

## **Are Crimes by Online Predators Different From Crimes by Sex Offenders Who Know Youth In-Person?**

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### **Are Crimes by Online Predators Different From Crimes by Sex Offenders Who Know Youth In-Person?**

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#### **Source**

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#### **Abstract**

##### **PURPOSE:**

We examined cases in which sex offenders arrested for Internet-related crimes used the Internet for sexual communications with minors, comparing crimes by offenders who met victims online to those by offenders who knew victims in-person prior to the offense.

##### **METHODS:**

We collected data from a national sample of law enforcement agencies (n = 2,653) about arrests in 2009 for Internet-related sex crimes against minors, conducting detailed telephone interviews with investigators about individual cases. This paper examines a subset of arrest cases that included the use of online sexual communications (online-meeting offenders, n = 143; know-in-person/online offenders, n = 139).

##### **RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS:**

Compared with know-in-person/online offenders, online-meeting offenders were less likely to have criminal backgrounds and more likely to use online communications to deceive victims. However, deception was a factor in a minority of cases and was also used by some know-in-person/online offenders. The majority of cases in both groups involved statutory rape (i.e., nonforcible illegal sexual activity with underage youth) or noncontact offenses such as child pornography production or sexual solicitation of a minor. We conclude that crimes by online-meeting offenders should not be treated as different or more dangerous than those by know-in-person/online offenders who use online sexual communications. Rather, prevention efforts should educate about the nature of statutory rape and related noncontact offenses. The primary message should be that it is criminal for adults to make sexual overtures to minors, online or offline, no matter what their relationship to the youth.

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**KEYWORDS:**

Child sexual abuse, Internet-related sex crime, Nonforcible sexual offense,  
Statutory rape

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