

More to Know about Male Offenders

Recently VIRTUS[®] *Online* published articles that referenced research identifying some differences and similarities between male and female offenders. The research focus was the female offender and how their social and interpersonal skills are similar to, and different from male child molesters.

Research on male offenders and the comparison between child molesters and sex offenders who abuse adults is offering us greater insight into understanding the people who commit these crimes. Knowing all we can about offenders and how they operate in society can help us create safer environments and protect children.

A recent analysis of 89 studies on the perpetrators of child sexual abuse investigated six categories of intra and interpersonal factors.* The study compared child sex offenders, sex offenders who abuse adults, and non-offenders. The following major categories were examined:

- *Family risk factors:* In this area, there was no significant difference between the child sex offenders and other sex offenders. However, in comparison to non-sex offenders, child molesters were more likely to have a history of abuse, poor family functioning, and poor attachment or bonding with family. Child molesters were also more likely to have experienced harsher discipline, and controlling or coercive parenting.
- *Externalizing behaviors:* Sex offenders who abuse adults were more likely to express strong emotions externally. Between child molesters and non-offenders, in areas such as anger/hostility, lifestyle instability, antisocial behavior, substance abuse, etc. the numbers were markedly higher for the child molesters as compared with non-offenders but higher for sex offenders as compared to child molesters.
- *Internalizing behaviors:* Child molesters generally have more anxiety, more depression, and lower self esteem than sex offenders and non-sex offenders. When compared to non-sex offenders, the child molesters were also more likely to have a history of mental illness.
- *Social deficits:* Child molesters and other sex offenders had similar measures in the area of social deficits; but once again the comparison between child molesters and non-offenders was telling. According to the analysis, molesters have generally lower social skills, more difficulty with intimate relationships, and experience loneliness and lack of secure attachments at a higher rate than non-offenders.
- *Sexual behaviors:* Oddly perhaps, not much data was available in this area. It appears from the information reviewed that child molesters have higher sex drives, more difficulty coping with sexual issues, and, obviously, a stronger deviant sexual interest than non offenders. Once again, the differences between child molesters and other sex offenders were minimal.
- *Attitudes:* Not surprisingly, child molesters have strong opinions and attitudes about sex. There was also some difference in their attitude about perpetrator culpability. They tended to minimize this and to be more tolerant of adult/child sexual activity.

So, what does this tell us about offenders that can help us create safe environments? In some ways, one might not see the study as providing us with significant new information. However, a closer analysis of the findings confirms some things we suspected but were unable to substantiate. Sex offenders who abuse adults are significantly more likely to display high levels of externalizing behavior. For example, they are more likely to act in

anger or response to internal rage than a child molester. The person who molests children is more likely to be methodical and to convince him or herself that the actions are the result of love and genuine caring.

The study also confirmed some theories or assertions that have been untested in the past such as the theory that there are variables that may lead to the development of sex offending behavior. The finding that many of the same characteristics were present for child molesters and other sex offenders may prove valuable in the identification of potential molesters as young people and the development of effective intervention that can turn the person in a more productive and healthy direction.

The evidence also supports something we have been saying for years in the *Protecting God's Children® for Adults* program. Most child molesters were molested AND most people who were molested as children DO NOT become child molesters.

The more we learn about perpetrators and how they develop into child molesters, the more we can support early intervention to stop the behavior. When we do that, we not only save children and future victims, we save these adults from destroying their own lives as well.

* Whitaker, D.J., Le, B, Hanson, R.K., Baker, C.K., McMahon, P.M., Ryan, G., Klein, A, Rice, D.D., *Risk Factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse: A review and meta-analysis*, Child Abuse & Neglect, 32 (2008) 529-548.

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