



SundayTribune



1 IN 3 women will be raped, abused or beaten in her lifetime. **That's one too many.** [WAKE UP >](#)

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Readers are warned that these articles contain graphic descriptions - Child Porn: Underground, online and in your street

The rise of the internet has sparked a massive increase in the trading of child pornography by Irish people. The figures are staggering, the images truly shocking, reports Ali Bracken, Crime Correspondent.

THIS WEEKEND in towns across the length and breadth of the country, men are sitting in the comfort of their homes downloading and swapping images of children being raped. Some of the children are still infants. Others are older and the pain and realisation of what's happening to them is visible on their young faces. In one of the most graphic photographs ever detected, an attempt is made to orally rape a newborn baby still attached to its mother by the umbilical cord.



A crime that crosses class boundaries: Circuit Court judge Brian Curtin was prosecuted for buying child pornography over the internet with his credit card

1 2 3

Some men (and possibly women too) are sitting alone in darkened rooms as they download these images across Ireland. Others may be gazing out the window at children playing on the street.

"The depth of this problem we have in Ireland is beyond shocking," says Dr Niall Muldoon, national clinical director of CARI (Children at Risk in Ireland). "This has to be a wake-up call. The people who are doing this are living in communities all over the country. They are our neighbours, people we all know."

In the first six months of this year, there were almost 5,000 detections of people downloading or trading in child pornography in Ireland on peer-to-peer networks (P2P). Some of these individuals swapped and downloaded child porn hundreds of times within a few weeks.

In the first three months of the year, more than 1,000 computers across the country each month were downloading or trading these illegal images with people online all over the world. Following an RTÉ Prime Time Investigates programme at the end of May, the number of computers in Ireland downloading or trading in child porn dropped to 235 in the first half of June. This decrease is being attributed to fears by those involved in this illegal activity that they will be detected.

Some people participating in this depraved criminal activity must have been glued to their computers almost continuously – one Dublin-based individual's PC was detected 315 times in January downloading or sharing images of sexual abuse of children. There is an undisputed link between people who access child pornography and paedophilia.

The most worrying development in the child porn industry at present is the sharp rise in people with an interest in photos of children being sodomised participating in this activity on peer-to-peer networks.

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It works like this: P2P file-sharing networks allow users access each other's computer hard drives to share files. These networks act as online communities where members with similar interests share, search and download files which are located on their computers. Each member of the community has its own collection of files which it shares with others. All the members of the community have the same software, so enabling the transferring of files.

Once installed, community members can start downloading files from each other's computers. The members of each group can be from anywhere in the world. It is possible to download a single file, an entire directory, or an entire hard drive. P2P is predominantly used for the sharing of music and movie files. But it is also perfect for the distribution of child pornography.

Sheer scale is horrifying

Software company TLO, based in Florida, has created a software analysis system that can analyse if people are trading or downloading other people's child pornography images on peer-to-peer systems. It provided the Sunday Tribune with a snapshot of the situation in Ireland – in terms of activity of those sharing and downloading child porn images on P2P networks – from January until the middle of June. The sheer scale of activity is horrifying. But what makes it even worse is that this is not the full picture.

"The actual activity in child pornography I'm sure is actually much higher. As well as the thousands detected by TLO on peer-to-peer, that's only one way people access child porn. The other popular way is by buying child pornography on the internet. The rise in 'pay as you go' credit cards has ensured people can continue to do this," says John Carr of the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online (ENACSO).

'The situation is far worse'

He has been an adviser to the British government and the UN on safeguarding young people's use of the internet and associated new technologies. "I'm afraid the actual situation in Ireland is probably far worse than your figures show. While there has been a rise of sharing of child porn on peer-to-peer networks, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) estimates that a significant proportion of the child porn industry is commercial. So more people are still selling pictures of kids online rather than sharing them on peer-to-peer."

The internet has facilitated the child porn industry to a greater extent than any other illegal business in the world. While people running websites selling these images of children are continually prosecuted and have their sites shut down, they reappear online in different guises and regularly change web addresses. Most of the developed world including the UK – but not Ireland – has blocked access to child porn websites. The government has promised that legislation is on the way to bring Ireland up to standard with most of the rest of the modern world in this regard.

But even though access to child porn websites to buy images is still possible in Ireland, those interested in doing so know these sites are monitored by gardaí. This is another reason why peer-to-peer trading in these illegal photos and videos is so popular.

People think it's undetectable even though gardaí have now been trained in how to monitor this relatively new activity. The use of personal credit cards to buy child porn is also fast disappearing. It's seen as a 'rookie mistake' nowadays. A garda probe in 2002, Operation Amethyst, led to over 100 arrests and several prosecutions.

Circuit Court judge Brian Curtin and celebrity chef Tim Allen were among those prosecuted for buying child porn with their own credit cards. Because of this – and as people sharing child porn delude themselves that by not paying for it they are not committing a crime – people in Ireland who wish to look at images of sodomised children have embraced P2P file sharing.

"Because a lot of the websites selling child porn have been outlawed, this has forced a lot of people to trade and barter for child porn," says Steve Racioppo, chief operating officer at TLO. "This has meant that the trading and downloading of child porn on peer-to-peer networks has really flourished. It's basically people seeking out other like-minded people online and forging communities."

TLO also monitors activities in chat rooms and other internet-based communications. It provides this service free of charge to 36 countries worldwide and across many of the US states as part of its philanthropic ethos.


Recently, a detective from the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit underwent a training seminar in Denmark by TLO. Essentially, this officer will now be able to use the company's software to detect when, and exactly where, people in Ireland are using peer-to-peer networks to download and share child pornography.

"The technology we provide is just a tool used by law enforcements worldwide to monitor the situation. After we provide them with the data, extensive police work must take place in terms of building cases against people. In a way, what we provide law-enforcement agencies with are very good leads. But we have provided data to police all over the world that has led to arrests and prosecutions," adds Racioppo.

"The gardaí are now involved and we hope that information we provide to them will be useful. The data we provide is people trading and downloading child porn involving children eight years and under. If we were monitoring it for children under 18, can you

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imagine how high our figures would be?"

A disturbing consequence of like-minded people forging online communities and sharing child porn rather than buying it anonymously from websites ensures that people with similar urges to abuse children begin to communicate regularly.

Soon, they begin to swap tips on how to gain access to and groom children. And not long after that, people who initially had only a vague interest in the world of paedophilia are beginning to make plans about how they can get photos of children to share with their new friends.

Avid collectors of child pornography consider themselves serious hobbyists. It is a way of normalising the crimes they are actively participating in. It is a sad fact that "collections" of child abuse images exist. And people will go to extraordinary lengths to assemble an entire set.

"It's like any hobby – similar to people who collect stamps or train spotters. There is a collection of child porn images called the 'Helen' series. They are stills taken from a video of a young girl being raped, over a dozen. To collect every picture in that series for someone actively involved in child porn is very sought after. That would be a prized thing," explains John Carr.

"The children in these images are given names. There is another series involving pictures of a boy being abused at different ages over the course of his life. Again, having a complete set of images of this boy being abused at different ages would be very sought after. It's almost unbelievable. But believe me, this is happening."

Before the internet went mainstream in the mid-'90s, people with urges to view pictures of children being raped had no channel for their desire. So, in most cases, these feelings did not have the opportunity to flourish and intensify.

In 1995, Interpol had 4,000 photos or videos containing child pornography. Now, there are millions of unique images. In 1995, the number of children abused in order to produce child porn was in the hundreds. Today, tens of thousands of children are being raped and assaulted to satisfy this burgeoning industry.

"Child porn images have become more violent, more extreme, and younger children are being abused all the time. They keep pushing the boundaries. As well as images of an attempt to orally rape an infant child with its umbilical cord still attached, there are pictures of a two-month-old baby girl in a nappy being raped. There are lots of horrific examples, unfortunately," adds Carr.

"Before the internet, there were of course people who wanted to look at pictures like these. They were usually loner types, they knew they were weird. But the internet has given these people a community to explore these desires they have. It helps them reach out. A lot of the guys who get involved in this crime would never have had it if it wasn't for the internet."

There is no 'typical profile' of the type of man who is attracted to child pornography. Men of all ages and social class engage in the activity.

"In many cases, it starts off as a passing fancy to have sex with children. Some people will think they're interested, download pictures once and then never do it again because it disgusts them. But for many others, the more images they see, it's an edge that keeps creeping up," explains TLO's Steve Racioppo.

"They begin to enjoy trading pictures with others online; that normalises it. They enjoy the sensationalism of it and it satisfies them to find like-minded people. Things outside the norm become the norm. Sometimes the men who are into child porn can often be into cruelty to animals, bestiality and incest. Often, these people have abused themselves."

'It's a troubling thought'

In the US, there have been countless examples of several male members of the same family all being active participants in downloading child porn. In one case, police detected three generations of men in the one family living under the same roof who were all involved.

"In one case, a grandfather, his son and the grandson were all involved," says Steve Racioppo. "It's a troubling thought how something like that could develop."

In the vast majority of instances of women being detected engaging in this crime, they are being coerced to do so by the bullying influence of a man in their lives, according to John Carr.

The number of detections by TLO of people in Ireland downloading and trading in child porn is not disproportionate.

"From all the countries we provide data to, we would describe Ireland as in the zone of average. We would not classify Ireland as a cesspool of activity but Ireland is clearly not unaffected by this crime either," says Steve Racioppo. "In a four-week period in the US, one million computers are involved in this activity. People in Ireland and all over the world need to stand up and address this problem. For the safety of our kids."

Where the child pornography consumers lurk (distinct internet i.p. addresses by town/city, 2010 figures)