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Child Predators Arrested During COVID-19 Internet Operation

Christopher Contreras, a 26-year old Fresno man was arrested on October 13, 2020, for raping a 15-year old girl as well as child molestation, trying to meet a minor for sex, and committing a felony while out on bail, all just months after he was arrested for trying to meet a minor for sexual purposes.

Contreras has been out on bail, after being arrested in July 2020, when he was charged with arranging to meet a minor to engage in sexual acts. This was during Operation "COVID Chat Down," which targets online predators as internet usage increased during the lockdown.

Contreras, however, spent less than a day in jail and posted a \$1,000 bond on August 1, 2020. He is now back in custody, a very short time later, on rape charges.

His current bail is set at \$1,075,000.

COVID Chat Down is an ongoing undercover operation conducted by the Central California Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force from July 20 - August 2, 2020, and involved numerous law enforcement agencies, District Attorney's offices, the U.S. Attorney's Office and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). ICAC is comprised of 64 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies spread throughout nine counties and is dedicated to protecting children online and investigating crimes committed against children which are facilitated by computer usage.

The arrests from the late-July 2020 operation resulted in 34 arrests of men aged 19 to 63-years old.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, internet usage has increased across the country with people of all ages. Children have engaged more with people through social media sites due to school closures and a reduction in extra-curricular activities. A potential danger of being online more often is an encounter with a sexual predator who is seeking out relationships with children. To combat the problem, detectives with the ICAC Task Force and special agents constructed an operation to identify, contact, and arrest anyone who may be trying to target a child for sex. Detectives posed as 12 and 13-year old children and conversed with men through online apps. During their conversations, these suspects used sexually explicit language and sent graphic photos to the detective pretending to be a child. Once the suspect requested to meet with the child, detectives arrived at a predetermined location and arrested them. No actual children were ever used or placed into danger during the operation.

This is a picture of all 34 men arrested during the July 2020 operation:



One of the most notable arrests was 55-year old Thomas Binford. Binford is a registered sex offender who was previously arrested for sexually assaulting a child. Along with the crime of trying to meet with a child for sex detectives found Binford to be in possession of child pornography. This included images of infant bondage and infant rape.

Another man arrested had intentions of having unprotected sex with a 13-year old girl. He later told detectives he is HIV positive.

While Operation COVID Chat Down remains an ongoing investigation and more arrests could be made, so far in 2020, the ICAC Task Force has made more than 90 arrests related to the distribution and possession of child pornography, including images of children being raped. This is nearly double the amount of arrests in 2019. Most of these arrests occur with victims not being known due to this violent material being produced all around the world and then shared across the internet. However, ICAC detectives are well-aware suspects who view child pornography can easily progress into hands on crimes against children. Operation COVID Chat Down is a prime example of how sexual behavior can escalate.

Our professionals know the warning signs of child predators and how to help combat online child sexual abuse. We can help you prevent this from happening to your organization or family. **Contact us today** for more information.

Sources:

1. <https://kmp.com/news/local/man-accused-of-raping-teen-months-after-being-busted-in-online-sexual-predator-sting?video=b05d5c0d1ffb44d8955e92c1e667b399&jwsourc=cl> ;
2. <https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/crime/article246440000.html> ; and
3. <https://www.fresnosheriff.org/media-relations/operation-covid-chat-down-nets-34-arrests-of-potential-sexual-predators.html>



Employers should *a*lways conduct thorough background checks for all prospective employees.

Subject to certain restrictions, employers are also allowed to conduct ongoing background checks of current employees. It is highly unlikely a potential candidate will disclose any criminal history to you. They will likely take their chances to see if you miss whatever skeletons are in their background.

Employers should:

- Update job applications to let applicants know if any information is discovered that has not been disclosed or may affect their job duties, it is grounds to not hire, or for immediate discipline and/or termination.
- Let applicants know at the interview what your policy is about background checks as well as post-hire background checks. Make sure to receive their consent in writing **before** asking questions about anything you may find in their background.
- Search the State-by-State offender registries ePlace has compiled in one convenient location. Depending upon your state, such registries may include: Sex offender, child abuse, violent felonies, animal abuse, narcotics, vulnerable victims, and more.
- If any detrimental information is located, contact us at 800-387-4468 or legal counsel prior to proceeding.

ePlace has developed **training courses** and policies covering these areas in great depth. We urge employers to read, watch, learn, and implement the best practices of **hiring and interviewing** strategies, comprehensive **background checking**, and the lawful process if something negative is located.

It is imperative to the safety and livelihood of your organization and employees to ensure no one slips through the cracks. Due diligence can save your business, and even a life.



A former Columbia University and New York Presbyterian Hospital gynecologist, now 62-years old, was indicted in September 2020, on multiple counts of sexual assault of female patients, including a minor, over nearly 2 decades. The 6-count indictment included enticing and inducing dozens of victims to travel to his medical offices in New York and subjecting them to unlawful sexual abuse from approximately 1993 to 2012. Each count carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Over objection, Hadden was released on a \$1 million bond secured by his home.

Acting US Attorney Audrey Strauss called Hadden, "a predator in a white coat." She continued on to state, "For many victims, Hadden was their first gynecologist. Many of Hadden's victims did not know what to expect during an OB/GYN examination and were less likely to challenge Hadden when he engaged in sexually abusive behavior. Many didn't know his examinations were inappropriate and so returned to see him for years."

The Indictment

The women who came forward to accuse the doctor included Evelyn Yang, wife of the former Democratic presidential candidate. She stated she was sexually assaulted by Hadden, including when she was 7-months pregnant.

The former doctor, "sought out and abused" one girl who he himself delivered as a baby and, "inflicted her with the same abuse he inflicted upon adults," Strauss said.

The indictment accuses the doctor of creating, "opportunities to be alone with his victims," sending nurses and medical assistants out of the exam room, attempting to "develop a rapport with them and put them at ease by asking them questions about their personal lives and telling them about his own life and family," bringing "up inappropriate and medically irrelevant sexual topics without prompting from his patients," and that Hadden, "inappropriately touched, squeezed, and even licked his victims."

"He used the cover of conducting medical examinations to engage in sexual abuse that he passed off as normal and medically necessary," Strauss said. "His conduct was neither normal nor medically necessary."

The First Case

Unfortunately, this was not Hadden's first run-in with the law on similar charges.

The Manhattan District Attorney's Office, made a plea deal with Hadden in 2016 over sexual abuse charges. At the time, Hadden was facing nine charges relating to sexual abuse allegations when he pled guilty to two counts: 1. Criminal sexual act in the third degree; and 2. Forcible touching.

Allegations made by Yang and others earlier this year sparked outrage over the terms of the deal. At the time, Hadden had surrendered his medical license, but received no prison time or even probation.

Columbia University Already Knew

Columbia University officials were warned about Hadden's behavior in the mid-1990s. A letter from a former patient to Columbia officials in 1994, spelled out her allegations of sex abuse by Hadden. The head of the hospital's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology unit responded with a letter to the patient acknowledging receipt and saying her concerns would be addressed, but officials never got back to her.

Columbia, at the time, said the university was, "deeply disturbed by the accounts of Robert Hadden's behavior that are now emerging." However, the school did not say what was going to be done or whether an internal investigation would be launched.

Currently, the Manhattan District Attorney's office additionally has an "Intensely active and ongoing" investigation into the potential failures by Columbia University.

There are additional pending lawsuits against Columbia University, its affiliates, and Hadden, which argue that all defendants, "actively concealed, conspired, and enabled" Hadden's sexual exploitation.

The Takeaway

These horrific acts are avoidable. Let us help you **train your workforce** on the red flags and reporting procedures to avoid victimization and business and reputation killers. The acts of Hadden never should have happened, and there were multiple stops along the route where changes should have been made. ePlace knows what those changes are and how to help you avoid a similar situation. **Contact our professionals** for immediate help.

For more information about
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