



NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER • INFO & STATS FOR JOURNALISTS

PEOPLE WHO COMMIT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Often in efforts to prevent and eliminate sexual violence, the focus is on individuals who commit sexual violence and have been prosecuted. In those cases, the main focus shifts to their punishment. Not all offenders end up arrested; 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police (Rennison, 2002). There are many people who commit sexual violence but are never caught, and it will take a unified community strategy to prevent sexual crimes. With supervision and treatment, many sex offenders can live productive and offense-free lives (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

WHO COMMITS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

There are common misconceptions and stereotypes about people who sexually abuse. It is not helpful when these stereotypes are reinforced in media coverage. Here are some facts about people who sexually abuse:

- Not all offenders are the same. Some are more likely to reoffend than others, and there are different motivations for offending.
- They can have strong social ties in the community. People who sexually abuse can be male or female, and span a variety of backgrounds and ages. Some individuals are married with stable relationships, employment and lack a prior criminal history.
- The majority of sexual violence is committed by someone the victim knows – a family member, intimate partner, coworker, classmate or acquaintance.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS IN ADULTS

The presence of risk factors does not mean that abusive behaviors will happen. It is a balance of risk factors and protective factors that can impact the development of behaviors and affect the likelihood that an individual will sexually abuse. (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

- **Some individual-level risk factors:** Poor coping skills, low self-esteem, and sexual attraction or sexual preoccupation. (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).
- **Some family-level risk factors:** Difficulty establishing and/or maintaining appropriate intimate relationships and/or a chaotic, unstable, or violent home environment (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).
- **Some community-level risk factors include:** May have difficulty developing meaningful peer networks or a community presence (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

STATISTICS

- About 12% to 24% of known or adjudicated sex offenders will reoffend. When people who sexually abuse do commit another crime, it is often not sexual or violent. (Rates might be low because sex offenses are often not reported.) (Center for Sex Offender Management [CSOM], 2008).
- The longer (known or adjudicated) offenders remain offense-free in the community, the less likely they are to reoffend sexually. The average 10-year recidivism rate from time of release is 20%, the 10-year recidivism declines to 12% after five years offense-free and to 9% after 10 years offense-free (Harris & Hanson, 2004).
- Annually, there are nearly 2,200 juveniles arrested for rape and nearly 9,200 arrested for other types of sex offenses (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2005). Treatment programs can effectively reduce sexual re-offense; adolescents and children are more likely than adults to stop their abusive behaviors (Finkelhor, Ormond, & Chaffin, 2009).
- About 150,000 adult sex offenders are currently in state and federal prisons throughout the United States. Between 10,000 and 20,000 are released into the community each year (CSOM, 2007).
- More than 700,000 registered sex offenders live in communities throughout the U.S. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2014).

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Often, people who sexually abuse are portrayed publicly as “monsters.” Because of this, people might be less likely to recognize the warning signs of a sexual behavior problem in loved ones or others with whom they are close, because they

do not see them as “monsters” (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011). Someone who suspects abuse within a family could be less likely to ask for help and subject family members, including victims, to public exposure (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

- Once a convicted abuser returns to the community, he/she is subjected to many of the current legislative policies. The resulting housing and job instability, loss of income, and isolation could increase the risk to re-offend. The instability might also reduce the system’s ability to monitor the offender and hold him/her accountable (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

REFERENCES

- Center for Sex Offender Management . (2007). *Managing the challenges of sex offender reentry*. Retrieved from http://www.csom.org/pubs/reentry_brief.pdf
- Center for Sex Offender Management. (2008). *What you need to know about sex offenders* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from http://www.csom.org/pubs/needtoknow_fs.pdf
- Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009, December). Juveniles who commit sex offenses against minors [NCJ 227763]. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Retrieved from National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227763.pdf>
- Harris, A. J. R., & Hanson, R. K. (2004). *Sex offender recidivism: A simple question 2004- 03*. Retrieved from Static 99 Clearinghouse: <http://www.static99.org/pdfdocs/harrisandhanson2004simpleq.pdf>
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2014). Map of registered sex offenders in the United States. Retrieved from http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/documents/Sex_Offenders_Map.pdf
- Rennison, C. M. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000* [NCJ 194530]. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>
- Tabachnick, J., & Klein A. (2011). *A reasoned approach : Reshaping sex offender policy to prevent child sexual abuse*. Retrieved from the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers: <http://www.atsa.com/pdfs/ppReasonedApproach.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2005). *Crime in the United States, 2004: Uniform crime reports*. Retrieved from http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04