

Beat: News

UK police arrest 660 in nationwide crackdown on child porn

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USPA News - Police across the United Kingdom have arrested 660 people during a six-month-long coordinated investigation into people using the internet to download child pornography, British police announced on Wednesday, saying doctors and teachers were among those caught. The covert operation, dubbed Operation Notarise, began early this year and involved 45 police forces across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Authorities have not provided details about how the suspects were tracked down, saying they plan to use the same tactics again in the future. "This is the first time the UK has had the capability to coordinate a single targeted operation of this nature. Over the past six months we have seen unprecedented levels of cooperation to deliver this result," said National Crime Agency (NCA) Deputy Director General Phil Gormley. "Our aim was to protect children who were victims of, or might be at risk of, sexual exploitation." The National Crime Agency said the 660 people who were arrested includes doctors, teachers, scout leaders, care workers and former police officers. The vast majority of those arrested had not previously come to the attention of law enforcement, but 39 of them were already on the sex offenders registry. "Some of the people who start by accessing indecent images online go on to abuse children directly. So the operation is not only about catching people who have already offended - it is about influencing potential offenders before they cross that line," Gormley explained. "We want those offenders to know that the internet is not a safe anonymous space for accessing indecent images, that they leave a digital footprint, and that law enforcement will find it." During the nationwide operation, officers searched 833 properties and 9,172 digital devices, according to Lancashire Constabulary. The arrests so far have resulted in charges ranging from possession of indecent images of children to serious sexual assault, the National Crime Agency said. It said more than 400 children across the United Kingdom were safeguarded as a result of the operation. "This huge operation provides another distressing illustration of the scale of online offending against children," said John Carr, Secretary of UK Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety. "Police forces all over the world are co-operating on an unprecedented scale in pursuit of online child sex offenders and they are deploying technical tools to track them down with ever greater effectiveness." British police have stepped up their investigations into child sex crimes after a series of revelations that some of Britain's best known celebrities have sexually abused children. The country's biggest ever computer crime investigation took place in 2002-2003 when Operation Ore led to the arrests of more than 3,700 people for allegedly downloading child pornography, though only 1,837 people were eventually convicted.

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