

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 research paper looks at the risk factors for sexually abusive behaviors. Knight and Knight set out an exciting model for understanding both the causal and the correlative risk factors for perpetration. Their findings both affirm what we have believed for many years about who is at high risk to re-offend and also pushes us to be more intentional about where and how we focus our limited resources in both prevention programs and treatment interventions.

You can hear Dr. Ray Knight's keynote from the Annual MASOC/MATSA conference at www.masoc.net.

We hope the article, the podcast and the Powerpoint presentation help you as you grapple with these important issues. As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

Using Causal Risk Factors to Focus Our Prevention and Intervention Work

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

Question

Can we identify the difference between causal risk factors for sexual assault and those risk factors that are correlative?

The Research

Over the past years, Raymond Knight, Ph.D. and Dr. Judith E. Sims-Knight, Ph.D. have integrated an impressive combination of research studies on sexual and general aggression. In keynote presentations, the Knights have used their published articles and unpublished materials to develop a well-informed hypothesis about which risk factors are causal (those that contribute directly to sexual assault) and which are correlative (associated with, but not necessarily causing sexual assault). Their model identified three primary causal risk factors:

- Hypersexuality
- Callous/unemotional personality features
- Antisocial behavior

Their research then identified a number of key risk factors that correlate with sexual assault but are not causal. These risk factors include:

- Alcohol use
- Distorted perceptions
- Rape attitudes
- Pornography use

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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCE

[Growing Beyond Treatment
Manual: A Workbook Sexually
Abusive Teenage Girls](#)
and
[Growing Beyond: A Workbook
for Teenage Girls](#)

by Susan L. Robinson, LCSW

In this newly revised workbook and treatment manual for teenage girls, Robinson has developed gender-specific approaches for girls that are informed by the latest research on girls and sexually abusive behavior. The workbook and manual focus treatment on the girls telling what they did, dealing with their own victimization, realizing the impact of abuse on themselves, those they abused and the people around them. The books deftly explore these difficult issues and support a focus on building positive self-esteem, and developing both positive sexuality and deeper relationships.

For the next 30 days (ending June 6, 2011), NEARI Press is offering Robinson's Growing Beyond Treatment Manual for **free** when you order the workbook or

Knight and Knight's research focuses on adult rapists and they clearly point out that these risk factors are not completely aligned with the risk factors for child molesters, specifically around rape attitudes and distorted perceptions.

Further, they suggest that interventions that focus on these causal risk factors offer the best chance for success. Last, the Knights have put forth a compelling hypothesis about the interaction between genetics and the environment. They note that some genes are only expressed when the individual is living in a particularly stressful environment. The importance of this finding is that by building on resilience and enhancing other protective factors, the stress does not have the same impact and does not trigger the same behaviors.

Implications for Professionals

This research offers professionals a way to sharpen their focus and build targeted prevention and intervention programs that differentiate between the causal and correlative risk factors for abusive behaviors. With only limited resources available, the clinician or preventionist can target these causal factors first to ensure the most successful outcomes. When engaged in treatment rather than prevention, correlative factors become critical as well. The research shows that certain rape attitudes, use of alcohol, and access to pornography will not in and of themselves lead to sexual assault. However, with the causal factors in place, use of alcohol, pornography or manifesting certain beliefs about women/children represent a dangerous "cocktail" ready to ignite. Therefore, once abuse has been perpetrated, it is essential that these correlative risk factors become a central part of treatment with specific clients at higher risk to re-offend.

Knight's path analysis approach clearly outlines the interactions between each risk factor within a person's life and offers insights into how they interact with others.

For sexually abusive adults and adolescents with hypersexuality, callous/unemotional features, and antisocial behavior, our interventions can focus on close supervision and contact (e.g., circles of support and accountability) and building respectful people with healthy relationships. It can be helpful to develop interpersonal competence, including the ability to relate to others empathically and emotionally. With adults, interventions may also include addressing abuse-related sexual arousal. As has often been stated in this newsletter, while outcome goals remain the same, the methodology for achieving these outcomes differs based largely on diagnostic differentiation, cognitive levels, etc. What the Knights' research provides us is a causal pathway to assault that helps us focus the right tools on the right people.

Implications for the Field

Given the dramatic reduction in funding for intervention and prevention programs, it is imperative that our interventions focus on

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To learn more about *Growing Beyond: A Workbook for Teenage Girls*, click the title above or the image below.



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About the Editor:
David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

An internationally 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 a Past President of ATSA and is currently Clinical Director for the Becket Programs of

the right issues. The Knights have offered a compelling and exhaustively researched prevention and intervention paradigm focusing on causal and correlative factors. Prevention programs that highlight only correlative factors, (e.g., alcohol abuse and pornography use) are often focusing on issues that will not, in and of themselves, lead to sexual abuse. Prevention programs, whether in schools, colleges or other settings, would have better results by focusing on causal factors and differentiating those pathways that lead to rape and those leading to child molestation.

Treatment programs need to integrate causative and correlative factors, as well as focus on environmental stressors (particularly for those individuals who may be predisposed to a reduced capacity for coping with these stressors). By following this approach, we have the greatest chance of targeting limited resources at those most at risk.

Citation

- Preventing Rape: What the Research Tells Us. Dr. Raymond Knight, Keynote Address at the 13th Annual MASOC/MATSA Conference. Marlborough, MA. April 2011.

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

FEATURED RESOURCE

A Reasoned Approach: Reshaping Sex Offender Policy on our Ability to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse
by Joan Tabachnick and Alisa Klein

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) has published a new report, *A Reasoned Approach: Reshaping Sex Offender Policy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse*. The report "offers insights into current research about those who sexually abuse, an analysis of policy trends related to sex offenders, information about innovations in legislative and community responses to those who sexually abuse, and recommendations for policy change to facilitate the prevention of child sexual abuse.

For a free downloadable copy of the report:go to <http://www.atsa.com/pdfs/ppReasonedApproach.pdf>.

Maine, overseeing inpatient and outpatient services for juveniles.

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