

Using Typologies to Individualize Interventions for Sexually Abusive Youth

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The dearth of research on juveniles who have committed sexual offenses in the 1980s resulted in a “trickle-down” approach, in which an adult sexual offender model was utilized that supported a narrow and specialized “one-size fits all” treatment and supervision approach. Research has increasingly demonstrated the diversity of the population of juveniles who have committed sexual offenses in regard to factors including etiological pathways, offending patterns, delinquent history, personality characteristics and clinical presentation, and risk for sexual and non-sexual recidivism. The integration of findings from etiological and typology studies is suggestive of differential risk, and treatment and supervision needs.

The benefits of the development of an empirically based typology have been described as providing important information for clinical intervention by identifying key constructs for assessment, possible etiological factors specific to each subtype of juvenile, and unique risk and needs for each subtype that should be targeted in treatment (Faniff & Kolko, 2012)(p.7). Aebi et al (2012) add that a validated typology “shows a specific profile of an offender, victim, and offense characteristics that reflect underlying psychological processes” of the youth that are relevant to etiology, maintenance, treatment, and recidivism (p. 268). The information gained from typology research provides the foundation for designing and implementing more effective and efficient treatment programming and supervision protocols that reflect individualized risk and needs.

The methodology in typology research to date has primarily differentiated subtypes of juveniles who have committed sexual offenses based on victim age, delinquent history, and personality characteristics. Although the research has been mixed and certainly not definitive, it has yielded a great deal of valuable information in regard to identifying differential etiological paths, typological characteristics, and associated treatment targets. The research to date has provided very useful information in regard to dimensions that include trauma and chaotic family environments, attachment, psychosocial adjustment, delinquent history and orientation, co-occurring mental health problems, sexual drive and preoccupation, and atypical sexual interests.

This workshop will summarize the typology research to date, focusing on illuminating differential etiological pathways and identifying subtype specific dynamic risk factors/treatment targets. This will include identifying subtype specific skills deficits/needs and discussing the importance of family, school, and community involvement. Evidence based intervention models will be integrated. The information presented will provide evaluators, treatment providers, and supervising officers with practical application knowledge that will increase their ability to provide individualized treatment and supervision. Case examples will be provided and workshop attendees will be encouraged to apply the information to their own cases.