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Boy arrested over Net child porn

A boy of 15 was among dozens of suspected paedophiles arrested today after police smashed a massive internet ring involving distribution of child pornography.

Over 70 addresses across Britain, including eight in London, were raided simultaneously in the biggest operation ever carried out in the UK.

Among those targeted were teachers, care workers and medical staff. Police said the 15-year-old, from Telford, Shropshire, was the youngest. The oldest is 50. Six London men are among those being questioned.

The six-month investigation was described as a "major crackdown" by police who are increasingly targeting internet abusers. Thirty four forces were involved in Operation Magenta, led by Hertfordshire police and the abusive images unit of Greater Manchester police. Tens of thousands of images are believed to have been seized along with computer equipment which will be examined by experts.

Inspector Keith Tilley, head of the Hertfordshire police child protection and investigation unit, said: "Today's nationwide operation should send out a loud message to those people who use chatrooms to trade in indecent images of children.

"This activity is unlawful and is committed by people who often go on to commit further offences of abuse against vulnerable children." He added that police "will continue to work to identify and track down those individuals who believe the internet gives them anonymity ... This is not the case and further operations like today's will take place in the future".

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The Met's clubs and vice unit carried out a number of raids at 7am as part of 75 search warrants executed by police.

Inspector Terry Jones from Greater Manchester added that the operation was aimed at examining "activities of individuals who have engaged in the exchange of child abuse material and determine what access they have to real children". He also stressed that anonymity on the internet was no longer assured.

The National Hi-Tech Crime Unit has led the fight against internet child abuse. Officers have discovered that many of the paedophiles are experts in computer technology and hold wellpaid jobs. Tougher sentencing laws have now been introduced and offenders face up to 10 years in prison.

In February last year seven members of the notorious "Wonderland Club", which peddled hundreds of thousands of images of children, were jailed. National Crime Squad detectives are still trying to trace the hundreds of abused children.

Last month 12 suspects were arrested after police infiltrated an international ring involved in distributing images of children via the internet.

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