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Dear Colleague,

This month's research looks at the various pathways to sexual abuse. Knight and Sims-Knight have contributed significantly to our knowledge and thus have inspired a generation of researchers and clinicians, outlining many areas for them to explore.

While there is a great demand to predict future sexual abuse by adolescents and adults, the research with adolescents continually supports the notion that various factors will mitigate a "predictive" model. Knight and Sims-Knight offer cautions--while every good clinician needs to understand the full inventory of factors that are included in this article, it is equally important to understand the various factors that affect future behaviors.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Pathways to Offending: Adults Differ from Adolescents

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

Question

What factors bring male adolescents to abuse same-aged females? Knight and Sims-Knight propose that knowledge of the elements contributing to sexual coercion may serve as a useful starting point for the treatment that builds healthier lives and safer communities.

The Research

Ray Knight and Judith Sims-Knight examined the pathways to offending of 218 male adolescents who have sexually abused. Their research in this area follows decades of work developing classification models of adult sexual offenders. Following a review of the adult and juvenile literature, the authors developed and tested an impressive model of factors that predict sexual coercion of same-aged females. The core traits of the three final "pathways" include:

- Sexual drive/preoccupation
- Antisocial behavior
- Callousness/unemotionality

The authors noted that there were notable differences between their findings with juveniles and similar examples of adult sexual offenders. For example, within the pathways, the link between physical and verbal abuse and subsequent aggression and antisocial behavior was not as clear as it is among adults in related studies. Likewise, the pathway from sexual victimization to sexual fantasy was also not as clear. Therefore, the three final "pathways" that may be linked to sexual violence are different for adults and for adolescents.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven
Bengis



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NEARI RESOURCES

Current Practice for Treating Adolescents Who Have Sexually Abused (4 CEUs)

This online course by David S. Prescott reviews what we know and don't know about adolescents who have sexually abused, places it in the context of their development, and describes the key elements of effective treatment. If you plan to refer an adolescent to specialized treatment or want to get current on the most recent research regarding their treatment, this course is an essential building block to your work.

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The significant contribution of this study is the development of clear markers of risk to abuse. However, the authors themselves highlight the importance of separating truly persistent traits from the developmental turbulence of adolescence. Every clinician looking at these "pathways" must also look at the adolescent within the development issues for that particular adolescent.

Implications for Professionals

Despite the theoretical cleanliness of the three pathways, they must be considered within a more comprehensive assessment of the adolescent. Knight and Sims-Knight's research provides an essential outline of the key questions about an adolescent's behavior. However, its specific application to individuals remains a matter for further inquiry and professional discretion. For example, the role of confounding aspects, such as co-occurring psychiatric conditions and developmental disorders in individual cases, may be less clear and require a more comprehensive treatment package.

The factors that predict abuse do not indicate a "life sentence" of risk. While Knight and Sims-Knight have advanced our understanding of predictive factors, it is important to realize that we still do not have adequate knowledge of how adolescents change and mature. After all, the model in this study does not take into account resilience and other protective factors that can be introduced to mitigate risk.

Implications for the Field

It is important to understand the research as the researchers intended. The authors have developed an integrated model of pathways to abuse. This listing of factors to investigate is very different from creating a laundry list of risk factors to simply check off with a client. In order to reduce the harm and likelihood of sexual abuse, we must understand how these risk factors interact with developmental issues and protective factors to create and mitigate risk.

Reference

- Knight, R.A., & Sims-Knight, J.E. (2004). Testing an etiological model for male juvenile sexual offending against females. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 13, 33-55.

To print a pdf of this article, click [newsletter](#).

Abstract

Research on the origin of sexual aggression has identified several important contributing factors:

- Early abuse (physical and sexual)
- Personality/behavioral traits (callousness and unemotionality,

Publication from NEARI

Assessing Youth Who Have Sexually Abused: A Primer

By David S. Prescott (2006)

Assessing Youth introduces program and clinical staff to the goals and principles, techniques and instruments, and accomplishments and pitfalls of assessing young people who have sexually abused. This primer provides an overview of many of the instruments currently in use for assessing youth and addresses areas of risk that can serve as treatment goals.

For more information, go to the NEARI website at www.neari.com/press.

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ISBN #: 1-929657-27-7
Cost: \$23, plus s&h

Featured Website

www.midsa.us

The Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex, and Aggression (MIDSA) is a comprehensive inventory to support therapeutic interventions with juveniles and adults who sexually offend. Among other information the inventory includes:

- * A history of living arrangements with caregivers and institutions.
- * Detailed family and child-rearing experiences, including

antisocial behavior/impulsivity, and hypersexuality

- Attitudinal/cognitive variables (negative masculinity, hostility toward women, misogynistic fantasies)

We developed and tested an etiological model of sexual coercion on adult samples of sexual offenders and community controls. The model proposes three major causal pathways to sexual coercion. Using data gathered from a computerized interview, we employed this same model to predict sexually coercive behavior in a sample of 218 juvenile sexual offenders. The cross-sample consistency of the model provides support for a unified theory of sexual aggression against women.

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Upcoming in NEARI e-News

In next month's issue, we will question the effects of group treatment for adolescents.

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[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Questions/Feedback

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sexual and physical abuse, neglect, caregiver relationships and vicarious violence.

* Social, sexual, anti-social, and criminal history.

* Scales assessing sexualization, aggressiveness, and related attitudes, beliefs, and feelings that have been found important in causing and sustaining sexually aggressive behavior.