

# 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,

This month's NEARI News highlights one of the first studies of sexually abusive behaviors in a public non-correctional-based cohort of children and youth. This exciting study is one of the first that provides us with insight into a baseline of normative behaviors for this age group. These results, especially if they are replicated in other studies, will provide critical information for the development both of treatment programs addressing healthy sexual behaviors and of more effective prevention programs targeting this youth population.

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As always, if you have any other questions, please don't hesitate

## Prevalence of Sexual Abuse Perpetrated by Boys and Girls

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

### Question

How common is the perpetration of sexual violence among adolescents?

### The Research

Michele Ybarra and Kimberly Mitchell utilized data from a longitudinal self-report survey titled *Growing Up with the Media* using questions about forced sexual contact, coercive sex, attempted rape, and completed rape. The researchers used the phrase, "I [attempted xx] when I knew he/she did not want to..." as indicative of consent.

The results of the study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 youths (9%) reported some type of sexual violence perpetration in their lifetime;

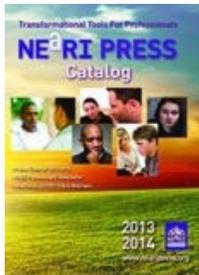
- 8% (n = 84) who kissed, touched or made someone else do something sexual when the youth knew the other person did not want to do (defined by the researchers as forced sexual contact)
- 3% (n = 33) got someone to give in to sex when he or she knew the other person did not want to have sex (defined as coercive sex)
- 3% (n = 43) attempted, but were not able to force someone to have sex (defined as attempted rape)
- 2% (n = 18) forced someone to have sex with him or her (defined as completed rape)
- Overlap between the categories was noted and, among perpetrators, 12% reported two different behaviors, 11% reported three different behaviors, and 9% reported all four types of behavior

Those who perpetrated some form of sexually abusive behaviors reported significantly greater exposure to and use of violent sexually explicit media. The study also commented on the fact that for those who perpetrated sexual abuse, 16 years was the most common age of onset (40%). Youths who were sexually abusive at younger ages were more likely than older youths to get in trouble with caregivers; adolescents starting when they were older were more likely to report that no one found out about the perpetration.

In questions about the tactics used, one third reported using coercive tactics, two thirds said they tried to make the person feel

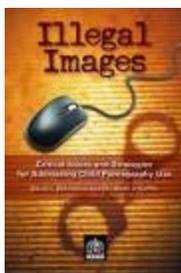
to contact us.

Sincerely,  
Joan Tabachnick and Steven  
Bengis



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## FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



### [Illegal Images: Critical Issues and Strategies for Addressing Child Pornography Use](#)

by David Delmonico and  
Elizabeth Griffin

With the widespread use of the Internet and subsequent technologies, child pornography is more available and accessible than ever. As a result, more individuals are entering the mental health and legal system who have viewed child pornography. *Illegal Images* provides helping professionals with current information regarding the key issues to be addressed when working with anyone viewing online child pornography. Reading *Illegal Images* will answer critical questions about this difficult issue and give practical solutions for working with these individuals.

**ISBN:** 978-1-929657-72-8  
**Catalog Number:** 9729  
**Cost:** \$12.00

guilty, while only 5% threatened and 8% used physical force. Surprisingly only 15% used alcohol as a tactic to move beyond consent.

The most controversial part of the study (because of how it was reported by the media) was the fact that while the youths who initiated sexually abusive behaviors by the age of 15 were overwhelmingly male (98%), by age 18-19 the split between males and females who did not obtain full consent were nearly equivalent.

### **Implications for Professionals**

Whether working with teens adjudicated for a sexual assault or providing information to parents or schools concerned about prevention, this research suggests the importance of teaching adolescents about the concept of consenting and non-consenting sex. Wherever possible, concrete information about how to talk about consent and how to ask for consent is crucial. Although there is no causal relationship established in this study, the results point to the possibility of ubiquitous availability of sexually explicit media that may guide the beliefs and actions of many young people. While we recognize the controversy of sex education in the schools and understand that some parents want to exclude sex education from school learning, this research suggests that schools may well be "ground zero" for just such a focus.

### **Implications for the Field**

This research provides one of the first studies of sexually abusive behaviors in a public (not correctional-based) cohort of children and youth, and therefore, provides a baseline of normative behaviors for these ages. One lesson learned is to be careful about the language used in any of these studies of youth. Despite the author's identification of sexual violence as a public health problem, the title of the article labeled all of these children and youth as perpetrators and the text continued this approach. These "perpetrators" included children as young as 12 who "kissed, touched, or made someone else do something sexual when they knew the other person did not want to." Unfortunately, the media picked up on this label and the sensational title did nothing to encourage a more important conversation about prevention.

Much of these results, especially if they are replicated in other studies, will provide critical information in the development of prevention programs. For example, the results indicated that three in four teens attempted or completed sexually abusive acts within the context of romantic relationships and that most (4 out of 5) said that the victim was at least somewhat responsible for what happened. Based on these findings treatment providers, health care professionals, parents and prevention programs may want to consider stronger education programs about healthy sexual relationships before the pivotal age of 16.

### **Abstract**

#### IMPORTANCE

Sexual violence can emerge in adolescence, yet little is known about youth perpetrators-especially those not involved with the criminal justice system.

#### OBJECTIVE

To report national estimates of adolescent sexual violence perpetration and details of the perpetrator experience.

#### DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS

Data were collected online in 2010 (wave 4) and 2011 (wave 5) in the national Growing Up With Media study. Participants included 1,058 youths aged 14 to 21 years who at baseline read English, lived in the household at least 50% of the time, and had used the

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Internet in the last 6 months. Recruitment was balanced on youths' biological sex and age.

## MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES

Forced sexual contact, coercive sex, attempted rape, and completed rape.

## RESULTS

Nearly 1 in 10 youths (9%) reported some type of sexual violence perpetration in their lifetime; 4% (10 females and 39 males) reported attempted or completed rape. Sixteen years old was the mode age of first sexual perpetration (n = 18 [40%]). Perpetrators reported greater exposure to violent X-rated content. Almost all perpetrators (98%) who reported age at first perpetration to be 15 years or younger were male, with similar but attenuated results among those who began at ages 16 or 17 years (90%). It is not until ages 18 or 19 years that males (52%) and females (48%) are relatively equally represented as perpetrators. Perhaps related to age at first perpetration, females were more likely to perpetrate against older victims, and males were more likely to perpetrate against younger victims. Youths who started perpetrating earlier were more likely than older youths to get in trouble with caregivers; youths starting older were more likely to indicate that no one found out about the perpetration.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE

Sexual violence perpetration appears to emerge earlier for males than females, perhaps suggesting different developmental trajectories. Links between perpetration and violent sexual media are apparent, suggesting a need to monitor adolescents' consumption of this material. Victim blaming appears to be common, whereas experiencing consequences does not. There is therefore urgent need for school programs that encourage bystander intervention as well as implementation of policies that could enhance the likelihood that perpetrators are identified.

## Citation

- Ybarra, Michele and Mitchell, Kimberly. (2013). Prevalence Rates of Male and Female Sexual Violence Perpetrators in a National Sample of Adolescents. JAMA Pediatric. Published online October 7, 2013.

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