Examining the Demographics, Psychological, and Social Profiles of Individuals Convicted of Cybercrime Offenses in the United States

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The primary purpose of this study was to develop a profile of the demographics, social characteristics, and criminal thinking styles associated with individuals who have been convicted of cybercrime offenses, mostly "cyber-dependent" offenses (McGuire & Dowling 2013). This study used data from the case management and risk assessment system used by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the agency tasked with supervising individuals on federal probation or supervised release. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a portrait of the demographics of people convicted of cybercrimes. Descriptive statistics were also used to review the scores on the risk and needs assessment and criminal thinking assessment.

First, this study examined all 813 offenders who were convicted of cyber-dependent crime and started federal supervision from 2004 – 2015. The analysis uncovered that most were white (72.7%), male (77.7%), and 38.2 years old on average. Characteristics concerning marital status, employment, and educational attainment were explored as well. The data for this sample demonstrates that individuals convicted of cyber-offenses display some differences in their demographic profile than those from the general offender population although in other respects they are similar.

Next, the study reviewed the risk and needs of cyber-offenders using federal probation's Post Conviction Risk Assessment (PCRA) (n = 336). The review of PCRA scores demonstrated that most of the sample was low risk to reoffend (76.3%). Despite most of the sample scoring as low risk, the areas they were likely to have risk factors were in criminal history, education/employment, and social network domains of the PCRA. These findings are slightly different from the typical risk and needs of the general offender population, indicating that individuals who commit cyber-offenses, especially cyber-dependent crimes may either be low risk to reoffend on general offenses and/or have different areas of needs related to their criminal behavior. These findings are reviewed to discuss implications of assessing risk and needs of this specific offender type.

Finally, the study analyzed Psychological Inventory Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS) scores of individuals convicted of cyber-offenses (n = 272). Only 8.8% of the sample scored as having moderate or higher presence in criminal thinking on the general criminal thinking measure. The study presented findings from two other dimensions of criminal thinking as well. Either due to the low risk nature of the group or differences among this population, there was a low presence of criminal thinking among the sample.

Since very little research has explored the individual characteristics of cybercrime offenders, and in particular cyber-dependent, convicted in the U. S. federal system, this study adds valuable insight into the profile of individuals who commit cyber-dependent offenses and explores the areas of need which may contribute to their criminal behavior.