

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.



Volume 3, Issue 9

September 2010

Dear Colleague,

For years, practitioners have made assumptions about the best way to treat adolescents who abuse sexually, about:

1. What makes these teens different from other teens who do not sexually abuse
2. The key changes that are needed to safely reintegrate these youth back into their communities.

Unfortunately, there hasn't been enough good research against which to temper these beliefs. Yet we have worked in this field long enough to have seen ways that our assumptions both have been wrong and have hurt the teens we are trying to help.

This new research by Michael Seto and Martin Lalumière provides invaluable insights to those who work in primary prevention or those who work with sexually abusing adolescents or to prevent them for abusing again.

As always, we welcome your

A New Analysis Sheds Light on Sexual Abuse by Juveniles

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

The Question

Are adolescent males who sexually abuse like adolescents who commit other non-sexual crimes? How do they differ? What factors do they have in common? What are the factors that differentiate adolescents who abuse sexually from those who commit other crimes?

The Research

Michael Seto and Martin Lalumière asked these questions in a new analysis. They examined studies involving 3,855 adolescents who had sexually abused and 13,393 adolescents who had engaged in non-sexual misconduct. They concluded that sexual abuse by adolescent males is not simply a variation of general antisocial tendencies. As a population, adolescents who sexually abuse are more likely than adolescents who commit non-sexual crimes to have "atypical" sexual interests and a history of sexual victimization. Of interest, social isolation was more prevalent among those adolescents who had sexually abused. The study distinguished isolation from social competence; these adolescents were socially isolated but did not lack important social skills.

This study is a vital contribution to our understanding of adolescents who sexually abuse. The authors describe both the strengths and limitations of previous theories of sexual abuse by adolescents (some of which were derived from adult research). Many professionals have taken these theories as articles of faith but without solid evidence. For example, the authors found that abuse-supportive beliefs about sexual offending were not more prevalent among sexual abusers than adolescents who did not sexually abuse

feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue in an upcoming issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

www.nearipress.org



FEATURED NEARI PRESS BOOK

Current Applications:
Strategies for Working
with Sexually Aggressive
Youth and Youth with
Sexual Behavior Problems



by (Editors) David S.
Prescott & Robert E. Longo

With the belief that a good book should be like attending a great 3-day conference, the editors have assembled diverse perspectives from nationally recognized leaders as well as rising stars in the field. *Current Applications* addresses practical topics related to everyday clinical practice with young people who

in the study. From a sexual health point of view, these attitudes are clearly important to address in treatment, this study illustrates the importance of basing our understanding of sexual abuse on research.

At the same time, there are limitations to this study. Seto and Lalumière compared adolescents engaging in sexual abuse to other adolescents who have engaged in problem behaviors. This is not the same as a comparison to other youth with no history of contact with the law. Likewise, the study does not distinguish those factors that contribute to the onset of sexual abuse from those factors that contribute to persistence of abuse after detection. The findings of this study therefore cannot be directly applied to adolescents outside of the legal system or those who have not yet sexually abused. The authors note other limitations and call for further research.

Implications for Professionals

Interventions should be specialized and person-centered. Adolescents who sexually abuse share many common features with other adolescents who break the law. At the same time, they also show important differences requiring specialized attention, such as atypical sexual interests and increased rates of sexual victimization. Professionals must at once be aware of the specialized aspects of this work while keeping in mind the many factors that adolescents who abuse have in common with others.

We still need more knowledge. Although this analysis is among the most important in recent years, the authors' call for further research is a true rallying cry. For example, the authors did not find attachment problems to be a distinguishing feature of adolescents who sexually abuse. However, they also note that there were very few studies of attachment to examine. In any event, the current literature continues to highlight this as an important target in treatment of adolescents who have sexually abused.

Implications for the Field

We cannot hold on to old theories about adolescents. Seto and Lalumière's analysis shows how far the field has come in just a few years. In order to prevent further sexual harm, professionals have an obligation to understand not only the abuse, but the abuser as well. These findings, including the high rates of social isolation, illustrate the importance of tailoring policies and intervention for these adolescents towards their successful integration into the community.

Furthermore, it is essential that practitioners understand both the similarities and the differences between generally delinquent and sexually abusing adolescents. Only with such research-based understandings can we begin to craft comprehensive approaches to treatment that draw on the knowledge and research in the general delinquency field as well as the important contributions of the evolving knowledge base connected to those who abuse sexually.

Reference

have sexual behavior problems, from making meaningful connections in treatment to building on the strengths of young people. Topics include:

- Working with developmentally delayed youth
- Building on client strengths
- Brain-based interventions
- Art therapy
- Considerations in using the polygraph
- Public policy
- Working through client resistance

For more information, click the image or go to the NEARI Press Bookstore at <http://bookstore.nearipress.org/>.

ISBN: 978-1-929657-43-8

Catalog Number: 9885

Cost: \$99.00 + S&H

Featured Website

[Men Can Stop Rape](#)

Men Can Stop Rape mobilizes male youth to prevent men's violence against women. This organization's mission is to:

- Build young men's capacity to challenge harmful aspects of traditional masculinity,
- Value alternative visions of male strength, and
- Embrace their vital role as allies with women and girls in fostering healthy relationships

- Seto, M.C., & Lalumière, M.L. (2010). What is so special about male adolescent sexual offending? A review and test of explanations through meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136, 526-575.

Abstract

We tested special and general explanations of male adolescent sexual offending by conducting a meta-analysis of 59 independent studies comparing male adolescent sex offenders (n=3,855) with male adolescent non-sex offenders (n=13,393) on theoretically derived variables reflecting general delinquency risk factors (antisocial tendencies), childhood abuse, exposure to violence, family problems, interpersonal problems, sexuality, psychopathology, and cognitive abilities. The results did not support the notion that adolescent sexual offending can be parsimoniously explained as a simple manifestation of general antisocial tendencies. Adolescent sex offenders had much less extensive criminal histories, fewer antisocial peers, and fewer substance use problems compared with non-sex offenders. Special explanations suggesting a role for sexual abuse history, exposure to sexual violence, other abuse or neglect, social isolation, early exposure to sex or pornography, atypical sexual interests, anxiety, and low self-esteem received support. Explanations focusing on attitudes and beliefs about women or sexual offending, family communication problems or poor parent-child attachment, exposure to nonsexual violence, social incompetence, conventional sexual experience, and low intelligence were not supported. Ranked by effect size, the largest group difference was obtained for atypical sexual interests, followed by sexual abuse history, and, in turn, criminal history, antisocial associations, and substance abuse. We discuss the implications of the findings for theory development, as well as for the assessment, treatment, and prevention of adolescent sexual offending.

Article available at <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/bul-136-4-526.pdf>.

The American Psychological Association provided an excellent press release and interview with the authors if you want to read more:

<http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2010/07/adolescent-sex-offenders.aspx>.

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

and gender equity.

About the Editor:
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.

Join Our Mailing List!

Questions/Feedback

Please email us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413.540.0712, x14 to let us know if you have a question or a topic you would like us to cover.

If at any time you no longer want the e-newsletter, just let us know and we will remove your name from our list.

We value your trust. We will not sell or give your contact information to any other organization.