

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



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Dear Colleague,

Happy New Year! May this year be full of change and hope for the children and adolescents we work with.

Quick update: In December 2008, over 100 of you registered for one of NEARI's free online courses offered in our last issue. The initial feedback from those who have completed the courses is overwhelmingly positive. One email to us said:

"What a wonderful gift. I've learned so much that I would not have this Tuesday morning! Thanks again for the thoughtful gift of knowledge and kindness!"

Clinician in a Sex Offender Commitment Program

Participants seemed to learn a lot through the courses too. The median pretest score was 70% and the post-test score was 90%. We are thrilled that we were able to give you that gift. If you would like to hear about bulk pricing for your organization, please don't hesitate to contact us directly.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis
www.neari.com

The Value of Asking Adolescents to Self-Report Sexual Arousal and Sexual Interest

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

The Issue

Many professionals believe that adolescents who have sexually abused are unwilling to reveal their sexual thoughts and feelings to adults. Although some clinicians use physiological techniques for assessing arousal (e.g., the penile plethysmograph, which measures blood flow through the penis), many other clinicians are troubled by their potentially intrusive nature.

The Research

James Worling studied three ways to measure sexual arousal and interest among adolescent males who acknowledged having sexually abused:

1. A computerized analysis of how long the adolescent looks at each of a series of pictures of clothed people of both genders and varying ages
2. A self-report rating form for each of the same photographs
3. A simple graph in which the adolescents rated their sexual arousal for eight age categories, with one graph for each gender

The study found similar patterns of responses to all three assessment techniques. The two self-report procedures distinguished those adolescents who abused children from those who abused peers or adults. The computerized assessment was able to distinguish those who had abused male children, but no technique accurately identified adolescents who had abused female children exclusively.

Importantly, Worling notes that earlier research into techniques, such as the plethysmograph, did not examine the adolescents' experiences of the procedure itself. In this study, Worling found that the adolescents typically did not find any of the methods upsetting.

Implications for Professionals

Adolescents can be truthful. Adolescents often have difficulty trusting adults, and vice versa. This study shows that adolescents can give meaningful information (including revealing their sexual thoughts and feelings) under the right circumstances.

Featured Website

motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a client-centered, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence.

The website provides general information about this unique approach, as well as helpful links, training resources, reprints, and access to the most current research:
www.motivationalinterview.org

Next Month

NEARI eNEWS will explore the effects of registration policies on juveniles who sexually abuse through a recent article by Letourneau and Armstrong.

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About the Author: David S. Prescott, LICSW



[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.

Get back to the basics. Worling's study suggests that the first approach to assessment and treatment of adolescents should be through a well-developed interviewing process. While adolescents did not seem to find technological interventions distressing, there is a far greater likelihood of creating such distress with technology than with a well-structured clinical interview. Since the outcomes appear the same, using the least intrusive methods first would be better practice (and saving the technology for very special cases where it is probably warranted).

Ensure person-centered practice. Previous research has not examined the impact on an adolescents going through the assessment process. Worling's study illustrates how a respectful approach to adolescents is the cornerstone of assessment, treatment, and public safety.

Implications for the Field

Assessment and treatment should address the person, not the behavior. Worling cautions that the adolescent's choice of victim does not necessarily indicate a fixed pattern of sexual interest. In fact, sexual arousal can change significantly across adolescence. Although some sexually abusive adolescents exhibit patterns of offense-related sexual interest and arousal, the majority do not. For this reason, clinicians should use a careful assessment to take a more comprehensive look at all of the issues the adolescent is facing.

There is much we don't know about adolescent sexual interest and arousal. They are related but different, e.g., many adult men experience sexual arousal to adolescent female stimuli in assessment conditions but are not interested in having sex with them. Sexual abuse against children does not mean that the person is a pedophile. Likewise, sexual assault of a same-age peer does not necessarily indicate a preference for sexual violence. To date, there is little research into adolescent sexuality generally and limited comparisons of the sexual interests and arousal of those who have and haven't abused.

Abstract

Sexual arousal was assessed using three approaches: the Affinity (Version. 1.0) computerized assessment of unobtrusively measured viewing time (VT), Affinity self-report ratings of sexual attractiveness, and a self-report sexual arousal graphing procedure. Data were collected from 78 males, aged 12-18 ($M = 15.09$; $SD = 1.62$), who acknowledged their sexual assaults. The pattern of responses to all three assessment techniques was remarkably similar, with maximal sexual interest demonstrated and reported for adolescent and adult females. Both self-report procedures could significantly distinguish those adolescents who assaulted a child from those who assaulted peers or adults. The self-report procedures could also significantly discriminate those adolescents with male child victims. The Affinity VT approach significantly differentiated those adolescents who assaulted male children from those who assaulted other individuals. No assessment technique could accurately identify those adolescents with exclusively female child victims. Overall, the results suggest that structured, self-report data regarding sexual interests can be useful in the assessment of adolescents who have offended sexually.

Reference

- Worling, J.R. (2006). Assessing sexual arousal with adolescent males who have offended sexually: Self-report and unobtrusively measured viewing time. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 18, 383-400.

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