


GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-757T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The availability of child pornography has dramatically increased in recent years as it has migrated from printed material to the World Wide Web, becoming accessible through Web sites, chat rooms, newsgroups, and now the increasingly popular peer-to-peer file sharing programs. These programs enable direct communication between users, allowing users to access each other's files and share digital music, images, and video.

GAO was requested to determine the ease of access to child pornography on peer-to-peer networks; the risk of inadvertent exposure of juvenile users of peer-to-peer networks to pornography, including child pornography; and the extent of federal law enforcement resources available for combating child pornography on peer-to-peer networks. Today's testimony is based on GAO's report on the results of that work (GAO-03-351).

Because child pornography cannot be accessed legally other than by law enforcement agencies, GAO worked with the Customs Cyber-Smuggling Center in performing searches: Customs downloaded and analyzed image files, and GAO performed analyses based on keywords and file names only.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-757T

To view the full testimony, click on the link above.
For more information, contact Linda Koontz at (202) 512-6240 or koontzl@gao.gov.

FILE-SHARING PROGRAMS

Users of Peer-to-Peer Networks Can Readily Access Child Pornography

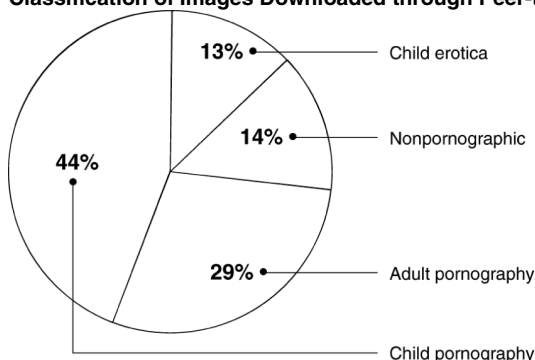
What GAO Found

Child pornography is easily found and downloaded from peer-to-peer networks. In one search, using 12 keywords known to be associated with child pornography on the Internet, GAO identified 1,286 titles and file names, determining that 543 (about 42 percent) were associated with child pornography images. Of the remaining, 34 percent were classified as adult pornography and 24 percent as nonpornographic. In another search using three keywords, a Customs analyst downloaded 341 images, of which 149 (about 44 percent) contained child pornography (see the figure below). These results are in accord with increased reports of child pornography on peer-to-peer networks; since it began tracking these in 2001, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has seen an increase of more than fivefold—from 156 in 2001 to 840 in 2003. Although the numbers are as yet small by comparison to those for other sources (45,035 reports of child pornography on Web sites in 2003), the increase is significant.

Juvenile users of peer-to-peer networks are at significant risk of inadvertent exposure to pornography, including child pornography. Searches on innocuous keywords likely to be used by juveniles (such as names of cartoon characters or celebrities) produced a high proportion of pornographic images: in our searches, the retrieved images included adult pornography (34 percent), cartoon pornography (14 percent), child erotica (7 percent), and child pornography (1 percent).

While federal law enforcement agencies—including the FBI, Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, and Customs—are devoting resources to combating child exploitation and child pornography in general, these agencies do not track the resources dedicated to specific technologies used to access and download child pornography on the Internet. Therefore, GAO was unable to quantify the resources devoted to investigating cases on peer-to-peer networks. According to law enforcement officials, however, as tips concerning child pornography on peer-to-peer networks escalate, law enforcement resources are increasingly being focused on this area.

Classification of Images Downloaded through Peer-to-Peer File-Sharing Program



Source: Customs CyberSmuggling Center.