

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,

We are delighted to announce NEARI's new and improved website. While we still hope to increase the resources that are available through our organization, you can see that the website is easier to use and we think it is much prettier!

Please take the time to check out our new publications and some of our standards. If you visit us now, we will be offering a 10% discount on all books. Please enter the discount code "**Launch2010**" when you order online or by phone at 1.888.632.7412. The offer expires on March 15, 2010.

This month's research looks at the use of polygraphs with adolescents. While the use of polygraphs is growing, the research about its effectiveness with adolescents and possible unintended consequences is still emerging. We hope this review will give you insights into if and how and when to use this tool in your work with teens.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to

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explore a particular issue in an upcoming newsletter, please let us know.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

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NEARI RESOURCES

Publication from NEARI



[Stages of Accomplishment - Clinician's Manual and All 4 Workbooks](#)

By Phil Rich, Ed.D., MSW

Stages of Accomplishment is a set of four inter-related workbooks that assist in the treatment of sexually abusive or sexually troubled adolescents. Building from simpler ideas to more complex and richer concepts, the workbooks take youth through a series of guided exercises that touch on many of the most significant elements of treatment. Augmenting individualized treatment, the workbooks are designed to be used in community-based or residential care settings.

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

How Should Professionals Use the Polygraph with Adolescents Who Have Sexually Abused?

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

The Issue

In recent years, despite the lack of research on the use of polygraphy with adolescents, polygraph use with adolescents is growing. While initial research identifies polygraphy as a helpful tool, professionals need to exercise caution when using it with adolescents.

The Research

A study by Jan Hindman and Jim Peters in 2001 found that adolescents who had sexually abused and participated in polygraph examinations reported twice as many victims as those who didn't. The authors touted "the power of the polygraph to elicit withheld information." Further, they observed that this finding was less dramatic than the results for adults, who reported five to six times as many victims as their adolescent counterparts. These results are similar to those of an earlier study by Robert Emerick and Wendy Dutton in 1993, who also found a greater disclosure of sexually abusive and abuse-related behaviors when adolescents participated in polygraph examinations.

There is little doubt that polygraph examinations yield more disclosures of abusive behavior. For some adolescents, polygraph monitoring of their behaviors and ability to follow the terms of their safety plan can mean the difference between residential and community placement. But in the absence of research on polygraphy use for teens, many questions remain unanswered: For which adolescents might the examination itself be traumatizing? Does additional disclosure result in more effective assessment and treatment in every case? Are we simply applying coercion to treat coercion? Is our field again importing techniques from the adult world without proper consideration of the consequences?

Implications for Professionals

There are many considerations in using the polygraph. There is some evidence that adolescents are willing to disclose their sexual interests under the right circumstances (see the January 2009 newsletter issue at [NEARI NEWS](#)). Given the potential impact on teens, clinicians should:

- Think twice before using a polygraph
- Consider the potential downside impact
- Explore what other alternatives may be available
- Decide whether it is clinically appropriate

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Professionals will want to ensure that they are protecting the rights of their clients as well as those of people the client may have harmed. In their study, Hindman and Peters ensured that their study subjects had entered an agreement with local law enforcement that provided some immunity from further prosecution for their newly disclosed actions. This is in line with the constitutional protection against self-incrimination. Given the stakes involved for both the abuser and the abused, these arrangements are vital if a polygraph is being considered. In addition, there is controversy in the field regarding the use of polygraphy by professionals to identify victims and offer them help. Hindman and Peters suggest that this is a worthwhile aim of the polygraph and do not address how to proceed if the victim did not desire identification. Other professionals will want to ensure the privacy of those harmed by sexual abuse and allow them to disclose their abuse only when they choose.

Implications for the Field

More research and discussion is needed. There is almost no research on the polygraph and its most effective use with adolescents. Just because professionals can use it with a given adolescent does NOT mean that they should use it. Policies that require polygraph examinations for every adolescent will likely do harm by neglecting the individual differences and vulnerabilities of each adolescent.

Reference

- Hindman, J. & Peters, J.M. (2001). "Polygraph Testing Leads to Better Understanding Adult and Juvenile Sex Offenders." *Federal Probation*, 65 (3): 8-15.

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This article is available free from: <http://www.ccoso.org/>.

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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.

