

# Chapter 3

## Juveniles who sexually abuse; the search for distinctive features

*Anton van Wijk en Cyril Boonmann*

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# Introduction

Since the 1980s, sexually abusive youth have been the subject of academic research in Anglo-Saxon and other countries (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). There are many reasons for this increased attention. Firstly, sexual abuse in general is now spoken about more openly than in the past. Initially, the focus was on the victims (Brownmiller, 1975); eventually, however, it began to include the perpetrators as well (Bullens & Van Wijk, 2004). It also became apparent that some adult perpetrators had started to develop their problematic sexual behavior in their youth (Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Mittelman & Rouleau, 1987; Abel, Osborn & Twigg, 1993; Burton, 2000). In line with developmental psychopathology models regarding other problematic symptoms and behaviors, clinicians and researchers realized that early intervention might produce more positive effects and would be more cost-effective. Secondly, the sheer number of sexually abusive youth had become a cause for concern. Estimates in the United States showed that juveniles were responsible for 20% of all rapes and 30 to 50% of all child sexual abuse cases (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). Thirdly, the number of treatment programs targeting sexually abusive youth has risen significantly over the years because of increased prosecution and greater clinical attention to this population (Becker, 1998; Burton et al., 2000).

In 1993, Barbaree, Marshall and Hudson edited a groundbreaking book, *The Juvenile Sex Offender*, summarizing the available knowledge about sexually abusive youth. Much of the early research and reports focused on describing the backgrounds and characteristics of sexually abusive youth (e.g., Aljazeera, 1993; Righthand & Welch, 2001; Vizard, Monck & Misch, 1995). Many publications that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s were written mainly from a psychological or psychiatric point of view and were written by clinicians working with sexually abusive youth. Towards the beginning of the new millennium, other academic disciplines such as developmental criminology, sociology and law became more involved in the research into juveniles who sexually offend. Sexual offenses were not necessarily the only focus: in some cases, they were considered part of a broader antisocial and/or criminal repertoire (Lussier, 2005).

As the research developed, a key issue concerned the extent to which sexually abusive youth are a separate and unique group, one that is distinct from adult sex offenders as well as juvenile non-sex offenders and, thus, how interventions may be directed accordingly. On the one hand, there is the idea that juveniles who sexually offend differ from other offenders and thus, require specialized assessment and treatment; on the other hand, there is the notion that sexual offending is just another manifestation of delinquency and as such, differs only in some respects.

In the last decade, several studies have been published in which sexually abusive youth are compared with non-sex offenders (Van Wijk, Vermeiren, Loeber, 't Hart-Kerkhoffs, Doreleijers & Bullens, 2006). This qualitative study suggested that differences exist between sex offenders and non-sex offenders on personality characteristics, behavioral problems, history of sexual abuse, non-sexual offending, and peer functioning. Inconsistent results were found for demographic factors, family functioning and background, antisocial attitudes, intellectual and neurological functioning. Subsequently, Seto and Lalumière (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 59 independent studies comparing male adolescent sex offenders ( $n = 3,855$ ) with male adolescent non-sex offenders ( $n = 13,393$ ). They found that sexually abusive youth differ from non-sexual abusive youth on some of the theoretically relevant variables including a history of sexual abuse, exposure to sexual violence, other abuse or neglect, social isolation, early exposure to sex or

pornography, atypical sexual interests, anxiety, and low self-esteem. However, overall, the Seto and Lalumière (2010) meta-analysis found the groups of sexually abusive youth and non-sex offenders homogeneous: with few differences found on most of the variables studied: 'The results did not support the notion that adolescent sexual offending can be parsimoniously explained as a simple manifestation of general antisocial tendencies' (p. 526).

Studies have repeatedly shown that sexually abusive youth are a heterogeneous group (e.g. Barbaree & Marshall, 2006). In order to determine what is "so special" about adolescent sexual offending behavior it is useful to take that heterogeneity into account. In this chapter we describe the current state of the research literature on the backgrounds and distinguishing characteristics of subtypes of sexually abusive youth, also compared with non-sex offending youth that commit other types of crimes, in order to gain more insight into the distinctive features of juveniles who sexually offend. First, however, we will examine the differences between youth and adults who commit sexual offenses.

### **Sexually abusive behavior: adults versus juveniles**

It is assumed that adults and juveniles who commit sexual offenses are one and the same group. When committed at an early age, such offenses are considered expressions of a perverse disposition, to be remedied only by long-term or life-long sentences because, it is believed that, they predict future perpetration. Many studies, however, show a different picture (e.g. Letourneau & Miner, 2005). Juveniles who commit sexual offenses do not necessarily become the adult sex offenders of the future.

Additionally, most adult sex offenders were not sexually offending youths. For example, prospective longitudinal studies of criminal career patterns distinguish juvenile and adult sex offenders as two separate phenomena (Lussier & Blokland, 2014). Most juveniles stop their sexual offending behavior before adulthood, and most adult offenders start their registered criminal behavior after adolescence. Studies of juvenile and adult offenders show that after 59 months, the percentage of repeated sexual offenses among juveniles is between 7 and 13 percent; (Caldwell, 2010; Reitzel & Carbonell, 2006; Harris & Hanson, 2004).

Moreover, juvenile sexual offending behavior differs from that of adults in a number of areas. Based on Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data, Finkelhor, Ormrod and Chaffin (2009) investigated the differences between 13,471 juveniles and 24,344 adult sex offenders who committed sexual offenses against minors. They found that juveniles were more likely to commit their offenses in groups and more frequently targeted male victims, often of a younger age, than adults. Similarly, a small-scale comparative study by Miranda and Corcoran (2000) also showed differences between juveniles and adults. Adults committed more sexual offenses, whereas the incidence of intra-familial sexual abuse was actually higher among juveniles. Juveniles committed digital fondling offenses more often than adults; adults more often committed vaginal, oral or anal sexual abuse.

Developments in neurological and developmental criminology research have revealed significant explanations for the differences between juvenile and adult (sex) offenders. Tolan, Walker and Reppucci (2012) assert that these differences regard the capacity for self-management and regulation, the susceptibility to social and peer pressure, and factors related to judgment and criminal intent. All these actions, reactions and determinations involve neurological activity. As a result of the ongoing development of their brains, juveniles have less

capacity to manage their behavior and emotions than adults. Adolescence is characterized by risk-taking and sensation-seeking behavior (Steinberg, 2012; Steinberg et al., 2008). Additionally, adolescents are less adept than adults in planning ahead, and have more trouble considering the potential consequences of their decisions and conduct (Steinberg et al., 2009). Moffitt (1993) has shown that a large proportion of juvenile delinquency is age-related; juvenile offenders stop offending after their adolescence. A small number of them continue committing offenses into adulthood, however (also see chapter xx).

The research to date shows that juveniles who commit sexual offenses differ from adult sex offenders. This may be due to neurological and developmental psychological factors. Decades of research have found that most juveniles who sexually offend do not continue committing sexual offenses in their adult lives (Caldwell, 2010; Zimring, 2007). Their abusive conduct may be considered as age-related conduct.

### **Classification of juveniles who commit sexual offenses**

Caldwell (2002) stated that the heterogeneity of juveniles who sexually offend is one of the most resilient findings in the research in this field. During the past thirty years, several research attempts to classify these juveniles have occurred. Some classifications were based on clinical experience, others on statistical analysis. Generally, there are five approaches to classifying juveniles who sexually offend. The first concerns classification based on the nature of the sexual offense, such as hands-on and hands-off offenses. The second form of classification uses the age of the victim and/or the age difference between the perpetrator and the victim. In the third form of classification, the nature of the criminal career is considered, in other words whether the juvenile's offending includes nonsexual offenses as well as sexual ones. Fourth, juveniles who sexually offend sometimes are distinguished based on the numbers of perpetrators per offense. Last, in contrast to research based on offense characteristics, Worling (2001) compared subgroups of juveniles committing sex offenses based on personality traits (see also Knight & Prentky, 1993; O'Brien & Bera, 1986; Oxnam & Vess, 2006).

A simple way to distinguish between various types of juveniles who sexually offend is to consider the nature of the sexual offenses committed. On the one hand there are *hands-off* offenses, which take place without physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim: voyeurism and exhibitionism are examples of these. On the other hand there are *hands-on* offenses, with physical contact, such as assault and rape (Fehrenbach et al., 1986; Saunders et al., 1986).

Within the category of hands-on offenses, further differentiation is possible if one takes into account the ages of perpetrator and victim. In this chapter, the term youth who sexual abuse peers/adults will be used to distinguish those adolescents who sexual abuse age mates or adults from those who sexual abuse children under 13 years when the victim is not a peer because the he or she is five or more years younger. This division is most common in the literature (Gunby & Woodhams, 2010; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2004; Hunter, Hazelwood & Slesinger, 2000; 2003; Skubic Kemper & Kistner, 2010, Kjellgren, Wassberg, Carlberg, Långström & Svedin, 2006). Child and peers or adult sexual abusers appear to be two different types of offenders when considering their psychosexual and social development, criminal career and psychological functioning (e.g. Hagan et al., 2001; Hsu & Stardinsky, 1990; Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth & Becker, 2003; Prentky, Harris, Frizzell & Righthand, 2000; Weinrott, 1996).

Butler and Seto (2002) have divided juveniles who sexually offend into those who only commit sexual offenses (sex-only) and those who also commit other offenses (sex-plus). These types concur with those in Becker and Kaplan (1988), who distinguish three offender types, each with their own developmental pathway. The first type concerns “dead-end” offenders who commit a sexual offense only once and do not commit any other type of offense thereafter. The sexual criminal career of these offenders begins and ends with their first sexual offense. Hence, they may be classified as first-and-only offenders. The second type regards delinquent sex offenders who commit several sexual offenses as well as various other, non-sexual, offenses. For these offenders, sexual offenses are only part of their entire criminal career. Since they commit both sexual and non-sexual offenses, offenders of this second type are called generalists (Hissel, Bijleveld, Hendriks, Jansen & d’Escury-Koenigs, 2006; Van Wijk & Ferwerda, 2000). In contrast to the second type, the third type are “specialists”, whose conduct is based on sexual deviation; they limit themselves to committing sexual offenses, which they commit repeatedly; only very rarely do they show any other kind of criminal behavior. The typology of Becker and Kaplan fits in with research into the continuity of and changes in sexual criminal careers: at one end of the scale, many youthful sexual delinquents are “dead-end” offenders; at the other end, only a small number of them become specialists in sexual offenses; in between these two, a larger group of offenders commit a variety of offenses, including sexual offenses.

Another classification is between solo perpetrators and group offenders (Looije et al., 2004; De Wree, 2004). Earlier research has shown a clear distinction between these two types with regard to their age, ethnic background and personality problems (Hendriks, 2006). Within the group offenders, another distinction can be made between leaders and followers (’t Hart-Kerkhoffs, Vermeiren, Jansen & Doreleijers, 2010).

It is important to understand that these kinds of categorizations are made to provide a framework for studies regarding the etiology of these kinds of offenses, which can provide guidance in determining suitable treatment. In reality, offenders are not easily classifiable. There are, for example, child abusers who victimize both males and females, hands-off offenders who may become hands-on offenders as their offending behavior develops over time; offenders who change the kind of sexual offenses they commit termed *cross-over* offenders (e.g. Heil et al., 2003). In other words, offenders may be placed in various different categories. Conversely, different typological terms may relate to the same perpetrator. Child abusers in study A may be the same group identified as specialists in study B and as solo perpetrators in study C. The same applies to offenders classified as abusers of peers, group perpetrators or generalists. It is imperative that researchers clearly define their conceptual frameworks and how categories are defined in their studies to increase comparability.

## Non-sexual offending

Although the sexual offense aspect of offending behaviors typically is the primary focus in publications on sexually abusive youth, attention has also long been paid to the fact that many of these youth commit other offenses as well, such as nonsexual violent offenses and property offenses (e.g. Fehrenbach et al., 1986). For two decades now, authors have focused on this problem in an attempt to figure out the difference between juveniles who sexually offend, and youth committing other offenses. In a review of the research literature (Epps & Fisher, 2004), many studies are mentioned that either fail to distinguish between the various types of (sex) offenders, or have used small samples that were too diverse in their offending to be able to warrant robust conclusions about non-sexual offending by sex-offending juveniles. For that reason, study results vary. In some studies, lower levels of non-sexual offending were found in juveniles who sexually offend (Seto & Lalumière 2010; Sipe et al., 1998), whereas in others, no differences with non-sexually offending juveniles were found (Hagan et al., 2001; Van Wijk et al., 2007; Van Wijk, Loeber, et al., 2005).

In various studies, attempts were made to further differentiate between the various types of (sex) offenders according to their offending patterns. Roughly speaking, two approaches were used: either the homogeneity or the heterogeneity of offending patterns was taken as a point of departure (sex-only and sex-plus), or the type of sexual offense (peer/adult abusers, child abusers and exhibitionists). Butler and Seto (2002) were some of the first to regard the heterogeneity of offending patterns as an issue. They compared 32 sexually abusive youth (22 sex-only and 10 sex-plus) with 82 non-sex offenders. They found that the sex-only group had fewer problems than the other two groups and that in many respects the sex-plus group was similar to the group of non-sex offenders. Wanklyn et al. (2012) reached a comparable conclusion. They compared 28 pure sex offenders (sexual assault and related charges), 172 violent non-sex offenders and 24 versatile violent offenders with each other. The violent non-sex offenders committed more property offenses than pure sex offenders. They also committed more violent offenses; they were not distinct from the versatile sex offenders in that respect. Yet, conclusions are limited because in both studies, the groups of sexually abusive youth were very small.

Van Wijk, Mali and Bullens (2007) adopted Butler and Seto's dichotomy. Based on police registrations, a larger group of sexually abusive youth (N=4.430) was divided into sex-only (n=1.945) and sex-plus (n=2.485) offenders. The sex-only offenders had limited criminal "careers" (1.7 sexual offenses on average) but the sex-plus group had much longer criminal careers; on average, they had committed 11.9 offenses. Some of the youth in the sex offense-only group might categorize as on Kaplan and Becker's (1988) dead end pathway; a major proportion was and remained first offender. The sex-plus group mainly committed property offenses over time. Chu and Thomas (2010) also differentiate between a group of sexually abusive youth in Singapore, in terms of specialists ('sex-only'; N=71) and generalists ('sex plus'; N=77). They did not find significant differences in sexual recidivism (14.3% versus 9.9%); they did find, however, that significantly more generalists had reoffended, committing violent offenses (18.2% versus 1.4%) and non-violent offenses (37.7% versus 16.9%). Dutch research replicates the findings of Chu and Thomas (2012). Hissel et al. (2006) discriminated four subgroups in a sample of 510 sexually abusive youth who had undergone a personality test: first offenders (n=367), generalists (sex plus; n=59), specialists (sex only; n=80) and exhibitionists (n=4). Contrary to the authors' expectation, no differences in sexual offense recidivism were found between the specialists and the generalists. The latter group repeats property offenses sooner and more often, however.

Lussier, Van den Berg, Bijleveld and Hendriks (2012) have mapped trajectories of 498 juveniles who sexually offended with an average follow-up period of 14 years. An added value of this study over the research mentioned earlier is that the authors take a developmental perspective by exploring offending rates over developmental periods. In addition to two sexual offending trajectories they found five non-sexual offending trajectories. More than half the sample (53%) regarding the non-sexual offending group is in the Very Low Rate trajectory: they commit almost no non-sexual offenses and also rarely reoffend. The second group (21%), the Late Starters, was not very active in their younger years; their non-sexual offending gradually increased, however, and peaked in their mid-20s. Almost the entire group of Late Starters reoffended as adults. Non-sexual offending in the Adolescent Limited group (11%) peaked at age 17; then decreased. The High Rate Persisters (4%) showed the highest levels of non-sexual offending. More than half of the High Rate Persisters become non-sexual repeat offenders as juveniles; three quarters as adults. This group showed an average of 23 convictions during the research period and peaked in their 20s. Finally, the Late Bloomers (10%) were like the High Rate Persisters but their non-sexual criminal careers start and peak later. The authors also checked to what extent the types of sexual abusive youth that were distinguished (child and peer abusers and group offenders) may be placed in the various trajectories: interestingly, it turned out that the child abusers can be found mainly in the Very Low Rate and Late Starter groups, i.e. the groups that commit – relatively speaking – few non-sexual offenses. The peer abusers are represented in all trajectories and the group offenders mainly in the trajectories of highest activity in youth (i.e. Adolescent Limited, Late Bloomers and High Rate Persisters). As noted above, two sexual offending trajectories were identified (adolescent-limited (89,6%) and high-rate slow desisters (10,4%) ; Lussier et al., 2012). The various types of non-sexual trajectories were represented within each of the two sexual trajectories to the same degree.

Based on police data, the crime patterns of juvenile peer/adult assaulters and rapists (n=2125), exhibitionists (n=237) and child abusers (n=491) were constructed and subsequently compared to nonsexual violent (n=4611) and property (n=6226) offenders by Bullens, Van Wijk and Mali (2006). A large proportion of these three groups of sexually abusive youth started their official criminal careers with a sexual offense; i.e., their first contact with the police was for a sexual offense: 84% of the child abusers, 65% of the assaulters/rapists and 71% of the exhibitionists. After their sexual offending, their criminal careers continue with non-sexual offenses, particularly property offenses and to a lesser extent violent offenses. Incidentally, sexual offenses have a larger share in the total number of offenses of the child molester group, compared to other sexually offending groups. When compared with juveniles with only nonsexual offense histories, the juveniles who sexually offend have shorter criminal careers than those who commit violent and property offenses; the child abusers have the shortest. The peer/adult assaulters/rapists, however, commit the most offenses of any kind. For example, Van Wijk, Mali, Bullens and Vermeiren (2007) conducted a longitudinal comparison of the criminal careers of two specific groups of juvenile delinquents: peer/adult assaulters and rapists (N=226) and non-sexual violent offenders (N = 4,130). Expectations were that, because of the violent nature of the offenses by both groups, the offense patterns of the two groups would be similar. The assaulters/rapists mainly committed nonsexual offenses (property offenses) after the assault/rape. Twenty percent of the new offenses committed by the assaulters/rapists were violent sexual offenses; eight percent were other sexual offenses and nine percent of the offenses were non-sexual violent offenses. In contrast, the non-sexual violent offenders remain violent

throughout their criminal careers: one third of the offences committed during those careers were violent offenses..

Overall, research findings indicate that juveniles who commit sexual offenses either stop quickly, or continue to commit mainly non-sexual offenses. As such, the non-sexual offending patterns of juveniles who sexually offend are an indispensable research theme. A meta-analysis of 63 datasets of recidivism among juveniles who sexually offend (total N=11,219, followed for about 60 months on average) shows this clearly (Caldwell, 2010). Nonsexual general recidivism was much higher than sexual recidivism: 43.4% versus 7.1% The *dark number* proviso should be considered here: persons studied may have repeated more offenses than the police and justice departments are aware of (Fortune & Lambie, 2006; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2008). Yet, based on the registered crime data, the common denominator of the various recidivism studies is that sexual reoffending by juveniles is much less frequent than general recidivism (McCann & Lussier, 2008). Further, juveniles who sexually offend do not differ significantly from juvenile non-sex offenders when it concerns the commission of (another) sexual offense. Official records of non-sexual offending follow the sexual offense rather than preceding it and sexually abusive youth do not become, at a different rate, the adult sex offenders of the future (Lussier et al., 2012). When predicting sexual offending by adults, the number of offenses, of any kind, that they perpetrated as juveniles seems more significant than whether they committed sexual offenses as juveniles (Hanson & Buissière, 1996; Lussier & Blokland, 2014; Zimring, Piquero & Jennings, 2007). The group of sexually abusive youth that commits multiple sexual offenses only, i.e. the specialists, is very small (Lussier et al., 2012).

In summary, the crime patterns (number and type of offenses committed) of juveniles who sexually offend are diverse and often vary between distinct subtypes of these youth. The sexual offense is often a small part of a youth's total criminal career. Child abusers commit the smallest number of non-sexual offenses. There are few specialists among the group of juveniles who sexually offend and relatively many one-time offenders. A small group commits many, mainly non-sexual, offenses for a longer period.

### **Cognitive distortion, and antisocial attitudes and beliefs**

It has been suggested that "by far the most important element in the profile of an adolescent sex offender is that of cognitive distortion" (Lakey, 1994, p. 757), manifested by "an undercurrent of misinformation and strange beliefs and attitudes" that "permeates the value systems of male juveniles who sexually offend" (Lakey, 1992). Although the concept of cognitive distortion still lacks definitional clarity, it is generally explained as opinions or beliefs that justify a criminal act (Maruna & Mann, 2006; Abel, Becker & Cunningham-Rathner 1984). These statements, which are not necessarily predictive, are believed to help protect the self from blame or a negative self-concept, facilitating aggressive, antisocial or delinquent behavior (Barriga, Landau, Stinson, Liao & Gibbs, 2000; Ward, Hudson, Johnston & Marshall, 1997; Barriga & Gibbs, 1996). Of interest for research into juveniles who sexually offend, cognitive distortion may be subdivided into generic (e.g., attribution of carelessness to theft victims) and sex-specific cognitive distortions (e.g., attribution of promiscuity to rape victims) (McCrary et al., 2008). Juveniles who sexually offend alter the general definition of appropriate behavior in order to justify their own sexual offending behavior (Lakey, 1992). Based on her collection of observations, Lakey (1992) showed that these juvenile offenders hold incorrect information, false beliefs and cognitive distortions about, for

example, sexuality (e.g., “If a seated female crosses her legs and swings one, she is inviting sexual encounter.”), sexual assault (e.g., “Compliance by a female during a sexual assault implies consent.”), male dominance (e.g., “A ‘real’ man watches a lot of television, drinks beer, and has his ‘woman’ hovering over him to fulfill his slightest needs or commands, including sexual.”), rape-supportive myths (e.g., “A female cannot be raped against her will.”), and molestation (e.g., “Children [under 10 years of age] are quite capable of giving meaningful consent for a sexual experience, even if obtained under duress. Parents should allow children to become sexually active whenever they express an interest in doing so.”). It is suggested that juveniles who sexually offend are more likely to endorse these fallacies than other juveniles (e.g., White & Koss, 1993). For example, juveniles who commit sexual offenses have higher levels of callous sexual attitudes towards females, and adversarial attitudes towards females and sexual minorities, than non-offending juveniles (Farr, Brown & Beckett, 2004). However, to better understand the relationship between cognitive distortions and juvenile sexual offending behavior, over and above antisocial behavior in general, juvenile offenders with and without sex offenses need to be compared.

As mentioned before, Seto and Lalumière (2010) conducted an extensive meta-analysis to examine “*What is so special about male adolescent sexual offending?*” (Seto & Lalumière, 2010, p. 1). They compared sexual and non-sexual offending juveniles in terms of various theoretically derived variables, such as cognitive abilities, mental health problems, and traumatic experiences. The two groups did not differ in antisocial attitudes and beliefs in general, including attitudes and beliefs about sex woman and sexual offending; however, juveniles who sexually offended scored significantly lower on antisocial attitudes and beliefs that support crime in general than their non-sexually offending counterparts (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). One interpretation of these findings could be that no differences in sex-specific antisocial attitudes and beliefs were found because these attitudes and beliefs are high in both groups (e.g., Benson & Vincent, 1980). However, although the juveniles who sexually offend constitute a heterogeneous group with a variety of characteristics between subgroups (e.g., child abusers, rapists) (e.g., Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth & Becker, 2003; Hunter, Hazelwood & Slesinger, 2000), Seto and Lalumière (2010) were not able to differentiate between subgroups.

Studies regarding sex-specific cognitive distortion and antisocial attitudes and beliefs in subgroups of juveniles who sexually offend are scarce. Based on victim age, juveniles with peer/adult victims have been found more likely to endorse beliefs supportive of aggressive behavior than juveniles with child victims (i.e., generic distortion) (Davis-Rosanbalm, 2002). With regard to sexual attitudes (i.e., sex-specific distortion) Worling (1995) found no differences between the two groups. In addition, in their study into moral judgment, cognitive distortion and implicit theories facilitating child sexual abuse in juveniles who commit sexual offenses, Van Vugt et al. (2011a) found no differences between juvenile offenders with child victims and those with peer/adult victims according to The Sociomoral Reflection Measure-Short Form (SRM-SF). However, intellectual disabled juveniles who sexually offend generally showed stage 2 moral reasoning (i.e. justifications for moral judgment dominated by instrumental and pragmatic reciprocity), whereas those without an intellectual disability generally showed transition stage 2-3 (i.e., maintenance of interpersonal relationships was considered to a certain extent in their justifications for moral decisions) (Van Vugt et al., 2011b). Finally, Butler and Seto (2002) found within the group of juveniles who sexually offended, that those who only committed sexual offenses (sex-only offenders) had significantly fewer antisocial attitudes and beliefs than juveniles committing both sexual and non-sexual offenses (sex-plus offenders).

In conclusion, juveniles who sexually offend appear to show more cognitive distortion and antisocial attitudes and beliefs than juveniles in the general population (Farr et al., 2004). Furthermore, juveniles committing sex offenses seem to have fewer generic antisocial attitudes and beliefs than juveniles who commit other types of offenses. Although several interesting differences were revealed between sex-specific antisocial attitudes and beliefs of juvenile sex and non-sex offenders in a few studies, it is still unclear whether these attitudes and beliefs are actually higher in juveniles who sexually offend or whether they are equally high in both groups. Finally, although research is scarce, there are some indications that juvenile offenders with peer/adult victims exhibit more generic antisocial attitudes and beliefs than juvenile offenders who target child victims.

## **Mental health problems**

Studies have shown that juveniles who sexually offend often exhibit high levels of externalizing and internalizing mental health problems (e.g., Boonmann et al., 2015; 't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al., 2015; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Van Wijk et al., 2006; Galli et al., 1999; Kavoussi et al., 1988), as well as social skills deficits ('t Hart-Kerkhoffs et al., 2009a). In addition, they often experienced childhood sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse (e.g., Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2008; Van Wijk et al., 2006), which correlate with an increased risk of mental health problems (e.g., Wasserman & McReynolds, 2011; Ruchkin, Henrich, Jones, Vermeiren & Schwab-Stone, 2007; Kilpatrick et al., 2000). In this section, we will elaborate on externalizing and internalizing mental health problems. In the subsequent section we will discuss social skills deficits and childhood traumatic experiences in more detail.

Recently, Boonmann et al. (2015) published a meta-analysis on mental disorders in juveniles who sexually offend. The main aim of the study was to estimate the prevalence of mental disorders in juveniles who sexually offended. In addition, prevalence rates of juvenile offenders with and without sex offenses were compared. In total, 69% of the juveniles met the criteria for at least one disorder; 44% had two or more disorders. Still, 31% of juveniles who sexually offended were not diagnosed with a mental disorder. With regard to externalizing disorders, a Conduct Disorder (CD) was found in 51%, an Oppositional Deviant Disorder (ODD) in 21%, and an Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in 14% of the respondents. In terms of internalizing disorders, anxiety disorders were most prevalent (18%), followed by affective disorders (9%) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (8%). In addition, 30% of the juvenile offenders were diagnosed with a Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Compared to juvenile offenders without sex offenses, however, juveniles who committed sexual offenses were less often diagnosed with a mental disorder. More specifically, sexually offending juveniles were less often diagnosed with an externalizing disorder (ADHD, Disruptive Behavior Disorder [DBD]; i.e., CD or ODD) or SUD than non-sexually offending juveniles. No differences in the prevalence of internalizing disorders were found between the two groups (Boonmann et al., 2015). These results regarding externalizing disorders and SUD are in line with the results of Seto and Lalumière's (2010) meta-analysis and the review of Van Wijk et al. (2006). In contrast to the findings of Boonmann et al. (2015), Seto and Lalumière (2010) reported more anxiety problems and lower self-esteem in sexually offending juveniles compared to non-sexually offending juveniles. Moreover, Van Wijk et al.'s findings (2006) also suggested that juveniles committing sex offenses display more internalization problems than their non-sexually offending

counterparts. Perhaps these characteristics prevail only in specific subgroups of juveniles who sexually offend (Boonmann et al., 2015; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Van Wijk et al., 2006).

't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al. (2015) examined mental disorders in subgroups of juveniles who sexually offend, based on the age of the victims and the numbers of offenders. This resulted in three relevant subgroups: (a) juveniles who sexually offend against young children, (b) juveniles who sexually offend, on their own, against peers/adults, or (c) juveniles who sexually offend against peers/adults as part of a group. Juvenile offenders targeting child victims showed the most mental disorders; they demonstrated higher rates of internalizing disorders in general, of affective disorders specifically, and of ADHD than group peer/adult offenders, and a higher prevalence of affective disorders than solo peer/adult offenders. Moreover, sexually offending juveniles with child victims had lower overall level of functioning scores than either solo or group offenders with same-age or older victims. Furthermore, solo offenders exhibited higher rates of affective disorders and ADHD than group offenders ('t Hart-Kerkhoffs et al., 2015).

Other research into mental health problems in subgroups of sexually offending juveniles has revealed more internalizing problems in offenders with child victims, but fewer externalizing problems, including substance use problems, than offenders with same-age or older victims. Hunter et al. (2003), for example, found greater deficits in psychosocial functioning but less aggression (during the offense), and less substance use (at the time of the offense) in offenders with child victims than in offenders with same-age or older victims (Hunter et al., 2003). Furthermore, Hendriks and Bijleveld (2004) identified higher rates of psychopathology, higher scores on neuroticism, more social problems, more victimization by bullies, and a more negative self-image in offenders with child victims than in offenders with peer/adult victims. Höing, Jonker and Van Berlo (2010) compared exhibitionists, sex offenders targeting children, and sex offenders targeting peers/adults. Exhibitionists and sex offenders against children more often lacked friends, were more often bullying victims, and more often demonstrated inadequate social functioning than sex offenders with same-age or older victims. Offenders with child victims were also more often perpetrators of bullying than offenders with peer/adult victims and exhibitionists (Höing et al., 2010). Finally, sexually offending juveniles with child victims had more internalizing problems (more submissive, more anxious feelings), and fewer externalizing problems (less unruly and forceful, less social insensitivity, less impulsive propensity and less delinquent predisposition), including fewer substance use problems (less substance abuse proneness) than juveniles who sexually offended against same-age or older victims (Glowacz & Born, 2013).

When comparing juvenile offenders with sexual offenses based on the number of offenders (group versus solo), solo offenders scored significantly higher on neuroticism, impulsiveness and sensation seeking, but lower on sociability than group offenders (Bijleveld & Hendriks, 2003). In the study by Höing et al. (2010), the prevalence of inadequate social functioning was found to be higher, and prevalence of negative attitudes against girls lower, in solo offenders than in group offenders. Furthermore, when Höing et al. compared juvenile offenders with only sexual offenses (sex-only offenders) and juvenile offenders with sexual and non-sexual offenses (sex-plus offenders), sex-only offenders were found to have significantly fewer conduct problems than sex-plus offenders. In addition, in their study, Butler and Seto, (2002) used the Young Offender-Level of Service Inventory (YO-LSI), and found that sex-only offenders had significantly fewer substance abuse problems, education/employment problems, family problems and peer relation problems than sex-plus offenders.

In conclusion, mental health problems are highly prevalent in juveniles who sexually offend. Overall, it appears that compared to juveniles who commit non-sexual offenses, juveniles who sexually offend have fewer externalizing mental health problems, including substance abuse problems and disorders. With regard to internalizing problems, research results are inconsistent. Although sexually and non-sexually offending juveniles do not seem to differ in terms of internalizing mental disorders (i.e., official diagnoses), juveniles who sexually offend seem to have more internalizing mental health problems than their counterparts with non-sexual offenses (see also Seto & Lalumière, 2010). Within subgroups, in general, juvenile offenders with child victims seem to have more internalizing problems, but less externalizing problems, including substance abuse problems, than juvenile offenders with same-age or older victims. Furthermore, solo offenders seem to have more mental health problems, especially inadequate social functioning, than group offenders, and sex-only offenders, seem to have fewer conduct problems than sex-plus offenders.

### **Social skills deficits**

Another prominent feature for some juveniles who sexually offend is the presence of social skills difficulties, such as problems in establishing and maintaining close friendships (e.g., Knight & Prentky, 1993; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987; Fehrenback, Smith, Monastersky & Deisher, 1986) Fehrenbach et al. (1986) for example, found that 65% of their sample of juveniles committing sex offenses had no close friends. It has been suggested that social skills challenges might be an important causal factor in the development of sexual offending behavior (e.g., Barbaree, Hudson & Seto, 1993; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). However, in order to distinguish the relationship between social skills problems and sexual offending behavior from the relationship between such social skills difficulties and offending behavior in general, research comparing juvenile sex and non-sex offenders is warranted.

In their meta-analysis, Seto & Lalumière (2010) compared the interpersonal problems of juveniles who sexually offended with non-sex offenders. They found that juveniles who sexually offend were significantly more often socially isolated than juveniles committing non-sexual offenses. Both groups, however, did not differ in heterosocial and general social skill deficits, or other social problems. Hence, it was suggested that social isolation might play a bigger role in the development and persistence of sexual offending behavior than social skills in general. This does not only apply for male juveniles who sexually offend but also for female juveniles who sexually offend, who were also found to show more social isolation than female violent offenders (Van der Put et al., 2014).

As mentioned before, juveniles who sexually offend constitute a heterogeneous group with differences between subgroups (e.g., Hunter et al., 2003; Hunter et al., 2000). Accordingly, several studies have also examined the differences in social skills between subtypes of juveniles committing sex offenses. Ford and Linney (1995), for example, not only examined differences in social skills between juveniles committing sex offenses, violent non-sexual offenses and status offenses, but also differentiated between juveniles who sexually offend against younger children and against peers. On the one hand, Ford and Linney (1995) did not find any differences in social skills between these last two subgroups (see also, Kemper & Kistner, 2010; Kemper & Kistner, 2007; Worling, 1995). On the other hand, juveniles who commit sexual offenses with child victims reported the greatest need for control in interpersonal relationships (Ford & Linney, 1995).

Furthermore, Hunter et al. (2003) found greater deficits in psychosocial functioning in juveniles who sexually offend against children compared to those who offend against peers/adults; they lacked social confidence, viewed themselves as socially inadequate and experienced social isolation. These results are in line with other studies in which more social problems were found, such as fewer age-appropriate friendships and lower self-esteem in juvenile offenders who commit sexual offenses against children compared to juvenile offenders who sexually offend against peers or adults (e.g. Gunby & Woodhams, 2010; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2004).

In conclusion: social skills difficulties are prevalent in juveniles who sexually offend. Compared to juveniles who commit other types of offenses, they are significantly more socially isolated. Although research findings have been mixed, studies have suggested that juveniles who target child victims may have more social skills deficits compared with those who have peer/adult victims. However, more research regarding these symptoms is needed to determine whether these juveniles, especially those who offend against younger children, are just socially awkward or whether these symptoms are part of Autism Spectrum Disorder (See also Chapter 11).

## **Traumatic experiences**

Previous research has shown that traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse) are highly prevalent in juveniles who commit sexual offenses (e.g., Hunter et al., 2003; Friedrich et al., 2001). Friedrich et al. (2001), for example, found that 77% of their sample of juveniles in residential treatment facilities who had sexually offended (N=70) had experienced (substantiated or suspected) sexual abuse, and 63% experience physical abuse. Furthermore, 68% reported having been neglected, 83% reported emotional abuse, and 51% reported domestic violence in the family. Based on the results in the meta-analysis of Seto & Lalumière (2010), the mean prevalence were calculated of childhood traumatic experiences in juveniles who commit sexual offenses was calculated; 37% experienced childhood sexual abuse, 42% reported physical abuse, and 48% reported emotional abuse/neglect (Boonmann, 2015, p. 83).

Sexually offending juveniles more often report adverse childhood experiences than juvenile non-sexual offenders (Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Van Wijk et al., 2006). In their meta-analysis, Seto and Lalumière (2010) compared childhood traumatic experiences (sexual abuse, physical abuse, family sexual violence, family non-sexual violence, non-family non-sexual violence, emotional abuse or neglect) in juvenile offenders with and without sex offenses. No significant differences were found between the two groups for family sexual and non-sexual violence or for non-family non-sexual violence. Juveniles who had committed sexual offenses reported sexual, physical and emotional abuse significantly more often, than juvenile non-sexual offenders. The effect size, “a quantitative reflection of a phenomenon and size as the magnitude of something” (Kelley & Preacher, 2012, p. 140), for physical and emotional abuse was small; the effect size for sexual abuse was medium.

As juveniles who commit sexual offenses constitute a heterogeneous group, it is important to distinguish subgroups. In their study, Ford and Linney (1995) examined interfamilial violence and abuse experienced by juvenile child abusers and juvenile rapists. The two subgroups did not differ in their experience of family verbal aggression; child abusers reported more intrafamilial violence than rapists, however. In addition, child abusers had been sexually abused more often than rapists (52% vs. 17%) (Ford & Linney, 1995). The higher prevalence of sexual abuse in

juvenile child abusers compared to rapists is in line with the results of Kemper and Kistner (2010) and 't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al. (2015). Kemper and Kistner (2010) found that sexual abuse had been more prevalent in the child abuser group or mixed sex offender group (juvenile offenders targeting younger children and peers) than in the rapist group. 't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al. (2015) found that child abusers had experienced more sexual abuse than either solo or group rapists. Both studies, however, did not find significant differences in physical abuse between the subgroups. In contrast with the results in the aforementioned studies ('t Hart-Kerkhoffs, 2015; Kemper & Kistner, 2010; Ford & Linney, 1995), Hendriks and Bijleveld (2004) found no significant differences in sexual abuse as reported in child abusers and peer abusers; however, the two groups also failed to differ where emotional cruelty by parents, neglect by parents, and violence between parents were concerned. Höing et al. (2010) also did not find significant results regarding sexual abuse victimization between child abusers and peers/adults sex offenders. In addition, also exhibitionists did not differ in terms of their own victimization compared to hands-on offenders. In another study by Bijleveld and Hendriks (2003), where they compared juvenile solo and group sex offenders, solo sex offenders reported victimization significantly more often than group sex offenders. Höing et al. (2010) found similar results. Finally, Malie and colleagues (2011) found that sexually offending juveniles who were sexually abused had higher odds to sexually reoffend than those who were not abused. No relationship was found between sexual abuse and general reoffending, or physical abuse and general or sexual reoffending (Malie, Viljoen, Mordell, Spice, & Roesch 2011). This is in line with the results of 't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al. (2015), who found that persistent sexually offending juveniles were more often sexually abused than sexually offending juveniles who did not continue their sexual offending behavior.

In conclusion, childhood traumatic experiences are highly prevalent in the group of juveniles who commit sexual offenses. Physical, emotional and especially sexual abuse is more often found in the history of juveniles who sexually offend than in that of juvenile non-sex offenders. Research findings suggest that juvenile offenders who molest younger children have been sexually abused more often than juvenile offenders targeting only peer or adult victims. Finally, a relationship between a history of childhood abuse and persistent sexual offending behavior is suggested.

## **Cognitive functioning**

Studies into the cognitive functioning of juvenile sex offenders yield varied findings. A significant cause for this is that cognitive functioning is an umbrella for many different aspects, such as IQ, academic performance, executive functioning, learning difficulties, and intellectual and cognitive impairments. In addition, other methodological issues are involved, such as the sample diversity, research settings and varied measuring instruments.

McCurry et al. (1998) studied 200 juveniles with serious psychiatric disorders. Half of this group also evidenced inappropriate sexual behavior such as hypersexuality, exposing and victimizing. Lower IQ youth engaged in more inappropriate sexual behavior than those with a higher IQ. Others also have reported the prevalence of sexually abusive behavior is high in the intellectually disabled population group (Gilby et al., 1989; quoted in Epps & Fisher, 2004).

Also other studies make clear that a substantial proportion of juvenile sex offenders are challenged by academic difficulties; for example Awad et al. (1984), found about 80 percent of the

juvenile sex offenders studied had learning and/or behavioral problems at school. Ryan et al. (1996) found that 60% of these juveniles have problems at school, including learning difficulties.

A number of studies have investigated to what extent juvenile sex offenders are similar to juvenile non-sex offenders regarding their cognitive functioning, in particular their IQ and academic difficulties – with various results. Sometimes juvenile sexual offenders scored lower than juveniles who commit other offenses (e.g. Ferrara & McDonald, 1996; Van Wijk et al., 2006). Recently, Mulder et al. (2012) found that juvenile sex offenders had lower IQs than serious violent and property offenders, and evidenced lower academic achievement. Other studies have not found any differences (e.g. Butler & Seto, 2002; Tarter et al., 1993). The latter authors suggested that sample selection likely has determined the various results.

When subgroups of juvenile sex offenders are studied, a few interesting differences are revealed. Epps (2000; in Epps & Fisher, 2004), for example, found that juvenile child abusers have more learning problems and lower IQ scores than other types of (non) sexual delinquents. Awad and Saunders (1989) found similar results: more serious chronic learning problems are more often seen in the group of child abusers than in other types of offenders. In their meta-analysis, Seto and Lalumière (2010) included 28 studies on cognitive abilities. When compared with non-sex offenders, juvenile sex offenders scored lower for general, verbal and performance intelligence, but the differences were not statistically significant. Interestingly, the authors included four studies in which peer and child offenders were compared for general intelligence. They did not find a significant effect of victim age. This finding is in contrast with a study done involving adult sex offenders (Cantor et al., 2005), where it was found that child abusers had lower intelligence scores than offenders who targeted adult victims.

More comparative studies are required for a better understanding of the similarities and differences in cognitive functioning between sexually and non-sexually offending juveniles. Similarities may be related to the finding that juvenile sexual delinquency may be partly explained by general delinquency explanations (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). Neuropsychological impairments may contribute to violent offenses, whether sexual or otherwise. For example, Lewis, Shanok, and Pincus (1979) investigated possible neurological deficits in a group of juveniles who had committed sexual offenses and a group of juveniles who had committed violent non-sexual offenses. The groups did not differ in their general, verbal, or performance IQ scores. 't Hart-Kerkhoffs et al. (2011) studied a group of juvenile sex offenders (mainly peer assaults/rapes). They distinguished between leaders and followers, and found no differences in IQ between the two groups.

Because cognitive functioning involves a wide range of skills and capabilities, specific cognitive functions should be considered as well. Recently, Miyaguchi and Shirataki (2014) compared a group of juvenile sex offenders (mostly child abusers) with a low IQ (below 69) with juvenile non-sexual offenders with low IQ. They found that the juvenile sex offenders with low IQ had significantly lower scores than the non-sexual offenders with low IQ where it concerned attention switching, processing speed, working memory and prospective memory. No differences were found between the groups that did not have low IQ. The authors assert: “one possible explanation for why the brain or executive functions of sex offenders had been inconsistent in other previous studies is insufficient control of IQ in participants, such as the intermixing of participants with high IQ with those with low IQ” (p. 256) when exploring cognitive functioning among juveniles who have sexually offended.

For now, research support for the premise that the cognitive functioning of juveniles who sexually offend differs from other delinquent groups is lacking. Also differences among the

various subtypes of juveniles with sex offenses are not consistent. Perhaps increased specificity in research, for example by controlling for IQ scores, may further our understanding of cognitive functioning among juveniles who have sexually offended.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have expanded on research indicating that juveniles who sexually offend differ in some ways from non-sexual offending peers. We also have noted they may be divided into various subgroups. Although there are various commonly used criteria by which to make further distinctions within the group of juveniles who sexually offend, a recurring theme is that juveniles who assault or rape peers or adults are most similar to juveniles who commit non-sexual offenses. This warrants a warning, however: the subgroup of juveniles who sexually assault peers and adults should not be considered homogeneous.

The most prominent differences between child offenders and other (non)sexual offending juveniles are in the areas of mental health, psychosocial functioning and traumatic experiences. Their increased rates of internalizing emotional problems are in contrast with the antisocial and externalizing problems of the peer abusers, and require assessment and, if indicated, appropriate treatment. This is not to say, however, that juvenile child abusers become pedophiles at a later age. Most child abusers do not continue their sexual offending careers into adulthood.

Roughly 30 years of research into juveniles who sexually offend have yielded a significant information regarding their characteristics. Nevertheless, there are gaps in our knowledge that require the attention of researchers. Research has demonstrated that most juveniles who sexually offend do not seem to persist in their sexual offending behavior, although many do seem to persist in non-sexual offending behavior (e.g., Caldwell, 2010; Fortune & Lambie, 2006). Given the fact that sexually abusive youth have much in common with juvenile non-sex offenders, Letourneau & Borduin (2008) proposed that interventions effective for reducing general delinquency, such as *Functional Family Therapy* (FFT) and *Multi-Systemic Therapy* (MST), would also be effective in the treatment of sexually abusive youth (see also Borduin, Schaeffer and Heiblum, 2009; Henggeler et al., 2009; Letourneau et al. (2009). Interventions like MST may work well for juvenile sex offenders, contrary to Lösel and Schmucker's (2005) conclusion that sex offender-specific treatments for adolescents are required, although promising results were made by a clinical adaptation of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) that has been specifically designed and developed to treat youth (and their families) for problematic sexual behavior (Letourneau et al., 2013).

Furthermore, juveniles committing sexual offenses, especially those targeting child victims, often exhibit high levels of mental health problems. More specifically, research findings suggest that juveniles who sexually reoffend have more internalizing mental health problems and have more often experienced childhood sexual abuse than juveniles who do not sexually reoffend. Therefore, assessments and treatment of juveniles committing sex offenses, especially those with child victims, should devote special attention to internalizing mental health problems and problems related to personal childhood sexual abuse victimization.

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