



American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

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APSAC Statement on the Harm to Child Pornography Victims

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The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children ("APSAC") is an interdisciplinary professional society focusing on child maltreatment. With more than 26 years of existence and a central role in the development of professional guidelines addressing child abuse and neglect, APSAC is well qualified to help inform the multidisciplinary field about the current nature of child pornography and the harm it causes its victims.

More than thirty years ago, in *New York v. Ferber*, 458 U.S.747 (1982), the United States Supreme Court recognized that "[t]he distribution of photographs and films depicting sexual activity by juveniles is intrinsically related to the sexual abuse of children . . . the materials produced are a permanent record of the children's participation and the harm to the child is exacerbated by their circulation." Because of the harm to children who are the victims of child pornography, in *Ferber* the Supreme Court declared that, unlike adult pornography, child pornography is entitled to no First Amendment protection and can be banned.

For the victims, the sexual abuse of the child, the memorialization of that abuse which becomes child pornography, and its subsequent distribution and viewing become psychologically intertwined and each compound the harm suffered by the child-victim.

Some children are shown pornography as part of the conditioning and desensitization process generally known as "grooming". Other children are aware that the abuse is being captured as photographs or movies. Some of the child sexual victimization that is photographed and/or video recorded are then distributed worldwide on the internet. There is presently no way to destroy these pornographic images and/or videos from the internet and the external media where they may be downloaded, stored, and further distributed.

Children and adults who enter mental health treatment having been used sexually to create child pornography may present with a range of reactions. Some are unaware of the pornography. Some are aware of it and express concerns that other children will be shown it as part of the abuse of those children. Some children express great concern that other offenders will use the images of their abuse for their own gratification. While some children worry whether friends, peers, parents or others will find the pornography. The fear that their abuse will be revealed can become a constant worry that goes with them throughout their childhood, adolescence and into their adult lives.

The long-term harm associated with child sexual victimization is well studied and clearly established. Child sexual victimization may generate a number of social, psychological, and health effects that occur more frequently among victims of child sexual abuse than non-victims. These effects may include depression, anxiety, impaired health, suicide, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, as well as alcohol, drug, gambling, sexual and other compulsive behaviors, and sexual functioning problems. Some effects are transient while others can last for decades if not an entire lifetime. The effects may also fluctuate or be triggered in response to various events or developments. Consequently, victims may benefit from treatment throughout their lifespan but especially during periods of increased distress.

The production of child pornography necessitates the sexual abuse of the child. As the Supreme Court correctly pointed out, in addition to the effects of child sexual abuse described above, victims of child pornography often experience an exacerbation of harms and/or additional problems. These may include shame, embarrassment, fear of being identified, vulnerability from having their abuse filmed, fear that adults are viewing and being sexual with themselves or other children, and the realization that the image of their abuse will last forever on the internet. APSAC members have seen each of these harms in children and adults who are victims of child pornography.