



CSPV FACT SHEET

Juvenile Sexual Aggression

The legal options and clinical resources for processing juvenile sex offenders have been developing at an astounding rate; in 1980 there was only one program for juvenile sex offenders. now there are approximately one thousand according to the Safer Society.

Although the body of research is largely limited to small, clinical samples, the available evidence on juvenile sex offender (JSO) characteristics suggests:

- ▶ A majority of JSOs offend solely against children
- ▶ The first offense is most likely to occur when the perpetrator is about 13 or 14 years old.
- ▶ Victims are most likely to be female acquaintances or siblings; rarely are they strangers.
- ▶ A significant minority of youthful child molesters have both female and male victims.
- ▶ Most offenses by a child molester could be construed as coercive rather than violent.
- ▶ Serious delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and interpersonal aggression are relatively uncommon among teens who molest only younger children; however there has been a high prevalence of conduct disorder in some samples of child molesters.
- ▶ Adolescent male child molesters tend to be shy if not socially isolated, lack self-esteem, and are aroused to children but are attracted to girls their own age.
- ▶ Being a victim of some form of abuse or neglect increases the likelihood of sexual offending in adolescence. But, most JSOs do not appear to have been sex abuse victims and most victims of child abuse do not become perpetrators.
- ▶ Juvenile rapists vary considerably from juvenile child molesters. They use threats, force and violence, they are likely to have suffered from parental neglect, they are less prone to social isolation, and there is little evidence of antisocial personality or lifestyle. However, they have been found to show arousal to aggressive sex, harbor condescending and adversarial attitudes toward women, and are likely to have used alcohol prior to the assault.

According to National Youth Survey (NYS) data, a national probability sample of youth, among those who self-reported a sexual assault, 92 percent had previously committed a (non-sexual) aggravated assault and property crimes. Less aggressive crimes against persons tended to precede both. Forcible rape was the final act in a developmental progression. Other antecedents of sexual violence included minor delinquency and substance use.

Tentative findings from recidivism studies include:

- ▶ Most males who sexually abuse younger children do not reoffend, at least not sexually, during the 5-10 years following apprehension.

- ▶ There is a fair likelihood that JSOs will subsequently come to the attention of police for non-sex offenses. For those whose offenses are sexual in nature they are less inclined to reoffend non-sexually.
- ▶ JSOs who have institutionalized are more likely to reappear in court than those who have not.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Models of juvenile sexual offending need to be informed by developmental theory and validated by empirical studies using measures that have demonstrated reliability and validity.
- ▶ In particular, longitudinal studies using representative samples of known juvenile sex offenders are needed.
- ▶ Integration of findings from typology research and etiology studies must be improved.
- ▶ Measures developed in delinquency research and in other fields should be used or adapted for use with JSOs to assess parenting skills/style, criminal behavior, peer culture, social bonding, empathy, impulsiveness, exposure to violence, and victimization history. There should also be more emphasis on measures within the school context since truancy has been associated with recidivism.
- ▶ Much research is needed on the assessment of deviant arousal in JSOs.
- ▶ Methodology studies should focus on improving the validity of both pornography and violent sex exposure measures.
- ▶ Evaluations of existing treatment programs for JSOs are needed.
- ▶ Research must focus more on the environment to which institutionalized JSOs return.

The information for this fact sheet was excerpted from the following Center paper:

Weinrott, M.R. (1996, June). *Juvenile Sexual Aggression: A Critical Review*. (Center Paper 005). Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

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