

SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT and PLANNING INITIATIVE

Chapter 2: Etiology and Typologies of Juveniles Who Have Committed Sexual Offenses

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[Introduction](#) | [Summary of Research Findings](#) | [Summary](#) | [Notes](#) | [References](#)

Introduction

This chapter addresses two topics: the etiology of sexual offending by juveniles and typologies for juveniles who have committed sexual offenses.

The etiological research reviewed in this chapter addresses the causes or origins of juvenile sexual offending and the pathways related to the development, onset, and maintenance of sexually abusive behavior in this population. Knowledge about the etiology of sexual offending is important because it provides both conceptual frameworks and specific guidance that can be used to develop more effective prevention efforts across a broad continuum, from primary to tertiary.¹

The typological research reviewed in this chapter addresses classification schemes based on types or categories of offenders or victims and offense characteristics. Empirically based typologies provide important information for clinical intervention by identifying key constructs for assessment, possible etiological factors specific to each subtype or typology of juveniles, and unique risks and needs for each subtype that should be targeted in treatment (Faniff & Kolko, 2012). (For more information on assessment, see [chapter 4](#), "Assessment of Risk for Sexual Reoffense in Juveniles Who Commit Sexual Offenses," in the Juvenile section.) Aebi and colleagues (2012, p. 268) add that a validated typology "shows a specific profile of an offender, victim, and offense characteristics that reflect [sic] underlying psychological processes" of the youth that are relevant to etiology, maintenance, treatment, and recidivism. (For more information on the "Effectiveness of Treatment for Juveniles Who Sexually Offend," see [chapter 5](#), and for more information on "Recidivism of Juveniles Who Commit Sexual Offenses," see [chapter 3](#), both in the Juvenile section.) The information gained from typology research provides the foundation for designing and implementing more effective and efficient treatment programming and supervision protocols that reflect individualized risks and needs.

[Back To Top](#)

Summary of Research Findings

Etiology

The research on etiological factors for sexual offending includes studies that focus on single factors and studies that focus on multiple factors. There appears to be a consensus in the field that etiological factors typically both co-vary and interact with each other in the development and onset of sexual offending and nonsexual delinquency.

Sexual Victimization

Veniziano, Veniziano, and LeGrand (2000) gathered information from a sample of 68 juveniles who had committed sexual offenses and were court ordered to a residential treatment facility. All of the juveniles had experienced sexual victimization. Information was gathered in regard to their prior sexual victimization and the characteristics and behaviors of their perpetrators. These data were compared to the behaviors of the adolescent offenders in the sample and the characteristics of their victims. **The results of the study supported the hypothesis that the juveniles who had been sexually victimized were more likely to select sexual behaviors that were reflective of their own sexual victimization in regard to age and gender of the victim and the types of sexual behaviors perpetrated against the victims.** However, the relationship between prior victimization and subsequent offending was not as strong with respect to whether victims were inside or outside the family. The researchers concluded that findings from the study offered support for the notion that the sexual offending of some adolescents represents a reenactment of their own sexual victimization, or a reactive conditioned and/or learned behavior pattern.

Grabell and Knight (2009) studied 193 juveniles who had committed sexual offenses, sampled from different inpatient treatment facilities. The study sought to examine child sexual abuse patterns and sensitive periods in the lives of juveniles who had committed sexual offenses. The results suggest a relationship between childhood sexual abuse and sexual fantasy in sexually abusive adolescents that is moderated by the age at which the abuse occurred. More specifically, it was found that ages 3 to 7 may

FINDINGS

Etiology

The sexual offending of some adolescents represents a reenactment of their own sexual victimization.

For some adolescents, sexual aggression is a learned behavior modeled after what they observe at home.

Adolescents who commit sexual offenses have much less extensive criminal histories, fewer antisocial peers, and fewer substance abuse problems compared with nonsexual offenders.

Typology

Meaningful differentiation can be made between youth who sexually offend against younger children and those who target peers and adults.

Various researchers have suggested that there are different subgroups of juveniles who commit sex offenses and that there are characteristics associated with the subgroups.

Individualized treatment is needed, rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

be a sensitive period when sexual abuse can do the most damage and place a youth at higher risk for engaging in sexually abusive behavior later in life. The researchers compared their findings related to discrete periods of sexual abuse with those from an earlier study conducted by Burton, Miller, and Shill (2002) and concluded that continuous sexual abuse was more likely related to severe perpetration than were discrete periods. Grabell and Knight concluded that both age and the length of the sexual abuse contribute to attitudes and behaviors in juveniles who commit sexual offenses.

Relationship Between Sexual Victimization and Personality Variables

Hunter and Figueredo (2000) focused on delineating the relationship between sexual victimization and personality variables in the prediction of patterns of sexual offending against children. Data were collected on 235 adolescents, representing subsamples of sexually victimized and nonvictimized, perpetrating and nonperpetrating, and emotionally maladjusted and nonmaladjusted youth. **A younger age at time of sexual victimization, a greater number of incidents, a longer period of waiting to report the abuse, and a lower level of perceived family support after revelation of the abuse were found to be predictive of subsequent sexual perpetration.** See "[Typologies](#)," in this chapter.

Burton (2008) conducted an exploratory study of the contribution of personality traits and childhood sexual victimization to the development of sexually abusive behavior, thereby testing a social learning/victim-to-victimizer hypothesis for the development of sexually abusive behavior. The study compared 74 incarcerated sexual abusers and 53 nonsexual abusers. Similar to the findings of many previous studies, Burton found that adolescent sexual abusers tend to have higher rates of sexual victimization than nonsexually abusive youth. In addition, sexually abusive youth who had been sexually victimized themselves were likely to repeat what was done to them in regard to the relationship with and gender of their victim(s), modus operandi, and sexual behaviors. These results suggest that sexually abusive youth may have learned to be sexually abusive from their own sexual perpetrator(s). The personality traits that contributed significantly to the social learning model were "submissive" and "forceful." Burton suggested that those who scored higher on the submissive trait may believe that close relationships with others are required to feel comfortable and socially confident, and that those who scored higher on the forceful personality trait may derive pleasure from inflicting pain on their victims and may attain this pleasure via forceful acts.

Multiple Types of Child Maltreatment

Awad and Saunders (1991) compared 49 male adolescents who sexually offended against females their age or older to 45 adolescents who engaged in sexually abusive behavior toward younger children. **The results showed that the majority of the adolescents who sexually offended against females their age or older came from a disturbed family background.** The rate of sexual victimization for the adolescents who sexually offended against children was much higher. The researchers concluded that, for some of these adolescents, sexual aggression was a learned behavior, modeled after what they observed at home. See "[Typologies](#)" in this chapter.

Kobayashi and colleagues (1995) tested a theoretical model of the etiology of deviant sexual aggression by adolescents that included several family factors: perceived parental deviance, child physical and sexual abuse history, and a child's bonding to his parents. Study subjects consisted of 117 juvenile males who committed sexual offenses and who had been referred to a treatment clinic. Results indicated that paternal physical abuse and sexual abuse by males increased sexual aggression among adolescents and that mother-child bonding had the opposite effect. The results can be explained from a social learning and a parent-child attachment or social control perspective. In addition, the researchers suggested an alternative perspective from evolutionary psychology to explain the findings. Kobayashi and colleagues noted that the behavior developed by juveniles who sexually offend may be the result of social modeling and highlighted the ethological literature related to sexual imprinting in animals to support this perspective.

Cavanaugh, Pimental, and Prentky (2008) studied a sample of 667 boys and 155 girls involved with social services, the vast majority of whom had engaged in hands-on sexualized behaviors. Almost all of the youth came from "highly dysfunctional" families and had experienced a high degree of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse as well as neglect. The researchers found that 66.7 percent of the study subjects had attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), 55.6 percent had posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 49.9 percent had a mood disorder. Approximately one-quarter used drugs and about one-fifth consumed alcohol. These findings highlight the importance of assessing and treating co-occurring issues, which can often be influential in sexual offending behaviors.

Seto and Lalumiere (2010) tested special and general explanations of male adolescent sexual offending by conducting a meta-analysis of 59 independent studies comparing male adolescents who committed sexual offenses with male adolescents who committed nonsexual offenses ($n=13,393$) on theoretically derived variables reflecting general delinquency risk factors (antisocial tendencies), childhood abuse, exposure to violence, family problems, interpersonal problems, sexuality, psychopathology, and cognitive abilities. **The results did not support the notion that adolescent sexual offending can be parsimoniously explained as a simple manifestation of general antisocial tendencies.** Adolescents who committed sexual offenses had much less extensive criminal histories, fewer antisocial peers, and fewer substance abuse problems compared with nonsexual offenders. Special explanations for adolescent sexual offending suggested a role for sexual abuse history, exposure to sexual violence, other abuse or neglect, social isolation, early exposure to sex or pornography, atypical sexual interests, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Explanations focusing on attitudes and beliefs about women or sexual offending, family communication problems or poor parent-child attachment, exposure to nonsexual violence, social incompetence, conventional sexual experience, and low intelligence were not supported. Ranked by effect size, the largest group difference was obtained for atypical sexual interests, followed by sexual abuse history for adolescents who had committed sexual offenses and, in turn, criminal history, antisocial associations, and substance abuse for nonsexual offenders.

Leibowitz, Burton, and Howard (2012) collected data from 478 youth, comparing sexually victimized and nonsexually victimized adolescent sexual abusers with a group of nonsexually victimized delinquent youth. The researchers found that the sexually victimized sexual abusers had the highest mean scores on trauma and personality measures, followed by nonsexually victimized sexual offenders and general

delinquent youth. The sexually victimized sexual abusers reported experiencing significantly greater levels of all five types of abuse (emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, and sexual victimization) than the other two groups. General delinquent youth had fewer behavioral and developmental problems than victimized and nonvictimized juveniles who commit sexual offenses. This difference between general delinquency youth and juveniles who commit sexual offenses has not been found in other studies (as summarized by Seto and Lalumière's 2010 meta-analysis).

Relationship Between Multiple Types of Child Maltreatment and Personality Variables

Johnson and Knight (2000) studied 122 juveniles who committed sexual offenses and were in inpatient treatment centers. The researchers explored developmental pathways possibly conducive to adolescent sexually abusive behavior, measuring the extent to which the sample experienced childhood trauma, engaged in adolescent delinquency, and exhibited particular personality dispositions and cognitive biases. The results suggest that sexual compulsivity and hypermasculinity, through misogynistic fantasy behavior, significantly discriminate verbally and physically coercive juveniles who commit sexual offenses from those who do not report using force in their offenses. Sexual victimization directly and indirectly (via sexual compulsivity) affected sexual coercion. **The study's results also suggest that alcohol abuse may play a more salient role in the expression of juvenile sexual coercion than previously hypothesized.** Physical abuse had an indirect effect on sexual coercion and was found to be predictive of delinquent behaviors such as peer aggression and adolescent alcohol abuse.

Knight and Sims-Knight (2004) studied 218 juveniles who were adjudicated for sexual offenses and resided in inpatient specialized treatment facilities. As part of the study, the researchers presented a three-path model intended to serve as a framework for understanding sexually abusive behavior toward women. Knight and Sims-Knight emphasized that an alternative model should be developed for sexually abusive behavior toward children. The three latent traits that identified the paths are sexual drive/preoccupation, antisocial behavior/impulsivity, and callous/unemotional trait. The paths predicted sexual coercion against women among juveniles who have committed sexual offenses. The researchers found that early traumatic physical and sexual abuse play an important etiological role, increasing the likelihood of sexually abusive behavior either directly by themselves or indirectly through the three intervening paths. The authors assert that these traits play a critical role across the life span, are critical in assessing risk of recidivism, and should be targets of treatment. See "[Typologies](#)" in this chapter.

In contrast to the above study that presented a model for sexually abusive behavior toward women, Daversa and Knight (2007) focused on an etiological model for sexual offending behavior toward younger victims. Data were gathered on 329 juveniles from different inpatient treatment facilities in four states. All of the juveniles had committed a sexual offense. The results provided evidence that various developmental and early childhood maltreatment experiences and specific, mediating personality traits contribute significantly to predicting adolescent sexual offending against younger victims. Four significant paths emerged in the model (Daversa & Knight, 2007):

1. From emotional and physical abuse, through psychopathy and sexual fantasy, to child fantasy and child victimization.
2. From emotional and physical abuse; through sexual inadequacy, sexual fantasy, and child fantasy; to child victimization.
3. From emotional and physical abuse, through sexual inadequacy, to child fantasy and child victimization.
4. From sexual abuse directly to child victimization.

The direct path from a history of sexual abuse to the sexual victimization of children is consistent with the finding that a disproportionate number of sexually abusive adolescents also report being victimized sexually. The researchers suggest that a subset of these sexually victimized offenders may select victim (s) specific to a particular age group that is consistent with the age at which they were victimized, indirectly supporting the victim-to-victimizer theory of adolescent sexual offending. The authors assert that this study provides data for the preliminary design of a dimensional model of adolescent sexual abusive behavior against younger children. See "[Typologies](#)" in this chapter.

Zakireh, Ronis, and Knight (2008) examined the individual beliefs and attitudes, and victimization histories, of 100 male youth ages 13–19. The youth were divided equally into four demographically similar groups: (1) sexual offenders in residential placement, (2) sexual offenders in outpatient treatment, (3) nonsexual offenders in residential placement, and (4) nonsexual offenders in outpatient treatment. The sexually offending youth included those who had exclusively offended against peer age and adult victims, those who had exclusively offended against children younger than age 12, and those who offended against mixed-age victims. The authors found that three categories of risk factors—greater hypersexuality or sexual deviance, more violent behavior or fantasies, and an increased history of victimization—are consistent with path models that predict sexually abusive behavior toward peers and adults. The authors asserted that their findings were consistent with hypotheses about the significant role that the domains of callousness, unemotionality, and antisocial behavior play in sexual abusive behavior against peers and the limited etiological role they play in sexually abusive behavior toward children. The study's findings are consistent with past evidence regarding the role that sexual victimization plays in subsequent sexual offending behavior. See "[Typologies](#)" in this chapter.

Pornography

Burton, Leibowitz, and Howard (2010) compared pornography exposure between male adolescents who sexually abuse and male nonsexual offending delinquent youth. Although previous literature indicates that pornography use for adult males at risk for aggression may result in sexually aggressive behavior, very little research has been reported on exposure to pornography on the part of juveniles who commit sexual abuse. The juveniles who had engaged in sexually abusive behavior reported more exposure to pornography when they were both younger and older than age 10 than nonsexual abusers. However, their exposure was not correlated to the age at which their sexually abusive behavior started, to the reported number of victims, or to sexual offense severity. The exposure subscale before age 10 was not related to the number of children the group sexually abused, and the forceful exposure subscale was not correlated with either arousal to rape or degree of force used by the youth. Finally, exposure was

significantly correlated with all of the nonsexual crime scores in the study. The researchers characterized this study as exploratory in nature and stated that no clear conclusions can be drawn regarding prohibitions or control of pornography for adolescents who sexually abuse and who are in treatment or on parole or probation.

Summary on Etiology

Knight and Sims-Knight (2004, p. 49) provide an excellent synthesis on the importance of etiology regarding the treatment, supervision, and policy response to juvenile sexual offending:

Identifying the developmental antecedents of sexual aggression not only informs treatment planning (i.e., tertiary intervention), but also will ultimately be the basis for identifying at-risk groups for primary and secondary interventions. Having a validated model of the etiology of sexual aggression is the cornerstone of any public health approach to sexual aggression and a necessary prerequisite for implementation of a primary prevention perspective.

The research cited above describes both single- and multiple-factor etiological theories. There is strong evidence that sexual victimization plays a disproportionate role in the development of sexually abusive behavior in adolescents. A number of studies have described a direct path from sexual victimization to sexually abusive behavior, and others have described an indirect path that is mediated by personality variables. Overall, the empirical evidence supports the notion that sexual abuse should not be examined in isolation as it clearly co-varies with other developmental risk factors. Much of the research has described multiple-factor theories in which early childhood maltreatment (traumatic physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and chaotic family environments) increases the likelihood of sexually abusive behavior, either directly or indirectly, in relationship with personality variables. See table 1 for a summary of the etiological research.

Table 1. Summary of Etiology Research

Study	Focus	Findings
Sexual Victimization		
Veniziano, Veneziano, & LeGrand (2000)	Sexual victimization and subsequent sexual offending	Sexual offending of some adolescents represents a reenactment of their own sexual victimization or a reactive conditioned and/or learned behavior pattern.
Grabell & Knight (2009)	Child sexual abuse patterns and sensitive periods in juveniles who had committed sexual offenses	Ages 3–7 may be a sensitive period during which sexual abuse can do the most damage and place a youth at higher risk for engaging in sexually abusive behavior later in life.
Sexual Victimization and Personality		
Hunter & Figueredo (2000)	Delineating the relationship between sexual victimization and personality variables in the prediction of patterns of sexual offending against children	Factors predictive of subsequent sexual offending in sexually victimized offenders follow: a younger age at time of sexual victimization, a greater number of incidents, a longer period of waiting to report the abuse, and a lower level of perceived family support after revelation of the abuse.
Burton (2008)	Contribution of personality and childhood sexual victimization to a social learning victim-to-victimizer hypothesis for the development of sexually abusive behavior	Sexually abusive youth who had been sexually victimized were likely to repeat what was done to them in regard to the relationship with and gender of their victim(s), modus operandi, and sexual behaviors. Suggests that sexually abusive youth may have learned to be sexually abusive from their own sexual perpetrator(s).
Multiple Types of Child Maltreatment		
Awad & Saunders (1991)	Compared male adolescents who sexually offended females their age or older to juvenile delinquents and adolescents who engaged in sexually abusive behavior toward younger children	A majority of the adolescents who sexually offended against females their age or older came from a disturbed family background. The rate of sexual victimization for the adolescents who sexually offended against children was much higher and suggested that in some of these adolescents their sexual aggression was a learned behavior, modeled after what they observed at home.
Kobayashi et al. (1995)	Tested a theoretical model of the etiology of deviant sexual aggression by adolescents that included several family factors: perceived parental deviance, child physical and sexual abuse history, and a child's bonding to his parents	Physical abuse by the father and sexual abuse by males increased sexual aggression by adolescents. Also, a child's bonding to his mother was found to decrease his sexual aggression. The results can be explained from a social learning and a parent-child attachment or social control perspective. Alternative perspectives of evolutionary psychology are also considered.
Cavanaugh, Pimental, & Prentky (2008)	Co-occurring issues that can often be influential in sexual offending behaviors	Almost all of the youth came from "highly dysfunctional" families and had experienced a high degree of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and neglect. A total of 66.7% had ADHD, 55.6% had PTSD, and 49.9% had a mood disorder. Approximately a quarter used drugs and about one-fifth consumed alcohol.
		Results did not support the notion that adolescent sexual offending can be parsimoniously explained

Study	Focus	Findings
Seto & Lalumiere (2010)	Tested special and general explanations of male adolescent sexual offending	as a simple manifestation of general antisocial tendencies.
Leibowitz, Burton, & Howard (2012)	Compared sexually victimized and nonsexually victimized adolescent sexual abusers with a group of nonsexually victimized delinquent youth on trauma and personality measures	Sexually victimized sexual abusers reported experiencing significantly greater levels of all five types of abuse than the other two groups (emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, and sexual victimization). General delinquent youth had fewer behavioral and developmental problems than victimized and nonvictimized juveniles who commit sexual offenses.
Multiple Types of Child Maltreatment and Personality		
Johnson & Knight (2000)	Explored developmental pathways possibly conducive to adolescent sexually abusive behavior, measuring the extent to which the sample experienced childhood trauma, engaged in adolescent delinquency, and exhibited particular personality dispositions and cognitive biases	Results suggest that sexual compulsivity and hypermasculinity significantly discriminate verbally and physically coercive sexually abusive juveniles from those who do not report using force. Sexual victimization directly and indirectly (via sexual compulsivity) affected sexual coercion. Alcohol abuse may play a more salient role. Physical abuse had an indirect effect on sexual coercion and was found to be predictive of delinquent behaviors.
Knight & Sims-Knight (2004)	Three-path model intended as a model for sexually abusive behavior toward women	Early traumatic physical and sexual abuse play an important etiological role, increasing the likelihood of sexually abusive behavior either indirectly through the three intervening paths or directly.
Daversa & Knight (2007)	Etiological model for sexual offending behavior toward younger victims	Various developmental and early childhood maltreatment experiences and specific, mediating personality traits contribute significantly to predicting adolescent sexual offending against younger victims. A subset of sexually victimized sexual abusers may select victim(s) specific to a particular age group that is consistent with the age at which they were victimized, indirectly supporting the victim-to-victimizer theory of adolescent sexual offending.
Zakireh, Ronis, & Knight (2008)	Individual beliefs and attitudes, and victimization histories of four groups of sexual and nonsexual offenders	Three categories of risk factors—greater hypersexuality or sexual deviance, more violent behavior or fantasies, and an increased history of victimization—are consistent with path models that predict sexually abusive behavior toward peers and adults. Findings were consistent with past evidence regarding the role that sexual victimization plays in subsequent sexual offending behavior.
Pornography		
Leibowitz, Burton, & Howard (2010)	Compared pornography exposure between male adolescents who sexually abuse and male nonsexual offending delinquent youth	The juveniles who had engaged in sexually abusive behavior reported more exposure to pornography when they were both younger and older than age 10 than nonsexual abusers. Exposure was significantly correlated with all of the nonsexual crime scores in the study.

Grabell and Knight (2009) suggest that in addition to having risk factors, it is likely that juveniles who have committed sexual offenses lack protective factors—such as emotional support and social competence—to buffer against risk in early experience. Future research should consider the complex relationships between these risk and protective factors in the development of sexually abusive behavior.

"Research supports a multifactorial explanatory theory regarding etiological pathways."

Typologies

Typology research undertaken to date has primarily differentiated subtypes of juveniles who have committed sexual offenses based on victim age, delinquent history, and personality characteristics. This section focuses on research as it relates to these dimensions.

Subtypes Based on Victim Age

Awad and Saunders (1991) found that the majority of adolescents who sexually offended against females their age or older were recidivists, had a history of antisocial behavior predating and coinciding with their sexual offenses, and came from a disturbed family background. Adolescents who sexually assaulted peer or older females were less likely to be socially isolated than those who offended against

children and more likely to socialize with older peers than a comparison group of delinquents. Alcohol and drugs were not found to play a prominent role in the adolescents who sexually victimized peer or older females. Sexually deviant impulses and antisocial traits were found to be motivating factors for the majority of these youth.

Hunter and Figueredo (2000) found that juveniles who offended against children were more likely to be pessimistic and less likely to be self-sufficient than nonoffending youth. These findings appear to be consistent with a conceptualization of juveniles who sexually offend against children as youth who are lacking in social competencies and who are competitively disadvantaged relative to their peers. The researchers proposed that the sexual acting out of these juveniles may be more reflective of compensatory behavior than psychopathy and more reflective of arrested sexual development than paraphilic interest.

Hunter, Hazelwood, and Slesinger (2000) conducted a study comparing 62 adolescents who offended against children to 64 adolescents who offended against peers and adults. The findings suggest that a meaningful differentiation can be made between those youth who sexually offend against younger children (5 or more years younger) and those who target peers and adults. According to the study, adolescents who targeted peers and adults were more likely to have—

- Selected a female victim who was either a stranger or acquaintance.
- Committed their offense in a public area, and acted in a group with others.
- Committed the sex crime in association with other criminal activity and have been more aggressive and violent in commission of the offense.
- Used a weapon.

Hunter, Hazelwood, and Slesinger (2000) suggested that the differences in victim age (peer/adult vs. younger children) represent unique populations of sexually aggressive youth. In general, peer/adult adolescents who commit sexual offenses display behaviors that suggest they have greater antisocial tendencies and are more prone to violence in the commission of their sexual offenses than adolescents who molest children.

In a followup study, Hunter and colleagues (2003) contrasted adolescent males who sexually offended against prepubescent children with those who targeted pubescent and postpubescent females. Table 2 identifies the differences found between the two groups.

Table 2. Differentiation Between Categories of Adolescent Males Who Sexually Offend

Those Who Target Prepubescent Children	Those Who Target Pubescent and Postpubescent Females
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater deficits in psychosocial functioning • Use less aggression in their sexual offending • More likely to offend against relatives • More likely to meet criteria for clinical intervention for depression and anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ more force in the commission of their sexual offense • More likely to use a weapon and to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense • Less likely to be related to their victim • Less likely to commit the offense in the victim's home or in their own residence • More likely to have a prior arrest history for a nonsexual crime • Demonstrate less anxiety and depression, and less pronounced social self-esteem deficits

Source: Hunter et al. (2003).

Deficits in psychosocial functioning were found to mediate the influence of childhood exposure to violence against females on adolescent perpetration of sexual and nonsexual offenses. Childhood physical abuse by a father or stepfather and exposure to violence against females were found to be associated with higher levels of comorbid anxiety and depression. Noncoercive childhood sexual victimization by a male nonrelative was found to be associated with sexual offending against a male child.

Knight and Sims-Knight's (2004) three-path model for sexual coercion against women found that juvenile rapists evidenced more antisocial behavior and a higher use of alcohol. Additionally, juvenile rapists were more likely to come from more disturbed families and to have experienced more caregiver instability. The researchers found that these juveniles had committed more violent offenses than offenders who victimized younger children and that they evidenced a higher frequency of borderline intellectual functioning.

Daversa and Knight's (2007, pp. 1326–1327) dimensional model of adolescent sexually abusive behavior against younger children indicates that "different models of developmental antecedents and core traits are involved in adolescent sexually abusive behavior against peer-aged girls or women and younger children and that identifiable paths to offending are evident in each model." The researchers proposed that their results suggest the possibility that a typology based on victim age and developmental trajectory is possible. Further, their findings challenged those from prior research that suggested all adolescents who offend against children are submissive, dependent, socially isolated, and less aggressive in their sexual offending. Daversa and Knight suggested the possibility that a subgroup of adolescent child molesters may be impulsive and aggressive in their offense planning, entertain sadistic fantasies, and demonstrate a high degree of sexual arousal toward young children.

Hunter (2009) reported on a study of a national sample of 256 adolescent males who committed sexual offenses and were receiving treatment in an institutional or community-based setting. Initial results suggest the presence of five subgroups and associated characteristics:

- Life Course Persistent—Antisocial
 - Has the highest arrest rate for nonsexual crimes and the highest reported rate of childhood exposure to violence.
 - Evidences lengthy childhood histories of exposure to violence and early developmental onset of pornography viewing and drug/alcohol use.
- Adolescent Onset—Experimental
 - Is more inclined to sexually offend against peer and adult females.
 - Appears less psychosocially and psychosexually disturbed than other subgroups, and reports less childhood exposure to violence and less preadolescent pornography/substance use.
 - Appears to have the lowest average number of victims of the five subgroups.
- Socially Impaired—Anxious and Depressed
 - Predominantly sexually offends against children.
- Pedophilic Interests—Antisocial
- Pedophilic Interests—Non-Antisocial
 - Evidences lengthy childhood histories of exposure to violence and early developmental onset of pornography viewing and drug/alcohol use.

Zakireh, Ronis, and Knight (2008) found that greater hypersexuality or sexual deviance, more violent behavior or fantasies, and an increased history of victimization are consistent with path models that predict sexually abusive behavior toward peers and adults. Additionally, they found that the domains of callousness, unemotionality, and antisocial behavior play a significant role in sexually abusive behavior against peers and a limited etiological role in sexually abusive behavior toward children.

Kemper and Kistner (2010) gathered archival data on 296 male adolescents who were committed to a residential high-risk facility for serious and/or chronic offenders between the ages of 12 and 19. The study examined the strength of the relationship between victim-age-based subgroup membership and personal, criminal history, and offense history variables. Consistent with previous research, juveniles who offended against children tended to victimize male and female relatives while peer offenders tended to victimize female acquaintances. Child and mixed-victim-age offenders were more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse. Peer offenders had a more extensive nonsexual delinquent history. Few associations were found between subgroup membership and measures of physical abuse, social skills, or impulsivity. Kemper and Kistner (2010) argued that victim age is more likely a proxy for pertinent factors associated with sexual offending and that these include the physical and emotional development of the victim. They proposed that when information related to the victim is used in classification, the combination method of using both victim age and offender-victim age discrepancy is preferable.

Miner and colleagues (2010) explored the relationship between sexual abuse perpetration and insecure attachment and adolescent social development. The researchers compared three samples of 13- to 18-year-old adolescent males: adolescents who committed sexual offenses against child victims, adolescents who committed sexual offenses against peer/adult victims, and nonsexual delinquent youth. The results indicated that attachment style had an indirect effect on sexual abuse perpetration. Attachment anxiety affected involvement with peers and interpersonal adequacy. Feelings of interpersonal inadequacy, combined with oversexualization, and positive attitudes toward others distinguished adolescents who committed sexual offenses against child victims from nonsexual delinquents and from adolescents who committed sexual offenses against peer/adult victims. Attachment anxiety with a lack of misanthropic attitudes toward others appears to lead to isolation from peers and feelings of interpersonal inadequacy. The researchers proposed that individuals with this constellation of factors may turn to children to meet their exaggerated intimacy and sexual needs. **The data suggest that youth who assault peers or adults are not substantially different from other delinquent youth on most of the measures.**

Faniff and Kolko (2012) studied a sample of 176 males adjudicated for a sexual offense who were considered low risk and court ordered to participate in outpatient treatment. Participants were classified into one of the following three groups based on the age of their victims: child victims (at least 4 years younger than the offender), peer/adult victims, or both types of victims (referred to as "mixed"). Regardless of victim type, the researchers found more similarities than differences across the groups in regard to maltreatment experiences, antisocial tendencies, mental health functioning, family functioning, and recidivism risk. In contrast to much of the research discussed above, Faniff and Kolko concluded that it is not clear that the selection of a particular type of victim is indicative of unique risks and needs, and suggested that subtyping based on criminal history or personality measures may prove more meaningful. They acknowledged, however, that there is a pattern across studies suggesting greater anxiety and internalizing problems in juveniles with child victims. Similarly, juveniles with peer/adult victims had higher general rearrest rates, consistent with the hypothesis that juveniles who select peer/adult victims are more generally antisocial than those who select child victims. The current study was not able to draw any firm conclusions about mixed offenders given how few were present in the sample.

Subtypes Based on Delinquent History

Butler and Seto (2002) sought to distinguish between adolescents who sexually offend based on nonsexual offense history. Based on their criminal records, 114 male adolescent offenders were divided into three groups: adolescents who commit sexual offenses, versatile offenders, and nonaggressive offenders. The adolescents who committed sexual offenses were further classified as "sex only" if they

had only been charged with sex offenses or as "sex plus" if they had ever been charged with a nonsexual offense. Youth were compared on measures of childhood conduct problems, current behavioral adjustment, antisocial attitudes and beliefs, and risk for future delinquency. The researchers found that sex-only adolescents who committed sexual offenses had significantly fewer childhood conduct problems, better current adjustment, more prosocial attitudes, and a lower risk for future delinquency than did the adolescents who committed nonsexual offenses. Sex-plus adolescents resembled criminally versatile offenders. Butler and Seto concluded that differences between sex-only and sex-plus adolescents who committed sexual offenses reflect a valid typological distinction and that this discrimination has implications for differential intervention. **Sex-plus adolescents are at higher risk for general reoffending than are sex-only adolescents and are more likely to benefit from treatment targeting general delinquency factors.** They may also be more likely to require multisystemic interventions that simultaneously address individual, family, and social influences on antisocial behavior.

Zakireh, Ronis, and Knight (2008) found that juveniles who have committed sexual offenses may share a number of common difficulties with general delinquents because many of these youth have similar patterns of criminal offending. Thus, sexual offending may be part of a broader pattern of serious antisocial behavior for a proportion of the population of sexual offending juveniles.

Subtypes Based on Victim Age and Delinquent History

Aebi and colleagues (2012) sampled 223 male children and adolescents between ages 10 and 18 who had been convicted of sexual assaults against children, sexual assaults against adolescents and adults, coercive sexual behavior, exhibitionism, and sexual harassment in Zurich, Switzerland. The research tested the validity of typing sexually abusive juveniles based on victim age, co-offender status, and crime history. The best evidence was found for the victim-age-based subtype that differentiated juveniles who offended against children from those who had offended against adolescents and adults. Consistent with findings from previous research, Aebi and his colleagues found that **offenders against children were younger at the time of offense, less likely to be of foreign nationality, more likely to have male victims, and showed less aggression in their offenses.** The researchers also found that sexual offense severity was higher among child offenders and included more intrusive behaviors relative to adolescents who had offended against adolescents and adults. The consideration of a distinct underlying psychological mechanism differentiating offenders based on victim age may be important for intervention planning.

Although there was some support for regarding juveniles who offend against children as a separate type, Aebi and colleagues (2012) concluded that the limited validity and lack of independence found for the three types strongly suggest that a comprehensive typology is not feasible. The researchers suggested that a dimensional approach based on the following factors is more adequate for describing juveniles who have committed sexual offenses:

- Single offender with severe molestation of a related child.
- Persistent general delinquent with migrant background.
- Older offender with alcohol use and familial constraints.
- Multiple and aggressive offender with social adversities.
- Offender with unselected and multiple victims.

Aebi and colleagues (2012, p. 283) concluded that these findings suggest "distinct dimensions of criminality implying different pathways that lead to sexual offending in youth" and proposed that the identification of criminality dimensions in terms of relevant patterns of sexual offending characteristics may be more useful in guiding treatment intervention.

Subtypes Based on Victim Age and Personality Characteristic

Carpenter, Peed, and Eastman (1995) compared the personality characteristics of adolescents who committed sexual offenses by examining the extent (if any) to which personality differences exist between adolescents who offend against their peers and adolescents who offend against younger children. The sample consisted of 36 adolescents who committed sexual offenses (16 peer offenders and 20 child offenders) and who were committed to Virginia's Department of Youth and Family Services. The researchers found that adolescents who molested children are more schizoid, avoidant, and dependent than adolescents who offended against peers. The adolescents who offended against children frequently demonstrated a pattern of withdrawing from social encounters with peers and, as such, they commonly experienced loneliness and isolation. In discussing these findings, Carpenter and his colleagues (1995, p. 196) stated that these results "may help explain why adolescent sexual offenders against children gravitate to their victims." Results also suggest that adolescents who offend against peers have an inflated self-image and are arrogant and interpersonally exploitative. Evidence suggests that the design and effectiveness of treatment programs may be enhanced if the personality differences between the type of victim (child or peer) can be taken into account.

Worling (2001) examined the California Psychological Inventory Scores from 112 males ages 12–19 who committed sexual offenses. A cluster analysis of the factor-derived scores revealed four personality-based subtypes and associated characteristics:

- **Antisocial/impulsive youth** are likely to have a propensity for rule violations. Their sexual offending, at least initially, is more a result of this factor than deviant sexual arousal. Descriptors of this subgroup may include anxious, unhappy, and rebellious.
- **Unusual/isolated youth** are emotionally disturbed and insecure. They are characterized by a peculiar presentation and social isolation. Their awkward personality features may inhibit their ability to develop and maintain healthy and intimate relationships with consenting peers.
- **Overcontrolled/reserved youth** endorse prosocial attitudes, are cautious to interact with others, and tend to keep their feelings to themselves.
- **Confident/aggressive youth** are confident, self-centered, outgoing, aggressive, and sociable.

Significant differences were observed between the groups regarding history of physical abuse, parental marital status, residence of the juveniles, and whether or not they received criminal charges for their index sexual assaults. Membership in the subgroups was unrelated to victim age, victim gender, and the juvenile's history of sexual victimization. The juveniles in the two most pathological groups, antisocial/impulsive and unusual/isolated, were most likely to be charged with a subsequent violent (sexual or nonsexual) or nonviolent offense. Worling reported that 39 percent of his sample was sexually victimized, with no between-group differences being found. Twice as many juveniles in the antisocial/impulsive group had a history of physical victimization compared to the other groups in the study. Worling asserted that these results provided evidence for heterogeneity in the presence and nature of psychopathology, personality characteristics, and social functioning in adolescents who commit sexual offenses and of different etiological pathways and treatment needs.

Richardson and colleagues (2004) described a personality-based taxonomy based on an out-patient sample of 112 sexually abusive adolescents. Five subgroups were derived from cluster analytic procedures applied to personality pattern scales scores from the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI): normal, antisocial, submissive, dysthymic/inhibited, and dysthymic/negativistic. The groups were also found to be differentiated on MACI's psychopathology scales, with mood disorders indicated in three of the five subgroups. The results of the study provide evidence of the heterogeneity of adolescents who sexually abuse in both personality characteristics and psychopathology. A comparison of the groups differentiated on the basis of victim characteristics did not indicate a relationship between personality and sexual offense. The broad clinical distinction between internalizing and externalizing disorders was found to be valid in this sample. The researchers suggested that it may be better clinical practice to facilitate treatment planning that is based on subgroup membership, as evidenced by personality type and clinical presentation.

[Back To Top](#)

Summary

The dearth of research on juveniles who have committed sexual offenses in the 1980s resulted in a "trickle-down" approach, in which an adult sexual offender model was used that supported a narrow and specialized one-size-fits-all treatment and supervision approach. **The national experts who participated in the SOMAPI forum identified the importance of individualizing treatment for juveniles who commit sexual offenses.** In addition, research has increasingly demonstrated the heterogeneity of the population of juveniles who have committed sexual offenses in regard to factors including etiological pathways, offending patterns, delinquent history, personality characteristics and clinical presentation, and risk for sexual and nonsexual recidivism. The integration of findings from etiological and typology studies is suggestive of differential risk and of treatment and supervision needs.

The importance of using individualized treatment and supervision strategies was also acknowledged by the experts at the SOMAPI forum. Related to typologies, Knight and Prentky (1993, p. 77) provide a balanced assessment of the use of clinical labels:

Clinical labels have some negative consequences. If however, we refrain from applying labels because of fears about the possible negative consequences of the misapplication of such labels, we would also forfeit our chances of discerning causes, of designing intervention programs that address the more specific needs of subgroups, of identifying vulnerable individuals who might profit from primary prevention programs, and of improving our dispositional decisions about specific subgroups of offenders.... Thus, categorization yields multiple advantages, and must be pursued. We must also remain cognizant of the limits of our taxonomic models and continually challenge our constructs and scrutinize the empirical validity of the measures and types we generate.

Typology research dealing with juveniles who commit sexual offenses has focused primarily on the subtyping of juvenile offenders based on victim age, delinquent history, and personality characteristics. Although the research has produced mixed and certainly not definitive findings, it has yielded substantial insights in regard to identifying differential etiological paths, typological characteristics, and associated treatment targets. Aebi and colleagues (2012) argue that, given the large number of potential influences and interactions of sexual offending characteristics, sexual offending juveniles may be better described by the use of dimensional measures rather than assigning them to specific types. The research to date has provided very useful information regarding dimensions that include trauma and chaotic family environments, attachment, psychosocial adjustment, delinquent history and orientation, co-occurring mental health problems, sexual drive and preoccupation, and atypical sexual interests.

The evolving knowledge on etiological pathways and typologies is increasingly informing intervention practices, particularly the ability of sex offender management professionals to design intervention programs that address the specific needs of subgroups of juveniles who commit sexual offenses. Empirical evidence concerning the prevalence of child maltreatment in early development offers support for continuing treatment aimed at victimization and trauma resolution with sexually abusive youth. Developmental models, which have included early childhood experiences and family functioning, should be broadened to include larger social variables such as exposure to sexually violent media and characteristics of social ecologies.

While research has documented the heterogeneity and differential treatment and supervision needs that exist within the juvenile offender population, policy responses tend to be designed with only the highest risk offenders in mind. Rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, legislative initiatives should encourage risk assessment and the application of aggressive strategies and the most intensive interventions only for those offenders who require the greatest level of supervision, treatment, and personal restriction. In this way, both community safety and the successful rehabilitation of youth who offend can be ensured.

[Back To Top](#)

Notes

¹ Primary prevention approaches occur before sexual violence to stop initial victimization; tertiary prevention approaches occur after sexual victimization to address the consequences to the victim as well as the management of known sex offenders to minimize the possibility of reoffense (Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, 2013).

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[Back To Top](#)

[National Sex Offender Public Website](#) | [Site Index](#)

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