The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Establishing Successful Internet Predator Investigations for Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies

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An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Establishing successful internet predator investigations for smaller law enforcement agencies is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the area of cyber crime and internet predators is growing exponentially. The explosion of these crimes and the threat they pose to the children in these jurisdictions means that these agencies are going to need to develop innovative ways to successfully investigate and prosecute internet predators. These law enforcement agencies typically cannot readily afford to simply purchase the space, equipment, and training needed to conduct these investigations, so the relevance of being able to successfully investigate and prosecute internet predators is readily apparent.

The purpose of this research is to discover where smaller departments stand currently in the areas of: internet predator investigations, technology, and their investigations of these covert crimes. The research examines issues relating to how departments believe they are doing in the area internet predator investigations, and identifies what the major obstacles are for these departments in establishing successful internet predator investigations. The research will also discover if these departments feel their local prosecutors are adequately prepared to successfully prosecute these predators.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to twenty two survey participants. The survey was submitted and returned by eighteen different agencies. The results of the survey were compiled and will be presented in this research. The researcher discovered that smaller law enforcement agencies can use non-traditional

means to acquire the needed training, funds, and equipment to conduct successful

internet predator investigations. The statistics and survey completed will also make a

convincing argument to any law enforcement administrator of any agency that the

feasibility and necessity of initiating these investigations is within any agency's grasp.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not smaller law enforcement agencies can successfully implement and maintain successful internet predator investigations with a limited budget, manpower, and equipment, including where to house and conduct these operations within these agencies. Also, whether the prosecutors in these jurisdictions are ready and able to successfully prosecute these offenders will be examined.

The relevance of establishing successful online internet predator investigations and prosecutions to law enforcement is that these crimes are a wave of the future in law enforcement. Law enforcement is woefully behind in the area of crimes involving computers and the internet. As these criminals turn more and more to computers and the internet to commit their crimes, the exploitation of the most prevalent users of the internet, children, will become one of the most heinous crimes using this medium. Law enforcement agencies and prosecutors who can establish those investigations now will be able to monitor trends and successfully investigate other criminals in this arena.

The purpose of this research is to examine and propose ways in which smaller law enforcement agencies can successfully investigate and prosecute internet predators. The research will examine budgetary options, training tactics, and avenues to acquire the needed equipment and space to conduct these investigations. The research will also examine ways to prepare and educate local county and district attorney offices to successfully prosecute these predators.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not smaller law enforcement agencies can initiate and investigate successful online predator

investigations with limited budgets, manpower, equipment and space, and training for their officers. It will also examine if these smaller agencies have prosecuting attorneys that are versed and prepared to successfully prosecute these offenders.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to twenty two survey participants. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show that even smaller agencies and their prosecuting attorneys can be successful in the investigation and prosecution of internet predators.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because as smaller agencies are required to do more and more with less money, a way to prosecute internet predators in their jurisdiction on a limited budget will make the community and citizens those agencies serve protected more form these predators, which in turn could give rise to additional funds being channeled to that agency and will make the bond between those agencies, the prosecuting attorneys, and the communities they serve better and stronger than before.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The videotape located by law enforcement was of typical hobbyist camcorder quality, and the subject matter was not much better filming an insurance seminar. A man named William Steen was talking into the camera and displaying his computer equipment as he logged into multiple services such as America Online and CompuServe. He spoke of an upcoming trip to meet Davey, showed off gifts that he had bought for Davey, and showed a picture sent to him of Davey. It appeared an uncle was filming preparations for an upcoming trip to see the nephew he doted over.

Unfortunately, William Steen was in fact a pedophile who was planning another trip to meet another young boy.

Law enforcement agencies today are faced with a rapidly rising population of an old predator in a new arena. Child predators and pedophiles of today feel that they can safely abandon their attempts to become ingratiated in limiting areas of their surrounding communities to align themselves and gain the trust of children and parents alike and stalk the vast jungles of the World Wide Web in almost complete anonymity. These predators exist in every facet of society, from unemployed criminals to high society heads of major corporations. They have even infiltrated the ranks of public servants including fire fighters and police officers. These predators reach every jurisdiction that a computer can be found, and in turn those jurisdictions will need to establish some sort of plan to combat them and protect the children in their communities.

The prevalence of children on the internet today is growing by leaps and bounds. According to one study, the number of children on the internet as of 2001 was about 17 million youths ages 12 to 17 years of age. This represents about 73 percent people in this age bracket (Henderson, 2005, pp. 38-39). Another study revealed that one in five children has received an online sexual solicitation in the last year. The study also says that only about 25 percent of all teens who were approached told a parent about the encounter. The study further revealed that one in 33 solicitations was considered aggressive, meaning the predator called, sent money or gifts, or suggested a face-to-face meeting. Although there are no firm statistics, a forthcoming study suggests that nine out of ten predators that travel to meet their victims admitted that they had sexually

molested children before their arrest (Kyrik, 2006, p. 1). These statistics show the need for all agencies to incorporate some type of internet predator investigations in their jurisdictions. These criminals are not a new breed of offender, rather the same individuals who are simply using a new medium (Lanning, 1998, p. 1).

There seem to be many roadblocks for smaller agencies to initiate and follow through with these investigations. However, any agency, if dedicated, can successfully investigate and prosecute online sexual predators. The first thing to look at is to avoid problems usually associated with law enforcement practices, computer crime investigation problems, and lack of institutional support. As far as law enforcement practices, police place priority on drugs and violence rather than computer crimes. Police fear not being computer savvy and afraid of technology. Police resist change and adaptation to new technologies while criminals embrace them. Finally, many department's elect to make the computer "hobbyist" responsible for these investigations rather than adequately train skilled computer investigators and forensic analysts. In the area of computer crime problems, the underreporting of these crimes lead to under funding and the belief that these crimes are isolated. Also, the fact that digital and electronic evidence is harder to capture rather than concrete evidence at a crime scene such as a weapon or drugs. In the arena of institutional support, there are few skilled investigators and forensic specialists, little or no budget allocation to purchase needed equipment, and insufficient training (Cheurprakobkit, Sutham, & Pena, 2003, pp. 25-26).

In 2000 the FBI began investigating a Yahoo discussion group called "Candyman". This group was engaged in posting and exchanging pornographic photos of children. In 2002, the FBI searched 231 homes and businesses and arrested 86

suspects in 26 states (Henderson, 2005, p. 41). Although local law enforcement agencies will not be able to conduct an operation of this magnitude, every agency can help protect the children in their jurisdiction. Together, these agencies could have the same effect. A survey conducted by the researcher of smaller agencies in Texas revealed that none had a full time internet predator investigator, 44 percent had a part time investigator, and 56 percent had no one investigating these crimes. On the other hand, 72 percent reported that they know of minors in their jurisdiction who had been contacted by an internet predator and 61 percent knew of an internet predator who had been arrested from their jurisdiction. Also, 72 percent of the officers surveyed felt that an investigator, either full or part time, is needed at their agencies. When asked about the obstacles in the way of having an investigator at their agencies, 39 percent report a lack of training, 28 percent report a lack of funds and/or equipment, and six percent cite a lack of support from their administration. As far as technology, 44 percent reported that their agencies were behind in that field, 44 percent report they felt they were about average, and only six percent felt that their agencies were on the cutting edge. The survey reveals that although more than half of the agencies had no internet predator investigator, almost three quarters feel that they need one, especially since three quarters have actually had children in their jurisdiction contacted by an internet predator and more than half had actually had an internet predator arrested from their jurisdiction. The survey also revealed that although many agencies feel they need an investigator for internet predators the lack of funds, training, and equipment seem to be the major obstacles.

METHODOLGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not smaller law enforcement agencies and their prosecutors can conduct successful internet predator investigations. The question will examine how smaller agencies can find or create their own funding, what type of space and equipment is needed and where that can be obtained, and the training of the officers who will be conducting these investigations. Also, the question will examine if the prosecutors for these agencies are equipped and versed in the law in order t successfully prosecute these criminals.
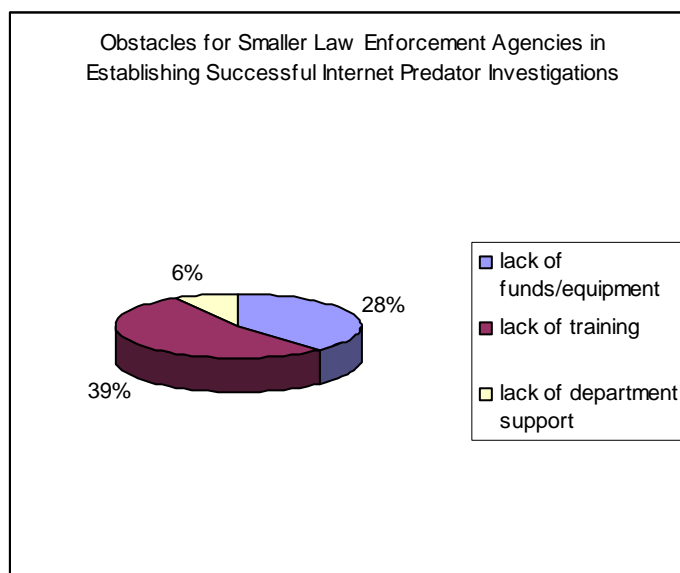
The researcher hypothesizes that smaller agencies with limited budgets, space, and manpower can initiate and successfully investigate internet predators. The researcher also hypothesizes that the prosecutors for these agencies will be able to successfully prosecute these criminals.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, and journals. Also, a survey will be distributed to twenty five survey participants that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of successful internet predator prosecutions. The size of the survey will consist of ten questions, distributed to twenty five survey participants from medium to small agencies in Texas.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in nineteen responses to the twenty two surveys, or eighty six percent return rate. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by evaluating the responses to the posed questions and analyze the needs of the smaller agencies.

FINDINGS

The research showed three key points that smaller law enforcement agencies are up against when establishing successful internet predator investigations. The three points are the lack of training, lack of funds and/or equipment, and lack of support from the administration of the department. There were different reasons for these shortfalls, but for whatever reasons they exist most can be resolved through the same manner.

Obstacles for Smaller Law Enforcement Agencies in
Establishing Successful Internet Predator Investigations

6%

28%

39%

- lack of funds/equipment
- lack of training
- lack of department support

Lack of training was cited as the biggest obstacle in the successful investigation of these internet predators. There are several ways in which training can be received by a law enforcement agency. One of the biggest problems in this area is the allowance of officers to take time from their current assignments to receive this training. In this area departments are going to have to show their dedication to this worthwhile cause in allowing these officers to attend training. However, this training can be accomplished in several ways. One way a department received training was to contact a nearby department that was having great success with its predator investigations. That larger department invited would-be internet predator investigators from the smaller agency to

spend a few days with them and see how these investigations were done. The smaller

department also had one of its investigators that had family living in that same city. By

simply networking with successful units in other cities and using available resources, the

smaller agency received real time training and actually chatted on line under the

supervision of the other investigators for only a few days pay and a few meals. Since

receiving that training, that smaller agency, in about one years time using only a few

part time investigators, has arrested eight predators who have traveled to their city to

meet who they thought were young children for sex and have warrants outstanding for

two more, with about 25 active cases open.   Another option is to contact those

agencies with successful operations or even government organizations such as ICAC

(Internet Crimes Against Children) in order to receive training. Agencies can then host

training in this area. The agency can receive funding as others pay to attend the class

as well as keep their officers in town and have them trained as well.

Lack of funds and equipment was cited as another major obstacle in smaller

agencies for establishing successful internet predator investigations. This area tends to

be one in which the initial funding seems difficult, but there are several ways around it.

When one smaller agency decided that they would become proactive in the

investigation and apprehension of internet predators, that agency approached the local

district attorney (and elected position) and told him of their plan. The only problem was

the department did not have the funds to initiate these investigations. The district

attorney used funds in his budget to purchase all of the necessary equipment and

software to get the team started. After that as the team arrested these predators and

executed search warrants on their residences, they seized their computers and other

electronic equipment. This equipment was then used by the investigators or sold to fund other needed items. The investigators also used the cities own IT (information technology) department to spec out the computer hardware and software needed. In almost every town there are charity organizations and even other computer software business that will donate all or part of the needed hardware and software. Contacting agencies that have these investigations already can readily advise anyone of the basic equipment needed. The computer will need to be stand alone and in a secure area. As in the case of the agency already mentioned before, they used a large storage closet and placed a keypad lock on the door. The local cable company supplied them with a high speed independent line with a fictitious name and the cities I.T. department was able to mask the true user of the computer with the fictitious name used by the cable company. This required only a few phone calls and no money to establish.

The final hurdle that the survey revealed was a lack of support from the departments. With facts and statistics that have been presented, it should be easy to convince any administrator that even part time investigators of internet predators are a winning proposition. One thing that the survey revealed was that 17 percent reported working in conjunction with other entities. In this manner agencies who wish to establish these investigations can share the cost even more with nearby agencies in acquiring equipment, funds, and training. If administrators still are not convinced of the need for even part time investigators, there are several citizen groups and elected officials that could voice their concern with the fact that the agency is turning a blind eye to the problem of internet predators.

The research has shown how problems such as lack of training, lack of funding and equipment, and lack of departmental support can be easily overcome to establish successful internet predator investigations. The above mentioned agency began their investigations of internet predators by spending no more than a few hundred dollars to secure a small room within the department. The investigators were able to receive training by working with another agency and having the district attorney's office supply the basic equipment that the city's I.T. department specified for the investigators. Since that time the investigators have seized enough computer equipment and vehicles to continue to easily fund the investigations. These investigations are good for the agency, and great for the community, especially the children.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not it would be feasible to establish successful internet predator investigations in smaller law enforcement agencies. The purpose of this research was to find ways in which smaller law enforcement agencies can successfully conduct and prosecute these internet predators. The research question that was examined focused on smaller law enforcement agencies and their ability to successfully investigate and prosecute internet predators on limited budgets and manpower.

The researcher hypothesized that it would be possible for smaller law enforcement agencies to utilize different means in securing funds, equipment, and training for the investigation and prosecution of internet predators. The researcher concluded from the findings that there are different and innovative ways of obtaining the

necessary funds, equipment, and training to successfully investigate and prosecute internet predators.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason(s) why the findings did support the hypothesis is/are probably due to the location of training avenues and equipment allocation afforded to smaller law enforcement agencies. Also, enough evidence was presented to easily point out the amount of internet predators trolling for children will make any administrator realize that this is a growing crime problem here to stay.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because of the number of surveys submitted and/or returned. Further, there are now programs and other avenues for funding and training being developed almost weekly, so those will not be mentioned in this research. The study of establishing successful investigations of internet predators is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because this is a growing problem. As technology continues to advance, law enforcement agencies of all sizes will have to advance with it. As stated before, these are not new breeds of criminals, rather the same criminal law enforcement has been after, just in a new medium.

Law enforcement agencies, their jurisdictions, and especially the children that these agencies are sworn to protect all stand to be benefited by the results of this research by these agencies being more prepared and able to attack the problem of internet predators. Whether your agency has 700 or seven officers, these predators are preying on our children right now.

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APPENDIX/APPENDICES

<u>LAW ENFORCEMNT SURVEY</u>

This survey is to be used for the sole purpose of creating a research paper for the LEMIT class #69. The paper is concerning establishing successful Internet predator investigations and prosecutions for smaller agencies. Please see the end of the survey for return mail directions. Thank you for your time in completing this survey. (The survey is front and back)

1) What is the size of your law enforcement agency?
    A. under 25 officers
    B. 25-75 officers
    C. 75-125 officers
    D. 125+ officers

2) What is the approximate population of the jurisdiction your agency covers?
    A. under 10,000
    B. 10,000-25,000
    C. 25,000-50,000
    D. 50,000+

3) Your jurisdiction is:
    A. Municipal
    B. County
    C. State
    D. Federal
    E. Other_____

4) Do you have a unit or officer(s) dedicated to the proactive investigation of internet predators of minor?
    A. yes-full time
    B. yes-part time
    C. no

5) Have you, to your knowledge, had an internet predator of minors chat with or contact a resident of your jurisdiction?
    A. yes
    B. no

6) Have you, to your knowledge, had an internet predator of minors arrested from your jurisdiction?
    A. yes
    B. no

7) Do you feel that you need full or part time internet predator of minors investigator in your agency?

      A. yes

      B. no

8) If you do not have any type of internet predator of minor investigations initiated by your agency and you believe there should be, what is the major hindrance?

      A. lack of funds and equipment

      B. lack of space

      C. lack of trained officers

      D. lack of support from agency

      E. lack of support from governing body (city, county, state, etc.)

      F. other

_____

_____

9) Do you believe that in the case of an internet predator of a minor, your prosecuting agencies would be knowledgeable and equipped to assist you in your investigation and to successfully prosecute an internet predator?

      A. yes

      B. no

10) Do you feel that your agency is behind, close to current, or on the cutting edge of today's technology as it relates to computer crimes in general and internet predator of minor investigations specifically?

      A. behind the times

      B. close to current

      C. on the cutting edge

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Please return at your earliest convenience to:

<div align="center">

Sgt. Shane Bush

Bryan Police Department

P.O. Box 1000

Bryan, Texas

77805

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If you have any questions please contact Shane Bush at:

(979) 209-5362

bushs@bryantx.gov

SURVEY SUBMITTED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES:

1. Aldine Independent School District Police Department
2. Alvin Independent School District Police Department
3. Aubrey Police Department
4. Borger Police Department
5. Bryan Police Department
6. Comal County Sheriff's Department
7. Elgin Police Department
8. Farmer's Branch Police Department
9. Floresville Police Department
10. Galveston Police Department
11. Harris County Constable Precinct 4
12. Horizon City Police Department
13. Humble Police Department
14. Huntsville Police Department
15. Jasper County Constable Precinct 2
16. Jonestown Police Department
17. Kemah Police Department
18. Lacy-Lakeview Police Department
19. Lake Jackson Police Department
20. Reno Police Department
21. Texas State University-San Marcos Police Department
22. Weatherford Police Department