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Understanding why male juveniles perpetrate: An exploratory study

Debbie Lee O’Sullivan

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UNDERSTANDING WHY MALE JUVENILES PERPETRATE:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Debbie Lee O'Sullivan

June 2005
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ABSTRACT

Little attention has been paid to juveniles who are sexually aggressive and commit sexual abuse. Even less attention has been paid to the reason why male juveniles commit these offenses. This quantitative and qualitative study surveyed 125 social workers that work within the Child Welfare System. The survey asked these why they believe male juveniles commit child sexual abuse acts and how they believe male juveniles should be perceived.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Teresa Morris for all your help and advising.
DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, Gary, Nikki, Cailin, Bogdan and Erin
for all your love and support.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There is a large population of juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators that has previously gone unrecognized by many. As noted by Manocha and Mezey (1998), "Approximately 20% of all rapes and between 30% and 50% of all child molestations, are committed by adolescent males" (p. 589). Without prevention services and intervention, this population will continue to grow. However, if social workers find a clear way to work with this population there may be hope of reducing this population. The first step toward this goal is to understand how social workers view these perpetrators and how they currently intervene with these cases.

Problem Statement

Male juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators are juveniles who are sexually active far beyond their age. They are engaging in such activities as vaginal or oral intercourse, oral copulation, and forcible penetration of vagina or anus with other objects. According to Snyder and Sickmund (1999) "Juveniles commit approximately one third of all sexual offenses against children." The cause
of juveniles committing these sexual offenses will be discussed in the following section. The topics that will be covered will be: male juveniles victimized previously, male juveniles victimized previously, problems within the family, misunderstanding of juvenile perpetrators, professionals and juvenile sexual abuse, juveniles without services and lastly barriers to social workers interventions. These topics will be covered to lay the foundation of understanding of male juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators and what services need to be in place to intervene with male juvenile perpetrators.

**Male Juveniles Victimized Previously**

As juveniles grow they exhibit behaviors that they have learned and seen within their own lives. This is true when it comes to juveniles who become perpetrators. Emma J. Palmer and Sam Farm conducted a study in 2002 where they were able to survey 108 male juveniles who perpetrated sexually against another child. They found these juveniles had very few common characteristics, however one stood out, "...over 80% of self-reported victimizers stated that they have been victimized at least once" (p. 478). Further, Toni Cavanagh Johnson (1989) conducted a study that described what these
perpetrators have experienced. Johnson (1988) explained that the juveniles who begin to perpetrate experienced not only sexual abuse, they may have been physically abused as well (p. 224). With this in mind, Johnson (1988) further explained that a precursor for a juvenile to become sexually abusive is not only that he has been sexually abused, but also that a person in his life could have physically abused them.

Problems Within the Family

Attachment to parents or a caregiver is one of the most crucial aspects of childhood. Children must attach with their parents in order to develop. A study conducted by Kishan F. Manocha and Gillian Mezey (1998) described the background characteristics of 51 male adolescents who have perpetrated sexually. Manocha and Mezey (1998) noted that, "It is relevant that a significant proportion of our cohort experienced parental losses as a result of parental separation, divorce and death, as well as a home environment characterized by inadequate, neglectful, or abusive parental care, all of which serves to undermine attachment bonds with parents" (p. 601). When a child grows up without attaching to a parent or caregiver he or she tends to feel lonely, have lower capacity to be
intimate and also have a lower self-esteem. Manocha and Mezey (1998) also found that adolescent sexual abusers might have other problems within their family such as, exposure to marital violence, parental separation and divorce, illegal substance use, mental illness within the family, and possibly a lack of sexual boundaries. All of these factors can contribute to a male juvenile becoming more sexually aggressive and becoming a sexual perpetrator.

Misunderstanding of Male Juvenile Perpetrators

It is common for male juveniles become interested in sexual activities during adolescents. Adolescent male juveniles are beginning to enter into puberty where they become more physically mature and are able to reproduce. They begin to have an increased in hormone production, which can lead to growth and stimulations of sexual organs. With this increased hormone production some male juveniles become sexually aggressive towards others, including children. This sexual behavior is also often ignored when juveniles display sexual interest and become mislabeled by professionals as being appropriate. They believe the male juvenile is exhibiting normal adolescent growth while trying to find his identity. Gil (1993)
examined behaviors of children from birth until adolescence and noted age appropriate behaviors of sexual activity. However as noted by Gil (1993) "Because of the range of behaviors that children can participate in, using only sexual behaviors as a measure of appropriateness can be misleading" (p. 29). Gil (1993) proposed that the other criteria that should be considered are: (1) age difference between the perpetrator and victim; (2) developmental age difference; (3) type of sexual activity; (4) if one of juvenile has power over another child; (5) size difference between the two, and (6) if a juvenile is spontaneously playing sexually or if there is anger and intensity involved.

However, juveniles who commit sexually aggressive acts have particular characteristics. Araji (1997) states that juveniles "Sexual behaviors have an aggressive quality and involve use of force, coercion, secrecy, or all three. The behaviors may be aimed at self, but generally involve others" (p. 36). These sexual acts may occur once or increase over a period of time. The juvenile may then become obsessive, committing these acts in a habitual manner as they might have a desire for control and power, or a need to ease feelings of anger or
loneliness. Also as explained by Araji (1997), “Sexually aggressive children demonstrate little self-control as related to their sexual behavior” (p. 36).

Professionals and Male Juvenile Sexual Abuse

Even though professionals may hear numerous reports, they themselves are uncomfortable with the subject of juveniles being sexually aggressive and do not know how to deal with this population. Araji (1997), states that “…the poor reporting of treatment for this population comes from a dichotomy that exists in the treatment field” (p. 37). This split is between offender therapists and victim therapists. As further explained by William N. Friedrich (1990) these therapists have dissimilar therapeutic styles and perceptions about the origins of sexual behavior. Friedrich stated, “Much of victim therapy appropriately is supportive and depends on the development of the relationship. Offender therapists typically eschew the relationship are irrelevant, something that gets in the way, and rely heavily on confrontation” (p. 243). These different therapeutic styles again split the professional field and increases the lack of reports being made because victim therapists tend to believe that a juvenile is reacting to abuse they
may have endured and do not choose to label the male juvenile as a sexual perpetrator.

**Male Juveniles Without Services**

Sexually aggressive male juveniles do not fall under the authority of criminal justice agencies and programs, due to the age of the juvenile who has committed the act. There are many restrictions regarding age and regulations governing investigating children. For example, as stated by Araji (1997), "The criminal codes for many states indicate that children under the age of 14 cannot be held 'criminally responsible' for their actions" (p. 38). Therefore many cases go uninvestigated and happen to go without services by the various criminal justice agencies.

Johnson (1988) conducted a study in New York regarding cases in which a juvenile was convicted of perpetrating against a child. Within this study she explained that, "...when children are found guilty in the justice system, there is frequently no program to treat the youthful offender" (p. 437). Children such as those convicted will get misplaced within the system and go without the appropriate services.
Also within child protective services the main concern is for victims of abuse, and consequently services for a juvenile who has been sexually aggressive may not be available. Child protective services only look at the issue of the juvenile being a victim, and often the problem of the juvenile being an offender goes unresolved (Aragi p. 39). It is important for social workers to be more aware of this practice issue. With juvenile sexual abuse occurring at an alarming rate, social workers need to intervene in prevention and treatment for these juveniles. Many children go without assistance and continue to commit these acts.

**Barriers to Social Workers Intervention**

There are policies within the child protective system that constrain a worker when a male juvenile is reported as the perpetrator of child sexual abuse. As explained by Faller (1990), "...protective services treats child maltreatment as a social or psychological problem rather than a crime" (p. 75). If a juvenile is a perpetrator the social worker is supposed to look at the male juvenile as though he is a victim. Male juvenile perpetrators will be interviewed in the same manner as any other victims, and will not be treated as though they
are a perpetrator. It will be assumed by the worker who is interviewing the male juvenile that they have been previously abused, and this is the cause of them acting in a sexually aggressive manner. However regardless of this view, if a Child Protective Service worker thinks the act is sexually aggressive, that is, not indicative of normal development, the male juvenile can be referred for treatment or referred to the police. Also if a male juvenile commits an incestuous act the worker may remove the child from the home, if parents are not willing to protect the victim.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why social workers believe a male juvenile would commit a sexual abuse act toward another child and how this juvenile should be understood within the social services system and society. Interventions social workers believe are needed once this abuse has occurred were also explored within this study. This study was carried out to expand the information and knowledge available on how social workers practice interviews and interventions within their field.
As stated previously, many times these cases get passed on throughout numerous agencies and are not given the services needed. The services include, therapy, classes in anger management, child abuse and rehabilitation services are for the juvenile who committed the act, as well as protection of the victim. It is important for juvenile sexual abuse to be studied in detail to understand not only the population to a greater extent but also to further understand the interventions with such cases.

Social workers are usually the first to respond to these cases. It is the social work field that comes into contact with countless juvenile perpetrators and it is the workers in this field that help make the decisions that can help or hinder finding solutions to this problem. If they choose to act on a case where a juvenile has been a perpetrator and advocate for the victim as well as the perpetrator to ensure they receive the proper services this will help the society as a whole. However if they choose to conduct their case in a manner that they ignore the juvenile perpetrator and assume he will not commit a sexual abuse act again, this can hinder our society in that the juvenile will likely perpetrate
again. These workers have the responsibility of protecting the children within communities from being victims and possibly in the future becoming offenders. Providing appropriate services, identifying the clear issue to be looked at and working collaboratively with the family and children, can do this.

Nonetheless if there is not a clear way of handling cases of juvenile sexual abuse; this can damage communities within our society. It can lead to further abuse and thus continuing the cycle of abuse. The underlying issue in this research project is: what do social workers believe causes a male juvenile to become a sexual abuse perpetrator and what interventions are needed to help the male juvenile.

This study aimed to develop a clear understanding of why social workers believe juveniles perpetrate against other children. Survey research was used to allow the social workers to respond in an anonymous manner.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Micro Practice

This is an important study for child welfare practice in that it increased knowledge for social
workers within child protective services on the growing problem of juvenile sexual abuse cases. As the social workers become more aware of this problem they can begin to gain important information that is imperative to dealing with juveniles who commit these sexual abuse acts. It will also increase awareness of what social workers believe causes juveniles to become sexually abusive.

The findings of this study will help social workers at the engagement stage of the generalist approach by allowing them to be more aware of other causes of the juvenile perpetrating, instead of assuming of instantly believing they have been abused. This will also begin to help them at the assessment level, by assisting them in asking more questions to gain a clearer understanding as to why they committed an act of sexual abuse. This will then assist the social worker at the planning level, by deciding what would be the best course of action to help a juvenile who is sexually aggressive to not commit these acts again.

Macro Practice

This study will also begin to help on the macro practice level at the implementation level of practice.
Currently there are very few resources available for juveniles who perpetrate sexually against other children. With this study it can increase awareness of what new practices and interventions should be put into place at the agency level. It would be easier to develop a program after understanding why social workers believe they are committing sexual abuse acts, to help the juveniles who are committing these acts.

The research question was, "What do social workers think causes male juveniles to be sexual abuse perpetrators? What do social workers believe the response to male juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be?"
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research on juvenile perpetrators of sexual abuse has increased since the 1980s. However in order to begin to understand social workers' beliefs about why male juveniles commit sexual abuse acts there must first be an understanding of what makes a sexually abusive male juvenile. In order to do this, in the following section the topics that will be discussed are: Male juvenile perpetrator characteristics, effects of male juvenile sexual abuse, professional views and theories guiding conceptualization.

Male Juvenile Perpetrator Characteristics

Several studies have been completed attempting to identify common characteristics of male juvenile perpetrators. Taylor (2003) conducted a study that aimed to establish a correlation between personal characteristics and backgrounds of juveniles who commit sexual crimes. In this study a sample was collected in the United Kingdom from a small community in which the number of juvenile perpetrator cases had risen. This data
was collected from the Social Services Department within minutes of meetings and conferences regarding the cases. Also data was collected from police records (p. 59). The cases were then compared to establish similarities among the juveniles. The largest common factor found was that ninety-two percent were males; however the rest of the factors varied among the juveniles. Some of these factors were, the age range varied from four years old to 16, some had learning or behavioral difficulties, others had an emotional problem and a high percent were alleged victims of abuse themselves. There was no outstanding common factor between the sexual behaviors and personal characteristics. Taylor (2003) concluded by acknowledging that professionals must continue to expand the interventions in place for juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators, since there is such a range of characteristics of juveniles who are sexually aggressive (p. 69).

A study that was done earlier by Benoit and Kennedy (1992) after it was noticed that male juvenile sexual perpetrators were increasing in the criminal population. Benoit and Kennedy conducted this study within a Florida juvenile hall of 100 male offenders. This study like
Taylor's sought to find the common history for these juveniles by hypothesizing that the male juvenile perpetrators had been physically or sexually victimized at a younger age. As explained by Benoit and Kennedy (1992), even though there was physical and sexual abuse found in the history of several of male juvenile offenders in this study, the greater part of this group had not been a victim of physical or sexual abuse (p. 547). They concluded that "...the relationship between being a victim of certain types of abuse and subsequent offending is not direct; other factors must be in operation" (p. 547). These other factors may include, problems within the family, impaired sexual identity, and social and behavioral problems.

Effects of Juvenile Sexual Abuse

In order to gain a better understanding of the effects of juvenile sexual abuse on a child it is important to know the effects that sexual abuse by adults has on children. Paolucci, Genuis, and Violato (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of research published on the effects of child sexual abuse and future problems. The study showed thirty-seven studies that have been
Another difference was the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator (Shaw et al., 2000). Juvenile perpetrators were usually unrelated females or siblings, where as adult perpetrators were usually a father figure to the victim (p. 1595).

There were no differences, in the type of sexual abuse and previous child abuse. However Shaw et al. (2000) clarified that regardless of type of perpetrator, whether adult or juvenile, the victims had the same troubles emotionally and behaviorally. With this in mind it is evident that regardless of the age of perpetrator this is a serious crime with dramatic effects. The next step should be to look at how professionals in the field look at child sexual abuse perpetrators.

**Professional Views**

At times social service agencies and judicial system professionals are at odds on the subject of juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators. Even though the common goal between these professionals is to protect and better society, in the course of meeting that goal there may be some disagreement on how this goal can be met.
Two studies were aimed to open communication between agencies and gain a better understanding of how different branches of the social service system view the subject of juvenile sexual abuse. Saunders (1988) and Sanders and Ladwa-Thomas (1997) compared views of public child welfare social workers, district attorneys, public defenders, police officers, and district justices through a self-reported questionnaire. Saunders (1988) focused primarily on child sexual abuse by adult perpetrators, and within the study on victim credibility, victim and offender culpability and last, on crime and punishment. Sanders and Ladwa-Thomas (1997) focused on juvenile perpetrators, and the perspectives on sexual abuse and practice issues that arise when the perpetrator is a juvenile.

Saunders (1988) study shared that the difference of opinions between the professionals lay in the categories of punishment and the credibility of the victim (p. 88). These differences were between the groups of public defenders, and social workers, police, and district attorneys. As explained by Saunders (1988), the public defender was for the offender as they support the least punitive response for them and find them the least
liable. The social workers, police officers, and district attorneys were for the victim, since they think they are the least responsible and most plausible (p. 89).

The difference discovered in Sanders and Ladwa-Thomas (1997) study was in whether a juvenile can be seen as a perpetrator in these circumstances or if they should be seen as a victim as well (p. 269). Those involved with child protective services thought the child should be still seen as a victim whereas police and those in the juvenile justice department thought, regardless of age, the child should be seen as an offender. Throughout the rest of the categories in the survey the agencies only concurred on one topic, that a child could grow out of the sexual behavior they are exhibiting. Otherwise with each question there was a difference, especially between police and child protection workers, which raises concern about police and child protection workers collaborating for the protection of children. As later explained by Sanders and Ladwa-Thomas (1997), all community service agencies need to be more pliant when working with juvenile perpetrators (p. 271). Agencies may also need to find a common theoretical framework to
explore this issue closer and gain a better understanding for all professionals.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Unfortunately there has been little theoretical explanation of juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators. There has been research conducted, though, no theory has been proven empirically. However, as stated by Burton, Nesmith, and Badten (1997), "Social learning theory may...provide a theoretical and testable base for understanding sexually aggressive behavior by children" (p. 160).

Albert Bandura's social learning theory framework has three factors, which affect one another. These are environment, behavior, and cognitive or other personal factors. An individual can learn through modeling and through reinforcement or punishment. For example if a juvenile commits a sexual abuse act they can learn to believe that this behavior is normal and therefore feel that nothing is wrong with what they doing.

According to Nesmith and Badten (1997), with the social learning model in place a juvenile may receive reward and feel satisfied when acting out sexually and
believe this is normal and therefore continue to act sexually and possibly in a more aggressive manner (p. 161). With this principle in mind, a juvenile who receives a negative reinforcement when they act sexually will soon learn that when they commit an unwanted sexual act they will not be rewarded. This will then diminish the behavior of the juvenile or change the behavior all together.

This theory guided this study, by adding structure to the research questions by following the lines of social learning. This will also give a baseline of understanding as to why juveniles would become sexual abuse perpetrators. However this is only the beginning of theories that may relate to sexually aggressive children. Further research needs to be done in order to grasp a full understanding of the sexually aggressive child’s thinking.

Summary

Within this literature search there is a lack of studies on juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators’ victims, and how these incidents affect them. There was also a lack of research conducted on social service agencies and
how they work with this population. Also, there was also a large gap in regards to theories about the sexually aggressive child. This current study is attempting to fill the gap on the subject of child welfare social workers and why they believe juveniles would commit acts of juvenile sexual abuse and how they should be viewed within the social services system.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

There were two research questions. "What do social workers think causes male juveniles to be sexual abuse perpetrators? What do social workers believe their response to male juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be?" The hypotheses were, "Social workers will conclude that the causes of male juveniles committing sexual abuse are previous experiences of being abused." "Social workers will respond that male juveniles committing sexual abuse acts should be perceived as victims."

Study Design

The research design that was utilized was a descriptive survey. This approach was used because it allowed the opportunity for a large population to be sampled anonymously (see Appendix A. for survey instrument). The strength of using this method was that it allowed the participants to answer in their own words and expand their point of view. They were also able to cover an area they may have felt was left out in the
questionnaire. In contrast, a limitation of this method is that it restricted the participants to answer such structured questions. Also a participant may have not understood a question and could have answered in a way they did not agree with.

Sampling

The approach to sampling was criterion sampling, as those who were asked to fill out the surveys all had one common characteristic; they were social workers within the Child Protective System. In order to keep the study manageable the sample included social workers from one region within California. These social workers, who were currently working within California’s Child Protective Services, were invited to volunteer to fill out the survey. This sample was chosen because these workers are working directly with clients on a daily basis. They come into contact with the population of interest on a regular basis and will have a reliable response to the question being posed.

Of the 115 social workers surveyed, 42 completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher with a response rate of 37%. The respondents were primarily
female (32) and Caucasian (22). The average number of years of the respondents have worked in the Child Welfare System was 7.2 years. Their average caseload per year was 11.3, with 6.5 of those cases being juvenile sexual abuse cases.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Years in CWS</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Cases per Year</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Juvenile Cases per Year</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection and Instruments

Through a survey, data was collected that described social workers’ perceptions of the cause of incidents of juvenile sexual abuse. The following demographics were included in this study: gender, ethnicity, years employed as social workers, average number of sexual abuse cases
per year, and average number of juvenile sexual abuse perpetrator cases per year. These were asked in order to compare and contrast the responses of the Social Worker. All were measured at the interval level, except gender, which was measured at the nominal level. The independent variables within the study were the social worker characteristics with the social worker as the constant. The dependent variable was the opinions of the social workers.

For this study, a survey instrument was created. The survey questions covered two broad areas of possible causes of sexually aggressive behavior and how professionals view juveniles who have committed juvenile sexual abuse acts. Once these areas are established four sub questions were developed and then converted onto a Likert scale, which measured the dependent variables.

Procedures

The surveys were administered by distributing them through the unit supervisors who agreed to take part in the study. The survey was voluntary for social workers to complete and all responses will be kept anonymous. This will be done to increase the response level of social
workers and also reassure them that they were not be penalized for their responses within their workplace, as they will not be able to be identified. The social workers were asked to fill out an informed consent form (Appendix B), followed by the survey at their convenience at the location they desire. A debriefing statement was also included within the survey packet, which explained where the results of the study could be obtained once the research is concluded (Appendix C). They were instructed to complete the survey, and then place them in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope, which was then be delivered directly to the researcher. The social workers had three weeks to complete the surveys, and reminder notices were sent out by emailed on a weekly basis in hopes of increasing the response rate.

Protection of Human Subjects.

As individuals were studied by direct, questioning it was important to protect the confidentiality of these individuals. All surveys were anonymous and only the researcher reviewed the surveys. Also, when the survey was complete they will be able to put them into a sealed envelope that could not be differentiated from any other
individual. When all the data are collected and recorded, the surveys were shredded.

Data Analysis

The quantitative procedures that were employed during the data analysis was the analysis of frequencies by looking at the relationship of being a social worker and what they think the cause is of juvenile sexual abuse. Then the reason why social workers believe juveniles commit sexual abuse will be compared. The interval variables within this study are learned during socialization, previous abuse, part of developmental stages, curiosity, hold juvenile accountable, juvenile will grow out of the behavior, perceive juvenile as victim, and perceive juvenile as offender. The demographics were measured at the nominal level. The qualitative data was analyzed through opening coding.

Summary

This chapter on methodology has explained the descriptive research design and how surveys allowed this design to be implemented. Also discussed was how the sample population was selected to participate within this research project. Lastly it was explained how the
findings will be analyzed and what tests will need to be done for an understanding of what was revealed by the social workers.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTs

Introduction

Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered for this study. For quantitative data, frequency distributions of the value categories were used to analyze the data. The qualitative data was analyzed through open coding.

Quantitative Data

The sample of social workers tended to agree that male juveniles who committed acts of sexual abuse have learned this early in their socialization and they have been previously abused. The sample also disagreed that male juveniles displaying sexual behavior is appropriate for their developmental stage. Lastly the social work sample had a mixed view on male juveniles acting out of curiosity when committing sexual abuse acts.

As described in the grouped cumulative percentage distribution table 2 below, of the 42 respondents 24% (10) strongly agreed and 62% (26) agreed that male juveniles commit acts of sexual because they learned this in their early socialization, while 14% (6) disagreed.
Further 38% (16) of the social workers strongly agreed and 50% (21) agreed that juveniles become perpetrators because they have been previously abused. Also 48% (20) strongly disagree and 36% (15) disagree that a juvenile committing sexual abuse acts is appropriate for their developmental stage. Leaving 12% (5) to agree and 5% (2) to strongly agree. Lastly, 24% (10) strongly disagree and 43% (18) disagree that a male juvenile who committing acts of sexual abuse is acting out of curiosity. However in contrast 31% (13) agreed and 2% (1) strongly agreed male juveniles are acting out of curiously when they perpetrate sexually against another child.
Table 2. Social Worker Perceptions of Why Male Juveniles Commit Acts of Sexual Abuse

1. Male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse because:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. This behavior has been learned during early socialization</td>
<td>24%(10)</td>
<td>62%(26)</td>
<td>14%(6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Another individual has previously abused them</td>
<td>38%(16)</td>
<td>50%(21)</td>
<td>10%(4)</td>
<td>2%(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. They are behaving in a way that is appropriate for their developmental stage by acting out sexually</td>
<td>5%(2)</td>
<td>12%(5)</td>
<td>36%(15)</td>
<td>48%(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. They are acting out of curiosity</td>
<td>2%(1)</td>
<td>31%(13)</td>
<td>43%(18)</td>
<td>24%(10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequencies N = 42

Overall the sample of social workers showed they agreed that juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be held accountable for their behavior. On the other hand, they disagreed that the juveniles who commit child abuse acts will grow out of this sexual behavior. The social work sample also showed they agreed that male juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be perceived as a victim as well as an offender.
As shown in grouped cumulative percentage distribution table 3 below, 38% (16) strongly agree and 57% (24) agree that male juveniles should be held accountable for their behaviors. Further, 45% (19) strongly disagree and 43% (18) disagree those male juveniles who are committing acts of sexual abuse will “grow out” of this sexual behavior in time. Also 10% (4) strongly agreed and 52% (22) agreed that juveniles who are committing sexual abuse acts should be perceived as a victim as well. However 10% (4) strongly agreed and 50% (21) agreed that juveniles who have committed acts of sexual abuse should be perceived as a criminal offender.
Table 3. Social Worker Perceptions of How They Should Respond to Juveniles Who Commit Sexual Abuse Acts

2. Our response to juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Hold the juvenile accountable for their behaviors</td>
<td>38% (16)</td>
<td>57% (24)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Assume that they will &quot;grow out&quot; of this sexual behavior in time.</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>7% (3)</td>
<td>43% (18)</td>
<td>45% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Perceive them as victims</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>52% (22)</td>
<td>33% (14)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Perceive them as criminal offenders</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>50% (21)</td>
<td>36% (15)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequencies N = 42

Qualitative Data

Of the 42 respondents to the survey, 31% (13) of the sample of social workers responded to the qualitative questions. The first qualitative question was additional comments about why male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse. Of the sample that respond to this question, 62% respond that male juveniles are becoming sexual abuse perpetrators because they have been previously abused or they have been exposed to sexualized behavior during
their life. One response was, "This is learned behavior from parents and peers either they have been abused by someone or witnessed abuse." Another respondent stated, "Learned behavior, what they see and believe to be a way of behavior and expression." The remaining 38% believed there was another cause for male juveniles to become sexual abuse perpetrators. Which ranged from the media, emotional stability, and pressures of the society. For example a response was, "Much of it is curiosity and pressure from a sexually permissive society." Another response was, "Sexualized behavior occurs in response to increased levels of anxiety as a mode of emotional release, to resolve compulsion."

Of the 32% (13) of the sample that answered the second qualitative question, which asked if the social worker had any additional comments on how social workers should intervene with male juveniles who commit acts of sexual abuse. Of this 32% (13) sample, 85% (11) agreed and commented that male juveniles who commit acts of sexual abuse need to receive a form of counseling as well as education on child abuse or anger management. One response to this question was, "Get them into specialized sexual abuse counseling as soon as possible." Another
response was, "Finding a professional therapist who understand the cycle of sexual abuse and is able to confront these juveniles is paramount to changing." The remaining 15% (2) respondents had a difference of opinion. They responded that their behavior should be addressed at the juvenile's home, and also the juvenile needs to be resensitized by limiting exposure to the media society. One respondent explained, "Focus on helping family's develop structure to supervise and model appropriate behavior."

The overall findings of this study were social workers' believe that male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse because they have learned this behavior and/or have been abused previously. The social workers' overall were undecided whether male juveniles are acting out of curiosity or not when they commit acts of sexual abuse. Lastly social workers were split with their response if male juveniles who have committed sexual abuse acts should be perceived as victims or offenders.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized at the beginning of this study that social workers would think that male juveniles who commit acts of sexual abuse would have been previously abused. The results showed that social workers did in fact feel that male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse because they have been previously abused. Also the vast majority of social workers responded that male juveniles commit these acts because it has been learned through their early socialization. This supports the literature that social workers believe male juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts, have learned this through previous abuse.

One interpretation of this finding is that social workers believe male juveniles must have been socialized to abuse otherwise they would not know how to act in this sexualized way. The sample of social workers supported this interpretation as they strongly disagreed that when male juveniles commit sexual abuse acts this is appropriate for their developmental stage. It can be assumed from this response that this sample of social
workers believe that a male juvenile should not have sexual aggressive tendencies at any developmental age.

It was also assumed at the beginning of this study that the sample social workers would perceive male juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts as victims. The results demonstrated that social workers believe that even when a juvenile commits an act of sexual abuse they should be perceived a victim. However there was only a 2\% (1) difference between social workers that perceived juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts as victims and social workers that perceived them as criminal offenders.

One interpretation of this finding is that the sample of social workers does believe that these male juveniles should be considered a victim however they still believe these "victims" are now offenders as they have committed a crime against another child. It may be assumed that the sample of social workers believes this is a more complex issue that one may believe. It is not appropriate to only see the juvenile as a victim as they have committed a criminal act, however should the child welfare system go as far as prosecuting the juvenile as they would an adult offender. This issue does not support the literature, as in the literature it was assumed that
social workers would perceive male juvenile perpetrators as victims only.

This complex issue was raised and unfortunately there is not a direct answer on what would work best for male juvenile perpetrators. This was also supported by an unanticipated result came from the analysis, which was that social workers strongly believed that juveniles who commit these sexual abuse crimes will not “grow out” of this sexual behavior. Also, according to the social workers surveyed it was shown those juveniles should be held for the sexual behaviors they are displaying.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the sample size was small in contrast to how many social workers there are working within California. In order to gain a more substantial and clear understanding of what social workers believe causes male juveniles to become perpetrators and what interventions need to be done with these perpetrators a more extensive study needs to be conducted. Also as this was an exploratory study, the hypothesis could not be tested for significance in the results. It would also be beneficial for a study to be
done on what interventions are being done for male juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators and their effectiveness.

Implications for Social Work

With the findings of this study completed, it can now be seen how important it is for the social work profession to begin to establish an effective way of working with juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators. It is important for a concurrence to be made among social workers on how male juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators are viewed and assessed. This will ideally allow more services to be put into place to help this rising population of offenders.

Conclusion

With this research study completed it is now recognized how often social workers in the child welfare system come into contact with male juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators. It is also seen that these social workers believe male juveniles have been perpetrated against, which is cause for them to perpetrate sexually. With this in mind it is important for further research to be conducted on what interventions are currently in place
for juvenile sexual abuse perpetrators and, and how effective these interventions are.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
QUESTIONNAIRE

You are participating in a research project, which is attempting to gain a better understanding about why male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse. Juveniles are defined here as being between the ages of 13-18. You will be asked questions in the areas of, maturation, socialization, developmental stages, life experiences, awareness of sexual orientation, status of the offender and personal awareness. Please use the following scale to answer the questions.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = disagree
4 = strongly disagree

Circle the response that most closely matches your opinion.

1. Male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse because:
   a. This behavior has been learned during early socialization.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   b. Another individual has previously abused them.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   c. They are behaving in a way that is appropriate for their developmental stage by acting out sexually.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   d. They are acting out of curiosity.
      1  2  3  4
   e. Other: ______________________________________
      ______________________________________
      ______________________________________
2. Our response to juveniles who commit sexual abuse acts should be:
   a. Hold the juvenile accountable for their behaviors.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   b. Assume that they will “grow out” of this sexual behavior in time.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   c. Perceive them as victims.
      1  2  3  4
      And/Or
   d. Perceive them as criminal offenders.
      1  2  3  4
   e. Other: ________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
Please would you provide the following demographic Information:

11. Your Gender: M \ F

12. Your Ethnicity (circle all that apply): American Indian \ Asian \ African American \ Pacific Islander \ Hispanic \ White \ Other

13. Years you have worked in the Child Welfare System: ________

14. On average, the number of sexual abuse cases you have per year: ___

15. On average the number of juvenile sexual abuse cases you have per year: ___

Any additional comments about why male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse:

Any additional comments about how social workers should intervene with male juveniles who commit acts of sexual abuse:

Thank you for your participation in this study; please place this survey and the informed consent in the self-addressed envelope provided.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

The research study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to gain a better understanding about why male juveniles commit acts of sexual abuse. Debbie O'Sullivan is conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Teresa Morris, Professor of Social Work and Director and Chair of Social Work Department. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked to complete a survey, which is in the attached packet. Please try to answer each questions with your honest opinion. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Once you have completed the survey, place it and this informed consent in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided in this packet and mail it back to the researcher.

Please understand that all your information will be anonymous. You cannot be identified by your responses to the survey. Also, no significant risks associated with this study. Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the research supervisor, Dr. Teresa Morris, (909) 880-5501.

I agree that I have been informed about, and understand the purpose of this study. I freely consent to participate, and acknowledge I am at least 18 years of age and work within the Child Welfare System.

Please mark the box below to participate.

☐ Date: _________
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about why a male juvenile would commit an act of sexual abuse with other children. The aim was to discover what social workers think are the causes and appropriate approaches to intervening with male juveniles who commit such acts of sexual abuse. The researcher asks for research purposes as well as the confidentiality of the participant that your answers not be shared or discussed with other potential participants.

General results of this study will be located at California State University, San Bernardino, Pfau Library and at the San Bernardino Child Protective Services Office when the study is complete (June 2005). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact the research supervisor, Dr. Teresa Morris at (909) 880-5501.
REFERENCES


