Male Adolescent Sexual Offenders: Exhibitionism and Obscene Phone Calls

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ABSTRACT: Clinical assessment of 19 male adolescent sexual offenders who had committed exhibitionism or telephone scatology showed that the majority were maladjusted, had committed numerous sexual offenses and came from multi-problem families. Several of them appeared to be sexually deviant, although they did not meet DSM-III-R criteria for a diagnosis of paraphilia. Anti-social traits, sexual deviance in the family, homosexual conflicts, repressed sexuality and sexual deviance were considered to be contributory factors.

KEY WORDS: Adolescent Sexual Offenders; delinquents; sexual deviation.

As part of an ongoing study of male adolescent sexual offenders we defined three subgroups on the basis of the nature of their offenses (3,4,11). Detailed descriptions of two subgroups, child molesters and sexual assaulters were summarized in two recent papers (3,4). Here we focus on the third group of offenders, those committing "hands-off" offenses, i.e. exhibitionism and making obscene phone calls: their demographic and personal characteristics and factors contributing to these offenses will be described.
Literature Review

Among sexual offenses exhibitionism and making obscene phone calls (from here on referred to as “hands-off” offenses) can be considered less serious than rape or child molestation. Thus it is not surprising that publications in the area of adolescent sexual offenders have focused on child molesters and rapists (8,10,13). Sometimes hands-off offenses are characterized as “nuisance offenses” with the primary concern being whether they are precursors to the more serious sexual offenses (7).

The relative lack of data on hands-off offenses may also be due to the fact that adolescent sexual offenders are more likely to be brought to the attention of courts and mental health professionals when they commit sexual assaults or molest children, than for hands-off offenses (5,6).

Publications describing adult exhibitionists and voyeurs consist primarily of case descriptions and theoretical speculations (9). Data from Langevin and his colleagues (9) (p.332) indicate that exhibitionists do not differ from normal heterosexual research participants in their patterns of sexual arousal (responding primarily to adult females) and lack of attraction to homosexual acts or history of homosexual experiences. None of the exhibitionists had raped and only few had molested children (involving body contact). However, many had exposed themselves to children and adolescents as well as adults and they were more likely to have engaged in voyeurism than normal heterosexual controls or sexual offenders committing other kinds of sexual offenses. Their dating experiences and rates of marriage/ separation were found not to differ from those of the general population or of controls in research samples. Reported rates of recidivism are 10-20% for first offenders and 33%-50% for repeat offenders.

Methodology

Subjects

Nineteen of the 108 male adolescent sexual offenders in our sample had committed hands-off offenses. The majority were referred by courts, a few were referred by police. They were either seen by one of the authors or we were involved in a consulting role in their assessments. They constituted most of the adolescent sexual offenders referred to the Clinic between 1980-1988. Approximately ten sexual offenders were excluded because they did not complete the assessment for a variety of reasons. Our sample is not