

Legalizing child pornography is linked to lower rates of child sex abuse: study

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Could making child pornography legal lead to lower rates of child sex abuse? It could well do, according to a new study by Milton Diamond, from the University of Hawaii, and colleagues.

Results from the Czech Republic showed, as seen everywhere else studied ([Canada](#), Croatia, Denmark, [Germany](#), Finland, [Hong Kong](#), Shanghai, Sweden, USA), that rape and other sex crimes have not increased following the legalization and wide availability of pornography. And most significantly, the incidence of child sex abuse has fallen considerably since 1989, when [child pornography](#) became readily accessible – a phenomenon also seen in Denmark and Japan. Their findings are published online today in Springer's journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

The findings support the theory that potential sexual offenders use child pornography as a substitute for sex crimes against children. While the authors do not approve of the use of real children in the production or distribution of child pornography, they say that artificially produced materials might serve a purpose.

Diamond and team looked at what actually happened to sex-related crimes in the Czech Republic as it transitioned from having a strict ban on sexually explicit materials to a situation where the material was decriminalized. Pornography was strictly prohibited between 1948 and 1989. The ban was lifted with the country's transition to democracy and, by 1990, the availability and ownership of sexually explicit materials

rose dramatically. Even the possession of child pornography was not a criminal offense.

The researchers monitored the number of sex-related crimes from Ministry of Interior records – rape, attempted [rape](#), sexual assault, and child sex abuse in particular – for 15 years during the ban and 18 years after it was lifted.

Most significantly, they found that the number of reported cases of child sex abuse dropped markedly immediately after the ban on sexually explicit materials was lifted in 1989. In both Denmark and Japan, the situation is similar: Child sex abuse was much lower than it was when availability of child pornography was restricted.

Other results showed that, overall, there was no increase in reported sex-related crimes generally since the legalization of pornography. Interestingly, whereas the number of sex-related crimes fell significantly after 1989, the number of other societal crimes – murder, assault, and robbery – rose significantly.

More information: Diamond M et al (2010). Pornography and sex crimes in the Czech Republic. Archives of Sexual Behavior.

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