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# Pedophiles trading pictures on Internet

Over seven days, a researcher monitored four "bulletin boards." Child porn came up 5,651 times.

By Thomas Ginsberg  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

STOCKHOLM — Pedophiles have found a home on the Internet and exchange hundreds of pictures a week through anonymous conduits, a researcher said yesterday.

The statistics provided a glimpse at the scope of the potentially illegal activity, which police fear can lure children into sex. It came from a study by Mats Wiklund, a researcher at Stockholm University's Institute of Computer and System Science.

During a seven-day period in late December and early January, Wiklund counted 5,651 messages or post-

ings about child pornography in four electronic "bulletin boards."

The postings included about 800 graphic pictures of adolescents engaged in sexual acts. He said at least eight pictures showed young children, possibly ages 8 to 10.

"The younger ones ... are not being shown in the act, but they are being used as bait," Wiklund said.

The actual number of postings probably was higher. Wiklund surveyed just half the "bulletin boards" dedicated to pornography and could not count private messages, he said.

A few messages offer telephone numbers or other instructions for

getting more pictures for a price, but most offerings were free, he said.

The bulletin boards were listed in Usenet, a section of the global computer network reachable today by an estimated 24 million people, including children.

The network operates largely without supervision, across national borders and often in a legal gray zone.

"The Internet has become a channel of communication for pedophiles," Wiklund said. "From their point of view, they've found a green technology. You can be anonymous and still be reached."

In most countries the distribution of child pornography is illegal. Two years ago, U.S. police raided about 40 locations where people were exchanging child pornography by com-

puter. Two Danes were convicted in 1993 of transmitting child pornography to an estimated 6,000 people worldwide.

In his study, Wiklund said 85 percent of the messages about child pornography were fantasy stories or tips on transmitting pictures.

Wiklund said he could trace the message origins only as far as a large "server" computer in Finland, one of several around the world set up privately to help Internet users remain anonymous.

A Finnish detective, Sgt. Timo Laine, said it was unclear whether the country's laws would apply to "electronic smuggling" by computer. He said did not know whether police would take action against the computer owner in Finland.