Assessment of Youth with Sexual Behavior Problems

Thomas F. Haworth, Ph.D.
Director of Outpatient Services

Barry Zakireh, Ph.D.
Director, Forensic Services Program
The Joseph J. Peters Institute
Philadelphia, PA.
Youth with Sexual Behavior Problems Who are Charged / Indicated AKA Juvenile Sexual Offenders

- Any male or female youth over statutory age to be charged criminally, who is found guilty / CPS Indicated for a sexual act with a person of any age that is:
  - Against the victim’s will
  - Without consent
  - When the other person is incapable of offering consent
  - Or in an aggressive, exploitive, or threatening manner.
  - Basically a criminal sexual act
If not found guilty or indicated or below statutory age??

- Child / Adolescent with a Sexual Behavior Problem
  - No Probation Involvement for sexual allegations
  - Usually followed by DHS in Phila. or CPS in other counties
Prevalence

- Children under 11 comprise 29% of all forcible rape victims.  
- 20% of rapes & 30-50% of all CSA are committed by minors (Kikuchi, 1995)
- Sibling Incest is the most common type of child sexual aggression (Carter & Van Dalen, 1998)
Prevalence – Adolescents made up:

- 16% of those arrested for forcible rape
- 19% of those arrested for all other sexual crimes (FBI – Uniform Crime Reports, 2002).
- 23% of Sexual Assaults (Bureau of Justice - National Incident Reporting System, in Snyder, 2000)
- 20% of rapes & 30-50% of all CSA are committed by minors (Kikuchi, 1995)
Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith (1990)

- National survey of 1200 adults found 27% women and 16% men reported a history of CSA.
- The majority of these cases were at the hands of child/adolescent perpetrators.
Who are these youth?

- Median age is between 14-15 years
  - (National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges)
- Age range is from toddlerhood onward
- 70% come from two parent homes
  - Most attend school and achieve average grades
- 4% suffer from mental illness
  - (Becker&Johnson, 2001)
What else do we know...

- JO’s and Children with sexual behavior problems frequently have comorbid ADHD.
  - For these youth it is wise to consider suspending “drug holidays” to consistently impact impulsivity.

- High incidence of problems with social judgment and social awkwardness.

- Some will also show high general delinquency.
Risk Factors Related to Problematic Sexuality in Children

- Exposure to sexually explicit media
- Poor supervision – chaotic family environments
- Sexualized environments & sexually explicit environments
- Lack of privacy – poor boundaries in family
- Exposure to adult sexual behavior
- Linking sex and aggression
- Physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse and neglect of child
- Observation of sexual or physical violence
- Sexual exploitation of child
Family Factors

- Chaotic / under-organized families
- Parental psychopathology
- Weak or limited interpersonal boundaries in home
- Few rules for privacy
- Pervasive sexuality
- Low privacy standards – nudity
- Interpersonal violence
  - (Gray et al., 1997; Friedrich, 1992; Finkelhor, 1986, 1990)
Family Factors - continued

- Family members contribute to the sexual climate of the home and explicit sexual material is a risk factor.
- Sexual abuse is associated with greater levels of familial distress & fewer educational & financial resources.
  - (Friedrich, 1992)
More Family Factors

- Witness violence in home:
  - 61.5% of the 6-9 year old YSBPs
  - 42.9% of the 10-12 year old YSBPs
- Families significant levels of sexual interaction
- 94% of YSBP’s victims were family members
- Family members showed:
  - Low frustration tolerance
  - Deficient problem solving
  - Marked social isolation
    - (Gray et al., 1997)
And More Family Factors

- Profound deficits in interpersonal functioning
- Long standing tension between parents and children
- Appropriate parenting is significantly under-represented
- Parental Psychopathology
  - (Friedrich & Luecke, 1988)
Protective Factors

- Cognitive Ability
- Communication Skills
- Peer relationships
- Academic Skills
- Absence of Psychopathology
- Familial Support
- Quality of Parent – Child Relationship
- Adequacy of Supervision / Safety
Comprehensive Assessment

- Individual Risk & Protective Factors
- History and Context
- Familial and Caregiver Structure
- Structure of the Home
  - Privacy Boundaries
  - Rules
  - Sexual Material / Exposures
- Parental Involvement / Supervision
Psychometrics

- Intellectual Functioning
  - Screening
- Personality Measures
  - MMPI-A  MACI
- Attitudes & Beliefs - Distortions
- Sexual Interests
  - AASI-2     MIDSA
A Picture tells a thousand words

- Drawing the family home
- Identifying where people sleep / live
- Doors, Privacy
- What are the rules in the house for bathroom use, sex, changing, males vs. females
What is the relationship between JSO’s & victims?

- Sibling Incest is the most common type of child sexual aggression (Carter & Van Dalen, 1998)
- 90% know their victims
- One third use force
- 75% of victims are female
  - (National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges)
Sexual Offenders Recidivate at High Rates…Don’t They?!?!

- Recidivism: the repetition of criminal behavior – usually measured by
  - Re-arrest
  - Reconviction - Adjudication
  - Re-sentence
  - Return to prison without a new sentence
    - (Langan & Lewis, 2002)
Sexual Offenders Recidivate at High Rates...Don’t They?!?!

- Adults:
  - Meta-analysis of 23,347 sexual offenders across 61 studies
  - Overall recidivism of the group was 13.7%
    - (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998)
Sexual Offenders Recidivate at High Rates...Don’t They?!?!

Juveniles:

- No one study to summarize findings
- Recidivism ranges between 2%-14% across studies (Reitzel, 2003; Rubenstein, Yeager, Lewis, 1993; Sipe, Jensen, & Everett, 1998)
- Adolescent rapists appear to have the highest recidivism rate (Alexander, 1999)
Do all sexual offenders have the same probability to re-offend?

- No

- Hanson & Thorton (2000)
  - Applied learning from the meta-analysis to derive 10 factors that taken together in an actuarial tool (STATIC-99) provide high predictive validity for estimating probabilities of reoffense in sexual offenders
Assessment of Risk Methods

- Clinical Interview
  - Hanson (1999) reports that risk assessments made in clinical evaluation are no better than chance.

- Empirically Guided
  - Not empirical – use research to guide focus

- Actuarial
  - Empirically derived and validated
What about Juveniles?

- No one actuarial measure with empirical validity has yet been developed.
- Two current Instruments are empirically guided:
  - ERASOR (J. Worling, 2001)
  - JSOAP-II (R. Prentky, 2001)
Empirically Guided Method

- Use the research to guide the factors we assess in considering the question of recidivism.

- Worling assembled a review of studies and created a list of factors associated with sexual and general recidivism in youth.
Risk of sexual recidivism in adolescents

- Empirically supported risk factors
- Promising risk factors
- Possible risk factors
- Unlikely risk factors
- Communicating risk factors
Empirically supported risk factors defined

- Each risk factor described at least 2 independent empirical investigations statistically linking the risk factor to sexual re-offending
- There has been no contradictory findings published to date
Empirically supported risk factors

- **Deviant sexual interest:**
  Adolescents who offend sexually and who are sexually aroused by prepubescent children

- **Prior criminal sanctions for sexual offending**

- **Sexual offending against more than one victim:**
  Adolescents who offend against two or more victims are at higher risk to reoffend (Langstroem (2002), Worling (2002))
Empirically supported risk factors continued....

- **Sexual offending against a stranger victim**
  Adolescents who targeted a stranger as victim are at greater risk Smith & Monastersky (1986) and Langstroem (2002)

- **Social isolation**
  Adolescents who sexually offend and who are unable to form or uninterested in forming emotionally intimate peer relations or who are socially isolated are up to three times more likely to re-offend.

- **Uncompleted offense-specific treatment**
  Adolescents who complete comprehensive treatment combining a strong family-relationship component w/ offense-specific interventions are less likely to recommit Borduin et al., (1990) and Worling & Curwen, (2000)
Factors have been listed in published risk-factor checklists, supported by at least one published study---therefore holding limited empirical support.
Promising risk factors

- **Problematic Parent-Adolescent Relationship**
  Adolescents With a history of sexually offending who also have problematic parental relationships are at higher risk of sexual re-offense
  
  Moderate correlation between perceived parental rejection and sexual recidivism Worling & Curwen, (2000)
  
  Poor parent child relationships were also related to violent-physical and sexual offending in meta-analysis- Lipsey & Derzon (1998)

- **Attitudes supportive of sexual offending**
  Adolescents who believe that sexual assaults are invited by victims, or other rape myths, are at higher risk for sexual reoffense - Kahn and Chambers (1991)
Possible Risk Factors - definition

- Viewed by **only some authors** as risk factors related to sexual recidivism---therefore holding limited empirical support
Possible Risk Factors

High-Stress Family Environment
Lipsey & Derzon (1998) Meta Analysis revealed that family distress, physical & sexual violence were correlated w/ violent, including sexual offending

Impulsivity
Strong correlation, but no empirical support for impulsivity as a risk factor, there is ample evidence that impulsivity is related to general juvenile delinquency and nonsexual reoffending (e.g., Cottle et al., 2001; Lipsey & Derzon (1998)

Antisocial Interpersonal Orientation
Contradictory evidence: Epps, 1997; Lane, 1997 or Rich, 2001 suggested antisocial behaviors as risk factor-- Langstroem & Grann, 2002; Worling and Curwen, 2000 found no relationship between psychopathy and adolescent sexual recidivism
Possible Risk Factors

**Interpersonal Aggression**

Contradictory findings: Langstroem (2002) no relationship b/w prior violent nonsexual criminal convictions and sexual recidivism—Hanson & Bussiere (1998) reported small correlation b/w anger problems and sexual recidivism in adults

**Negative Peer Association**

Association w/ delinquent peers is a well established risk factor for both onset and persistence of antisocial behavior. Negative peer association as an risk factor for sexual recidivism has not yet been empirically researched
Possible Risk Factors - continued

**Sexual Preoccupation**

Sexual preoccupation is a promising dynamic variable for adults (Hanson & Harris, 2000) but has yet to be examined for adolescents. However, in JO’s has been anecdotally associated with sexual recidivism risk.

**Sexual Offending Against Male Victim**

Hanson & Bussiere (1998) have shown that ADULT males that victimize male children have increased risk for sexual re-offense—findings for adolescents are **contradictory**
Langstroem & Grann, 2002; Smith & Monastersky, 1986 vs. Rassmussen, 1999; Worling and Curwen, 2000

**Sexual Offending against a Child**

Empirical data from retrospective studies w/ adolescents is mixed –as it stands, like gender, it’s considered a weak marker of risk for sexual recidivism in adolescents
**Possible Risk Factors - continued**

**Threats, Violence, or Weapons in Sexual Offense**

Langstroem (2002)—use of weapons or death threats during sexual assaults is related to nonsexual violent re-offending (general delinquency) but not to subsequent sexual reoffense.

**Environment Supporting Re-offending**

Epps (1997); Ross and Loss (1991)—adolescents who have unsupervised access to pornography or potential victims have higher risk to re-offend sexually—this intuitive logic has not been researched in adolescents-- Hanson & Bussiere (1998) has found that ADULT sexual recidivists had put themselves in a place w/ greater access to victims than non-recidivists
Unlikely Risk Factors - definition

Factors have no empirical support - thus should **NOT** be used in formulating risk estimates.
Unlikely Risk Factors

Adolescent’s Own History of Sexual Victimization

Childhood sexual abuse is, under some conditions linked to the onset of adolescent sexual aggression (Morris, Anderson, & Knox, 2002) but it is not predictive of sexual re-offending.

History of Nonsexual Offending

History of nonsexual criminal charges is related to sexual recidivism in ADULT MALES but (general delinquency) is was consistently unrelated to subsequent sexual offenses in adolescents.
Unlikely Risk Factors - continued

**Sexual Offending Involving Penetration**
No relationship was identified b/w degree of sexual contact and sexual recidivism

**Denial of Sexual Offending**
Langstroem and Grann (2000); Worling, 2002—adolescents who deny their sex crimes are less likely to re-offend sexually---some mechanism involved in denial (e.g., shame, embarrassment) act somehow to reduce odds of future re-offense

**Low Victim Empathy**
Hanson and Bussiere (1998), Langstroem and Grann (2000) found that youth w/ low general empathy were no more at risk for being reconvicted than those youth w/ more empathy
Safety Planning

- We weigh the developmental needs of the child with the safety needs, adequacy of monitoring, commitment by caregivers, nature of offense.

- Usual Recommendations:
  - No unsupervised contact with younger children or cognitively vulnerable individuals
  - Not to live with younger children
  - Not sharing a room
  - Set up a plan for managing safety & relapse prevention
Questions

Thomas F. Haworth, Ph.D.
Joseph J. Peters Institute
215-701-1560
thaworth@jjp.org