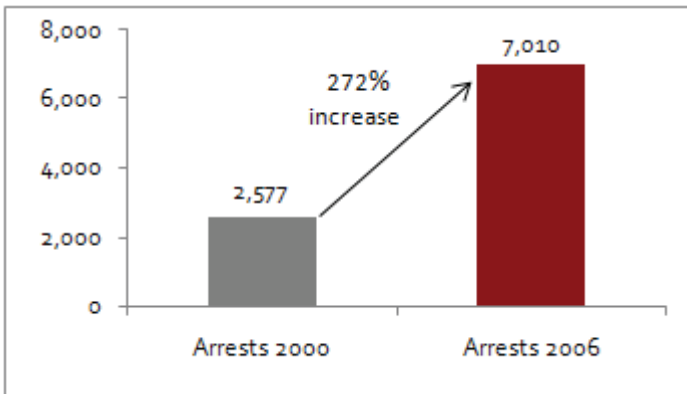
Janis Wolak, David Finkelhor & Kimberly J. Mitchell

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Arrests for online child sexual exploitation crimes increased substantially between 2000 and 2006.

In 2006, U.S. law enforcement agencies made an estimated 7,010 arrests for online child sexual exploitation crimes, close to 3 times as many as in 2000 (Figure 1). This increase seems to be a direct result of increased law enforcement activity.

Figure 1. Numbers of arrests, 2000 & 2006

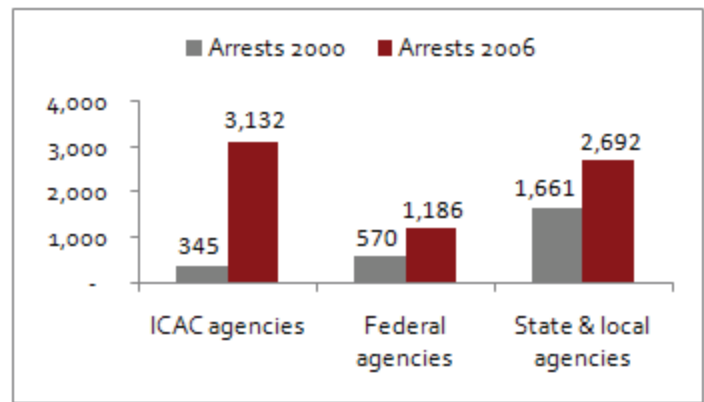


Arrests increased in all categories of crimes.

Arrests for crimes with identified victims increased by one-third. Some of the arrested offenders were online predators, but others were family members or acquaintances of victims that used the Internet to facilitate sexual abuse. Estimated numbers of arrests in 2006 include:

- 615 arrests for online predation, an increase of about 20% compared to 508 in 2000
- 877 arrests for family or acquaintance sexual abuse, an increase of about 80% over the 490 in 2000
- 3,100 arrests for solicitations to undercover investigators posing online as minors, an increase of almost 500% from 644 in 2000
- 2,417 arrests solely for child pornography (CP) possession or distribution, more than double the 935 in 2000

Figure 2. Agencies making arrests, 2000 & 2006



Arrests increased among agencies at every level.

Arrests by Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces increased sharply because of the growing number of state and local agencies formally affiliated with Task Forces through written agreements (Figure 2).

In 1 out of 6 cases, investigations of child pornography possession caught child molesters.

In 2006, about 3,672 arrested offenders possessed CP. About 70% of these cases began with investigations of CP possession. (30% began with suspicions of child molestation.) In both 2000 and 2006, 1 in 6 cases that began with investigations of CP possession caught offenders who had molested children.

More agencies handled cases independently.

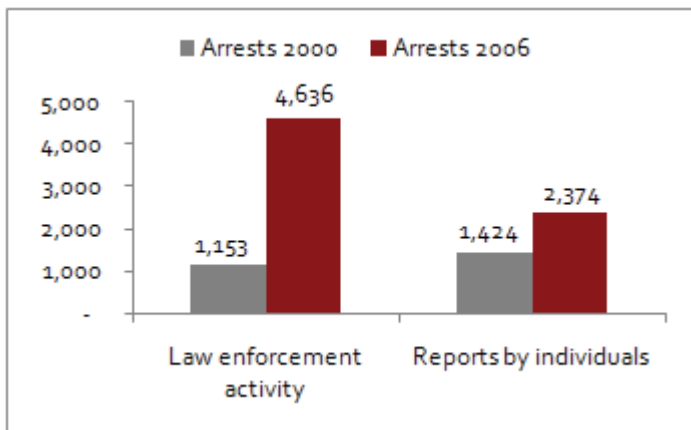
In both 2006 and 2000, many cases involved multiple agencies. But the percent decreased in 2006.

- **Multiple agencies** were involved in half of 2006 arrest cases, compared to about 80% in 2000.
- **Federal agencies** were involved in about 30% of 2006 cases, compared to over 45% in 2000.

Law enforcement initiatives generated more arrests in 2006.

Law enforcement was increasingly proactive. Two-thirds of arrests in 2006 originated with law enforcement activity (rather than reports from individuals), compared to only 45% in 2000 (Figure 3). Most of this activity was undercover operations targeting online predators or CP.

Figure 3. Reports vs. law enforcement activity, 2000 & 2006



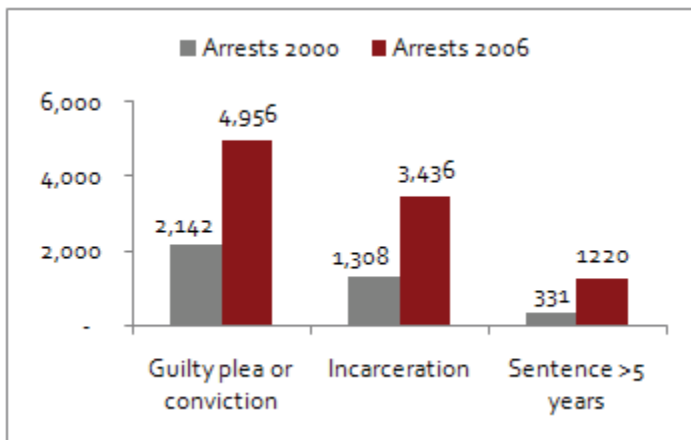
In 2006, more offenders were incarcerated and sentences were longer.

In both 2000 and 2006, about 95% of cases with known outcomes ended in guilty pleas or convictions at trial, a high conviction rate for sex crimes (Figure 4).

- In 2006, 65% of offenders were sentenced to incarceration, compared to less than 60% in 2000.
- Close to 25% were sentenced to more than 5 years, compared to 15% in 2000.

Since offenses were similar in terms of seriousness, the increases in incarceration and sentences probably reflect more aggressive responses by law enforcement.

Figure 4. Cases with known outcomes, 2000 & 2006



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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The *National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study* systematically examined the number of arrests for online child sexual exploitation crimes, their characteristics and law enforcement activity directed at such crimes throughout the US. We collected data through mail surveys of agencies to determine if they had relevant cases, followed by telephone interviews with investigators about specific arrest cases reported in the mail surveys. The NJOV Study includes 612 interviews about arrests in 2000 and 1,051 interviews about arrests in 2006. In early 2010, we will survey agencies about arrests in 2009.

The numbers in the figures were weighted to provide national estimates. Arrests noted as in 2000 happened between July 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001 and 2006 arrests happened during that calendar year.

Presentation slides of the information in this bulletin, along with other NJOV Study papers and reports are available at our website: www.unh.edu/ccrc.

We welcome inquiries about our research. Please contact Janis.Wolak@unh.edu.



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