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NEARI Press and Training Center Newsletter - Volume 10, Issue 3: June-July 2017
Sexual Reoffense Trajectories with Youths in the Child Welfare System

NORTHEAST EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Greetings!

This month, we take a look at a piece of deeply-researched work by Dr. Robert Prentky and colleagues – the outcome of many years of analysis – that informs us about a central question in our field: can we predict the likelihood of re-offense by youth identified to have problematic sexualized behaviors (PSBs)? As always, we include not just an easily-digestible summary of the research question and findings, but discuss their implications for you as professionals in the field. We hope you’ll find this useful and welcome your feedback.

On other fronts, between October 4th and 6th later this year, NEARI Press and Training Center is pleased to offer a three-day, in-person training, “**Contemporary Practice in the Treatment of Sexually Abusive Youth**” with Dr. Phil Rich at the LaSalle School in Albany, NY. “Early bird” registration at the rate of \$395 lasts until September 8th, so please don’t delay and register now! That’s just over \$100 a day to get world-class training and expand your professional repertoire and expertise. To find out more and register, go to: <http://nearipress.org/certificate-program> or to register by phone, please contact Diane Langelier at 413.540.0712 x14 or email: info@nearipress.org. We have reserved a block of rooms at reduced prices at a nearby hotel and look forward to hosting you there.

As always, we look forward to hearing from you about the articles, authors, and topics you’d like us to cover in the NEARI Newsletter, our webinars, and our in-person trainings. Please contact Alisa at: aklein@neari.com if you have ideas and thoughts about the particular kinds of training you’d like to see NEARI Press and Training Center offer in the coming year.

Thank you for your interest in NEARI, and for the vital work that you do to keep children and adults safe from sexual harm,

Craig Latham, Executive Director, NEARI
Alisa Klein, Director, NEARI Press and Training Center

This month, David S. Prescott and Alisa Klein examine the article:

"Sexual reoffense trajectories with youths in the child welfare system "

AUTHORS

Laura M. Grossi, Alexandra Brereton, Austin F. Lee, Ann Schuler, and Robert A. Prentky

(Please see below for full citation and abstract.)

THE QUESTION

Can assigning youth with problematic sexualized behaviors (PSBs) to particular taxonomic categories of dangerousness accurately predict their likelihood to reoffend in the future?

THE RESEARCH

By reviewing archival records of the Massachusetts Department of Children, the authors were able to identify 638 boys flagged between the years 1998 and 2004 as high-risk for exhibiting inappropriate, coercive, or otherwise problematic sexualized behaviors. The boys had been placed into three categories of offending behavior:

1. Early-onset/life course-persistent;
2. Adolescence-onset/adolescence-limited; or
3. Childhood-limited.

Research assistants developed abstracts for the boys by examining their criminal and case records, Sex Offender Registry Board reports, court evaluations, treatment plans, progress notes, incident reports, psychoeducational evaluations, and diagnoses. The boys were divided into three cohorts according to their age at the time of their first documented PSB:

1. Early childhood;
2. Middle childhood; or
3. Preadolescence/adolescence.

All three groups were comparable with respect to ethnic composition. Other differences and similarities between the three groups were noted, including, among others, categories such as IQ; the presence of mood, psychotic, anxiety, PTSD, and other disorders; legal histories; and cumulative time spent with biological caregivers.

Rates of sexual re-offense, defined as any new hands-on PSB perpetrated after the boys' initial evaluation, were measured for the three groups of boys within three follow-up periods: three years, five years, and seven years.

Definitive reoffense data was available for 609 of the boys and showed that in the seven-year follow-up period, 20 percent of the total number of boys had reoffended. However, there were significant differences in the reoffense rates when broken down into the age at the time of their first documented PSB category, as follows:

- Boys in the early childhood cohort - 29.3 percent reoffended
- Boys in the middle childhood cohort – 17.3 percent reoffended
- Boys in the preadolescence/adolescence cohort – 12.1 percent reoffended

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The authors concluded that the reoffense rates they found were consistent with those from prior research of kids convicted as juvenile sexual offenders, but were slightly higher than the reoffense rates found in studies of non-juvenile justice-involved children who participated in treatment for PSBs. They also determined that their findings were consistent with the theory that PSBs with childhood onset, like other delinquent behaviors, are more likely to persist.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

These findings highlight once again the fact that professionals working with children and adolescents with histories of problematic sexual behavior need to have specialized knowledge in a number of areas, including overall child and adolescent development, sexual development, and a deep understanding of the ecology in which these young people exist. The younger the person, the more vulnerable they are to the influences of others, including caretakers.

Further, this study shows the vulnerabilities of much of the existing research in our field. Focusing too exclusively on studies taking place in juvenile justice settings can miss important information. For example, in this paper, the authors observe that, “Although the early childhood cohort had a much higher reoffense rate than the other groups (31.2%), the overwhelming majority (92.2%) were never adjudicated” (P. 91). This is likely due, in part, to the fact that children under ten are typically referred to child welfare rather than the legal system. However, when we consider the encouraging, low base rates reported in larger-scale analyses, it is important to bear in mind that the continuation of problem sexual behaviors can occur in many different forms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Careful, informed assessment is vital, as is assessment-driven treatment. Just as young people differ from their adult counterparts, they also very often differ from one another. Sadly, in the authors’ experience, adequate funding for specialized assessments within the public sector is too often lacking.

Further, the scarcity of studies such as this show how little information is available to the schools that are seeking to prevent further harm. It is often easy for schools to over-react as well as under-react to the problem sexual behaviors of their students. These findings suggest that early intervention is crucial, and interventions should not resemble adult treatment programs.

This study also shows that early intervention is crucial, and interventions should not resemble adult treatment programs. While the earliest treatment programs focused on adults, often within prison settings, research consistently finds that community-based interventions that involve families are the most effective.

Finally, this study reminds us that we can aim our prevention efforts at multiple age groups, and not just the prevention of abuse by adults. In the end, sexual abuse exists in various forms across the life span, and no one form of prevention can be effective with all age groups.

ABSTRACT

The present study sought to determine whether the persistence of problematic sexualized behaviors (PSBs) committed by boys in the Massachusetts child welfare system would lend support to previous taxonomies categorizing offenders as early-onset/life course- persistent, adolescence-onset/adolescence-limited, or childhood-limited in their offending behavior. We examined the persistence of PSBs in a male sample (N = 638; age range: two to 17), using a retrospective longitudinal archival design. Procedures involved a comprehensive archival review of records from the Department of Children and Families. Subsamples were established by trifurcating the sample based on age at the time of the boys' first documented PSB, resulting in age cohorts reflecting early childhood (age two to seven), middle childhood (age eight to 11), and preadolescence/adolescence (age 12–17). Results supported the hypothesis that youths who first exhibited PSBs in early childhood would produce higher sexual reoffense rates during each of three follow-up windows (i.e., three years, five years, and seven years) than youths who first exhibited such behaviors in middle childhood, or preadolescence/adolescence ($p < 0.01$ for all group contrasts). Findings supported the distinctions of several taxonomies classifying youthful offenders in the juvenile justice system. Abuse reactivity, coping ability, and vulnerability to iatrogenic intervention effects are considered as some of many possible contributing factors.

CITATION

Grossi, L.M., Brereton, A., Lee, A.F., Schuler, A., Prentky, R.A. (2017). Sexual reoffense trajectories with youths in the child welfare system. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 68, 81–95.

[NEARI Newsletter Past Issues](#)



NEARI Press and Training Center Launching New Webinar Series in September

We just completed [NEARI Press and Training Center's 2016-2017 webinar series](#) on June 20th, but you can always check out past webinars [on our website](#) and watch them on our [YouTube channel](#).

AND COMING SOON:

NEARI's new 2017-18 webinar series will launch in September, 2017. We will cover topics such as:

- Working with LGBTQ youth with sexual behavior problems
- Providing treatment in culturally competent ways and with cultural humility
- Working with teenage girls with sexual behavior problems
- New research-based therapeutic interventions for treating youth with SPBs
- Working with the families of youth with SPBs to strengthen family interactions and improve parents' supervision and communication practices
- Several more topics that will enhance your practice and broaden your thinking!

The 2017-18 webinar series will showcase the work of some of the leading thinkers in our field, such as:

- Cordelia Anderson, MA
- Alejandro Leguizamo, Ph.D.
- Susan Robinson, LCSW
- Jane Silovsky, Ph.D., from the National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth (NCSBY)
- Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW

Please [consider becoming a sponsor](#) of our upcoming 2017-18 webinar series, by clicking [here](#)! And check out the list of our [current, illustrious, much-appreciated sponsors](#) for our webinar series [here](#).

Training Opportunity with Dr. Phil Rich: Contemporary Practice in the Treatment of Sexually Abusive Youth



Date: Wednesday-Friday, October 4-6, 2017
Location: LaSalle School, Albany, NY
Cost: \$450.00
Early bird special: \$395 if registering before September 8, 2017

Discounted hotel rooms will be made available.

This three-day training course is for clinicians and case managers at all levels of experience working with sexually abusive youth, although the course does not cover basic tools and principles of treatment for sexually abusive behavior. The course is instead designed to ensure clinicians and case managers understand current perspectives and practices in treatment, and experience an opportunity to build a strong and current knowledge base for best practice. The course will cover much, including the centrality of the therapeutic alliance and the importance of a collaborative treatment environment, and reviews and discusses clinical approaches and strategies for developing meaningful treatment goals, building effective treatment alliances, and delivering treatment at the individual, group, and family level.

NEARI Press and Training Center Online Courses



[Understanding Children's Sexual Behaviors - From Natural and Healthy to Disturbed](#)

By: Toni Cavanagh Johnson, Ph.D.
Duration: 3-4 hours; CE Credits: 4

[Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention](#)

By: Joan Tabachnick
Duration: 1-2 hours; CE Credits: 2

[Current Practice for Treating Adolescents Who Have Sexually Abused](#)

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Perspectives and Current Applications, both edited by David Prescott and Robert Longo, or others if you already have these.

For more information or to sign up, visit our website at www.nearipress.org OR contact Diane Langelier at 413.540.0712 x14, email info@nearipress.org.

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