

# NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

*An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.*



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Dear Colleague,

In the media, you may read statements like "sex offender will always reoffend" or "there is no cure for child molesters." Buried within this question is the assumption that all people who sexually abuse are the same.

The 20-year study featured this month clearly shows that we need to begin to make distinctions between adults and adolescents. Adolescents clearly respond well to treatment programs that are individualized to their risks and their strengths. With adolescents, there is still so much that can change for them internally. In addition, there is so much that is considered fixed in adults (e.g., their childhood family life) that is still subject to change for the adolescent.

We hope you will find this particular issue helpful to your work and your advocacy for children and youth in your care.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to explore a particular issue in

## 20-Year Study Concludes that Specialized Treatment with Sexually Abusive Adolescents Reduced Long-Term Re-Offense

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

### The Question

Does individualized treatment with sexually abusive adolescents lower the risk that they will re-offend?

### The Research

James R. Worling, Ariel Littlejohn, and David Bookalam conducted a 20-year follow-up study of specialized treatment for adolescents who sexually abused. No other study of adolescents has used a comparison group to examine the impact of treatment over this length of time. The adolescents in this study participated in the SAFE-T Program in Toronto in 1990. All adolescents received individualized treatment involving individual, group, and family sessions. The treatment model included "increasing insight and accountability for past offending, developing offense-prevention plan, enhancing awareness of victim impact, enhancing social relationships, reducing the impact of traumatic events, enhancing family communication and relationships, and enhancing prosocial sexual attitudes and knowledge." This program's mission has long been to treat traumatized children and adolescents who have engaged in problematic and abusive sexual behavior. They have actively rejected the adaptation of adult programs to adolescents.

After examining 20 years of follow-up data, the researchers concluded that specialized treatment of adolescents reduced long-term re-offense when examined against a comparison group with similar offending characteristics. The researchers found that only 9% of the treated adolescents were subsequently charged with an additional offense compared to 21% in the control group. The

an upcoming newsletter, please let us know.

Sincerely,  
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

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## NEARI RESOURCES

### Publications from NEARI



Current Practice for  
Treating Adolescents  
Who Have Sexually  
Abused

by David Prescott, L.I.C.S.W.

Nationally recognized for his training programs, books, and articles on treating youth who have sexually abused, David Prescott's online course is for anyone who wants to understand these adolescents' complex and diverse treatment needs. The course reviews what we know and don't know about this population, places it in the context of their development, and describes the key elements of effective treatment. If you ever plan to

researchers used a national criminal database to determine the percentage of young men charged with a new offense. Most of these new charges became known when the offenders were in their early 20's and very few occurred beyond that point.

### Implications for Professionals

This research illustrates the need for specialized treatment with adolescents and provides hope for those invested in protecting children and communities from further abuse. The treatment methodology itself is also important. Careful assessment was the foundation of the treatment these adolescents received. The treatment addressed the client's strengths as well as weaknesses, and did not employ a single modality (individual, family, and group). Further, the program addressed a number of treatment dimensions, including trauma. While the researchers did not describe the wide range of diagnostic variables considered in crafting treatment interventions (mental health, developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, etc.), the client-centered approaches employed by the practitioners whose clients were evaluated in this study made a significant positive outcome difference.

### Implications for the Field

This research provides strong support for the effectiveness of specialized treatment developed for adolescents from both a methodological perspective (e.g., employing a comparison group) and a longitudinal perspective (20 years). The research also raises important questions for further research. For example, how would more specialized interventions (e.g., neuro-developmental approaches, adaptations to learning disabilities) further impact upon success?

Our field has experienced a number of empirical successes in recent years. Worling and his colleagues have further dispelled the misguided belief that "once an offender always an offender." It is time for the public to learn otherwise.

### Reference

- Worling, J.R., Littlejohn, A., & Bookalam, D. (2010). 20-year prospective follow-up study of specialized treatment for adolescents who offended sexually. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 28, 46-57.

### Abstract

Most follow-up investigations of the effectiveness of specialized treatment for adolescents who have offended sexually have not included a comparison group. Furthermore, the average length of most previous studies is approximately 5 years. This investigation is a 10-year extension of our prospective, 10-year follow-up study of specialized treatment (Worling & Curwen, 2000). Recidivism data (criminal charges) were collected from a national database for 148

refer an adolescent to specialized treatment or want to get current on the most recent research regarding their treatment, this course is an essential building block to your work.

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adolescents who had offended sexually. Adolescents were between 12 and 19 years of age (M $\frac{1}{4}$ 15.5; SD $\frac{1}{4}$ 1.5) at assessment, and the followup interval spanned from 12 to 20 years (M $\frac{1}{4}$ 16.23; SD $\frac{1}{4}$ 2.02). Relative to the comparison group (n $\frac{1}{4}$ 90), adolescents who participated in specialized treatment (n $\frac{1}{4}$ 58) were significantly less likely to receive subsequent charges for sexual, nonsexual violent, and nonviolent crimes. These data add to the growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of specialized treatment for individuals who have offended sexually.

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## FEATURED WEBSITE

### Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ)

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/>

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing, and incarcerating youth under 18 in the adult criminal justice system.

CFYJ advocates for juvenile justice reform through providing support to federal, state, and local campaigns; coordinating outreach to parents, youth, and families; fostering national coalition-building; encouraging media relations; conducting research; and publishing reports and advocacy materials.

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About the Editor:  
David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.