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## What The Public Needs To Know About Sex Offenders

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**Imagine that your child has been sexually abused.** This thought is often a fear for parents today. However, most of us say “It will never happen to my kid.” Such an event can destroy even the most intact family. Before you rule this worry out consider the following information:

First, every day there are 234,000 sex offenders in some form of correctional care (Greenfeld, 1997). Such a number would populate a small city, yet, this figure is static and will change by tomorrow as inmates are released and new offenders enter the criminal justice system. About 60 percent of this group is already in the community (Greenfeld, 1997) - and may or may not be on parole or probation supervision.

Some states require sex offenders to register - other states do not expect to monitor a sex offender. And some states require parole and probation, while others do not.

Research shows that **61 percent of victims of rape are younger than 18.** (Salholz and colleagues, 1990). Many mental health professionals believe we are reaching - or have reached - epidemic levels already in commercial child exploitation in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Internet has produced a new form of pornography, distribution and sale. Almost daily, there is a news article about someone arrested for selling child porn of neighborhood children on the Internet - or someone being convicted for downloading and distributing child pornography.

Right now, today, the United States has a rape rate that is nearly four times higher than Germany, 13 times higher than the United Kingdom, and more than 20 times higher than Japan. (Salholz and colleagues, 1990) In addition, research shows that:

- Three out of 10 children had not yet reached their eleventh birthday before sexual abuse occurred.
- Virginia reports that nearly 80 percent of child victims know their attacker. (These figures appear equally high in other states.)
- **Three out of four sex offenses occur in a private residence.**
- About four out of five convicted sex offenders knew their victim prior to the attack.
- Yet, data indicates **only 16 percent of sexual assaults are actually reported to police.** Many times children are too frightened, traumatized or afraid to even tell their parents.
- Some experts believe the number of victims yearly is in the millions.

***And while these numbers are significant, even more noteworthy is the fact that the prison population for sex offenders has grown since 1990 by 330 percent - second only to drug trafficking.***

Equally disturbing is that many child victims who do recover - some spend a lifetime haunted by the memories of their assault. Many as adults develop depression, require psychiatric hospitalization, cannot hold jobs for extended periods, experience marital conflict or are unable to maintain a stable relationship, or abuse alcohol and drugs. Others suffer clinical disorders that include anxiety, panic attacks, self isolation, excessive worry, anger and rage, problems having friends or enjoying a fun event.

Sexual offending impacts the victim in a significant manner. Recovery is sometimes long term. Some child victims spend a lifetime healing from the wounds of their victimization. Others become offenders themselves. Some adults, victims of childhood sexual abuse, never leave their homes.

***Many experts believe sex offenders share common themes:***

1. Sex offenders violate the law.
2. Sex offenders are a growing and visible patient population group.
3. Sex offenders are different from other patients - they rarely seek help or therapy.
4. Sex offenders possess multiple paraphilias.
5. More than 50 percent start their sexual onset and offending behaviors in childhood or adolescence.
6. Many sex offenders are victims themselves - some studies have found one-third of rapists were sexually abused. Other research has found more than 40 percent of pedophiles had been victims.
7. Often sex offenders are educated and able to hold a job. Research has found many have graduated from high school, attended college, graduated from college, or even finished graduate school.
8. Many sex offenders are married or have significant relationships.
9. Many sex offenders lack victim empathy or remorse for their actions. They are unable to be intimate with others.

10. Many sex offenders experience problems being truthful or honest. Most will deny the reported offense.

11. Many sex offenders see their victim as an object for their pleasure - rather than as being a person.

12. To sexually offend almost always another person is harmed in some fashion.

13. Many sex offenders are products of dysfunctional homes where emotional, physical and sexual abuse were present.

14. There can be a pattern of reckless behaviors. Many offenders have a history of substance abuse.

But sexual violence is no longer being tolerated by the public.

Community safety is an issue. Children are being more protected. Sexual abuse is now less minimized. The Criminal Justice, Human Service and Mental Health Professionals are becoming much more active in protecting children. Still, much more work is required in order to safely protect children.

References:

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