

Understanding Juvenile Sexual Offender's and  
Aiding in effective treatment and management practices

PCP539 Counseling Issues In Life Span Development  
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary  
James M. Harris III, Ph.D., LPC  
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### Abstract

In the past decade juvenile sexual offender statistics have been on a steady incline. Attempts are being made to bring better attention to this negative aspect of society. This paper will bolster a concise understanding of the adolescent male in his current stage of psychological and physiological development. It will promote awareness into the psyche of Juvenile Sexual Offender's, while also yielding some relevant and practical books that furnish a gamut of useful information. These books will further one's studies, while offering some valid ventures to reduce and eliminate recidivism of JSO's offending again.

## INTRODUCTION

There are many observations of the life of an adolescent (ages 12-18). For many young people, it is a particularly stressful development in life. One could describe adolescence as a state of instability from childhood to (adulthood). There are many perplexing bodily changes brought on by puberty, the youth's intellect, and innovative opportunities for social freedom offered by society. To compound their quandary, teenagers in the modern Western world are not quite sure how much freedom they really have or want. Emotional frustrations arise from conflict between the attitudes, values, and styles of life of the period being left behind (childhood) and the period vaguely seen ahead (adulthood). Metaphorically speaking, adolescents are seen as foreigners entering into a new culture, where they are living amidst both old and new cultures but not completely accepted by either.

Amidst this new "cultural" experience the adolescent goes through a rather extensive development in the physical, cognitive, social, and sexual realm. Within the sexual developments, children's curiosity of the private parts of the opposite sex begins in early childhood, but such interest is notably heightened in adolescence, when new opportunities and strong erotic drives contribute to increased heterosexual (or homosexual) exploration. The start of heterosexual/homosexual exploration is often accelerated by peer pressure, by a sense of competition and a desire to be accepted and admired in a teen society that presses for adult experience and privilege at an early age. Of the kinds of counseling issues during adolescence, one particular case is that of adolescence/juvenile sexual relationships during adolescence.

Since the 1960's, research indicates that an exorbitant amount of change in sexual habit is occurring in American adolescents. A more specific adolescent sexual issue of concern today is juvenile sexual offenders. This paper's focus is aimed at gaining a holistic awareness and

understanding on how to manage and treat adolescent male perpetrators who fantasize and victimize the innocent. Keeping in mind the aforementioned aims, this bibliotherapeutic guide will give a starting point as to help alleviate some pertinent yet puzzling questions about the male juvenile sexual offender (JSO).

## **A LOOK INTO HOW THIS PROBLEM STARTED**

Juvenile sexual aggression has been a problem of growing concern in American society over the past decade. The size of the population impacted by juvenile sexual offenses can only be estimated. The current estimations juveniles account for are up to one-fifth of the rapes and one-half of the cases of child molestation committed in the United States each year. The majority of cases of juvenile sexual aggression appear to involve adolescent male perpetrators. Research also indicates that juvenile sexual offending traverses racial and cultural boundaries.

There are numerous theoretical explanations for juvenile sex offenses. While none of these theories fully explain the onset of offending behavior, taken together, the theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the perpetrator. The majority of these theories (not all) are based on the assumption that offending behaviors by adolescents are a reaction to their own physical or sexual abuse. Dynamics correlated with juvenile sexual offending are viewed from a social-ecological framework.

## **INVOLVED DYNAMICS**

### Individual (pathology) Dynamics

Multiple episodes of sexual and physical abuse increase the likelihood of perpetration. Roughly 80% to 95% of JSO's were abused in some fashion. Juvenile offenders demonstrate a lack of problem solving or appropriate coping skills. This is coupled with a tendency to use emotion focused, avoidant, and aggressive coping in response to stress. Fire starting, property

destruction, impulsiveness, aggression, and unrealistic thinking, are common. Generally, these are youths who display more severe levels of personality and/or psychosexual disturbances (Senson, Henggeler, & Schoenwald, 1998). Low self esteem in all forms is seen as a major contributor to sexual acting out. Feelings of male inadequacy, fear of rejection, anger at women, and exposure to modeling inappropriate behaviors is also commonly shared and will be seen in JSO's. Many of these youths, particularly those with victimization histories, show evidence of depression. Other factors involve substance abuse and exposure to pornography. Needless to say, JSO's show a more internalized symptom than have nonsexually offending delinquent counterparts (Senson, Henggeler, & Schoenwald, 1998).

### Family Dynamics

The family of origin can show elevated levels of distress in JSO's for many reasons. The majority experience lack of boundaries, confusion about parent roles, lack or parent supervision, and inconsistent rules or limits. Inter parent violence is the most common indicator and is seen in 79% of offenders. Perpetrators who began abusive behaviors by age 6 and were sexually abused themselves, represented 72% of the population, while those who started at age 7 to 11 had been abused in 42% of the cases. From age 11 to 12, the percentage drops to 35 (Agler, 2000; Center for Sex Offender Mgmt., 1999). Another commonality is a high level of broken homes. Only 28% of offenders in an extensive study lived with both biological parents while others show roughly 60% experiencing parental loss (Agler, 2000; Center for Sex Offender Mgmt., 1999). The families are likely to exhibit less active or recreational lifestyles, demonstrate low levels of cohesion and expression between members, and are highly conflicted. Little interest is seen in independence, achievement, or social education.

### Peer/Social Dynamics

Social deficits are common among JSO's. The individual may want age appropriate relationships, but he lacks the skills necessary to initiate or sustain one. Therefore, the JSO is likely to seek the company of younger children. They have few consenting sexual experiences as well as higher interest in paraphilias when compared to the general population of the same age. Another study links a larger number of oldest brothers to the likelihood of deviant sexual behaviors. In contrast with drug-using adolescents and other juvenile offenders, where association with deviant peers is strongly associated with their antisocial behavior, juvenile sexual offenders tend to have low association with deviant peers while in community settings. Rather, youths who sexually offend tend to be interpersonally isolated and socially inept (Cashwell & Caruso, 1997). Many other researchers have noted, however, that although sexual offenders may tend to be immature in their peer relations, most possess the requisite social skills for successful grooming of potential victims and caregivers (e.g., to assist parent by playing or babysitting with younger children) (Cashwell & Caruso, 1997).

### School/Academic Factors

Similar to nonsexual offenders, juvenile sexual offenders have high rates of learning disabilities, academic dysfunction, and behavioral difficulties in school (30-60%) (Hunter, 2001). These difficulties include below expected grade placement, behavior problems, learning disabilities, school suspension, and expulsion.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

### Books

*The Juvenile Sexual Offender*, by Howard Barbaree, et al.

There is an exorbitant amount of researched and theorized material on sexual assault by adult male offenders. While there is but a modicum of written material about the juvenile sexual offender, this book fills in the gap by giving a comprehensive examination of the JSO and what is known about the development of sexually assaultive behavior. Dr. Howard Barbaree, a clinical psychologist and head of the Psychology department at a University in Ontario has authored this book with several other key researchers. Furthermore, this book takes its time to lay out many angles in a succinct and pertinent fashion. The chapters define terms, key concepts, how sexuality evolves, how sexuality manifests itself in the normal and deviant teenager and how it often carries over to the adult lifestyle.

Lastly, the book investigates ways in which society may prevent or control the occurrence of sexual assault by juveniles. A very understandable approach to intervention is presented that includes criminal justice and mental health systems, cognitive-behavioral interventions, pharmacological approaches, relapse prevention, and supervision.

This book is included in this review because of its highly informative and useful. Although the text is more partial for psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and other mental health clinicians who work with JSO's; the work serves as an ideal text for advanced courses on juvenile sex offenders or as supplementary reading for students of forensic psychology or psychiatry (Barbaree, et al., 1993).

*Sibling Abuse: Hidden Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Trauma* By: Vernon R. Wiehe

*Sibling Abuse* provides insight into this form of abuse and carefully describes the range of abusive behaviors perpetrated among siblings. Along with individual accounts by adult survivors, this restructured book describes appropriate steps for parents in order to evaluate and

respond to their children's abusive interactions. A chapter on current techniques of assessment and treatment also helps therapists or counselors work to end this problem.

This book is recommended because it's very readable yet reinforced by the latest research and will make an excellent supplement for advanced students in social work, sociology, psychology, nursing, education, and family studies. Lay readers looking for a resource for understanding this underexposed form of abuse will also want to turn to this book (Wiehe, 1997).

In no way are the aforementioned books 'the' answer or cure-all for any or all JSO issues. They simply give a few substantial models to help heal and bring restoration to perpetrators who are perplexed with cognitive distortions and thinking errors.

### Workbooks

*Pathways Guide for Parents of Youth Beginning Treatment, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* By: Timothy Kahn

The *Pathways Guide for Parents* is written specifically for nonoffending parents of adolescent sexual offenders. This resource offers invaluable reassurance to parents/caregivers of adolescents with sexual offending behaviors. He encourages parents to participate in the treatment process, and includes words of wisdom from other parents. The workbook also outlines twelve steps for parents of young sex offenders, insight into evaluation and assessment, visitation and reconciliation guidelines, testimony from a young offender who completed treatment, suggested questions for parents to ask their adolescent as treatment progresses, a brief review of the Pathways workbook, ways to help prevent re-offenses, forms and explanations for chaperones, and more.

*Pathways* is most effective when used in a sex-offender treatment group under the guidance and supervision of a specially trained counselor. Unfortunately, in some locations such groups and counselors may not be available, and you and your child's therapist or probation/parole

officer will need to find other resources to help you cope with your child's sexually aggressive behavior. This book is advocated for the essential purpose that parents need to try to understand and support their child's treatment process. Young offenders with involved and supportive parents frequently require less time in therapy, often have a stronger support system, and ideally, should have lower re-offense rates (Kahn, 1997).

*The Relapse Prevention Workbook for Youth in Treatment* By: Dr. Charlene Steen, PhD.

Dr. Charlene Steen of California, one of the nation's leading specialists on sex offenders, has spent 14 years studying issues dealing with sexual offenders. Steen, a licensed psychologist and clinical social worker, a retired attorney, and former director of a family sexual abuse treatment program takes the time to address the issues of denial and relapse prevention in adults and also wrote this workbook coupled with other writings, speeches, and web articles. Relapse Prevention (RP) Workbook continues to be a widely used treatment model for sex offenders. This book instructs the juvenile sexual offender about RP and how to use a variety of treatment techniques to prevent sexually abusive behavior. This workbook is included because it is written in straightforward and easy to understand language, this guided workbook helps the client learn RP cycles and interventions, with accompanying homework assignments. RP is an ideal companion to *Pathways*. Overall this workbook postulates a very individual and familial practical and relevant hands-on approach (Steen, 1993).

#### VHS Video Cassette

*The Assessment of adolescent sex Offenders* By: Dr. Eliana Gil, PhD.

Dr. Eliana Gil is a certified marriage, family, and child therapist, author, lecturer and clinician, and has been a frequent guest on national and local television and radio programs. She is currently on the board of directors of the National Resource Center on Child Abuse, is

president elect of the Association for Play Therapy and is an adjunct faculty member at both George Washington University and Virginia Tech University.

This 60-minute video is a two-part series by moderator Eliana Gil. She and five other experts collaborate together on the assessment and treatment of adolescent juvenile offender's. They discuss definition and types of offender's characteristics of young sex offenders and family dynamics. The video focuses on assessment issues to facilitate decisions on treatment planning and treatment setting and any ostensible risks that may be involved. This video is recommended and aids in anyone's pursuits to gain a firmer foundation to JSO concerns. Furthermore this 60-minute video is included because it advocates a bio-psycho-social model of therapy. Access Dr. Gil's homepage at [www.home.earthlink.net](http://www.home.earthlink.net) and order her video's online through [www.empowerkids.com](http://www.empowerkids.com) (Gil, 1992).

### Catalog

The Safer Society Foundation, Inc. (SSF), a nonprofit agency, is a national research, advocacy, and referral center on the prevention and treatment of sexual abuse. The SSF provides a variety of services related to the prevention and treatment of sexual abuse.

The Safer Society Press, a small nonprofit press operated by the SSF, publishes relevant research, studies, video and audio tapes, and books that contribute to the development of sexual abuse treatment, sexual abuse prevention, emerging topics, and developments in the field. The Safer Society Press has been publishing sexual abuse prevention and treatment materials since 1982. Access the catalog of books and audio-video titles at [www.SaferSociety.org](http://www.SaferSociety.org) (Safer Society Foundation, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

One must be mindful that the juvenile population responds better to treatment than adults, indicating that support should be given for early detection and intervention to increase the possibility of success. As mentioned previously adolescents are going through many unexplainable psychological and physiological changes that they do not fully understand.

At present, little scientific evidence supports the effectiveness of any treatment with JSO's. Evidently, methodologically sound empirical studies are needed to inform clinical practice on how to effectively interrupt the course of offending from adolescence to adulthood. Considering that multiple factors relate to the JSO, treatments that focuses solely on the offender are not suffice to meet this goal. A Bio-psycho-social model of therapy treatment, which includes the family, victims, and other significant family members, school, church, therapist, parole officer, and community systems, may be the most effective route for reducing offender risk and increasing victim and community safety.

JSO's perpetrate a substantial amount of sexual victimizations. This paper brings awareness to not only mental health counselors but to those wanting to gain a requisite knowledge, skill, and awareness to effectively dealing with this challenging population and clinical issue.

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