

IX: Summary

This thesis consists of eight chapters which describe a research project conducted at the VU University of Amsterdam on the psychological characteristics of juvenile sex offenders.

The first chapter presents a short general introduction to the subject of sexually abusive youngsters and their psychological characteristics.

In the second chapter, the Adolescent Sexual Abuser Project Assessment Measures-Dutch Revised Version (ASAP-D) is presented. This is an assessment instrument which measures the psychological characteristics that are generally considered relevant in the literature for the development and continuation of sexually abusive behavior in juveniles. The instrument is described and its basic psychometric qualities are presented. The ASAP-D comes forward as an instrument of satisfactory validity and reliability.

In the third chapter, a correlation study is presented between the Moral Orientation List and two ASAP-D empathy subscales which are generally regarded as indicative of the subject's empathic abilities. The results of this study support a satisfactory degree of validity of these ASAP-D subscales. The applicability of these subscales for the evaluation of offender treatment in juveniles is also discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the psychological characteristics as measured by the ASAP-D are compared between three groups of male juveniles: a group of juvenile sex offenders, a group of juvenile perpetrators of non-sexual violent offences and a representative sample of non-delinquent young people. Contrary to general expectation, these three groups did not differ significantly in most of the measured psychological characteristics. Clear differences were found in only a limited number of areas. The implications of these results are further discussed.

In the fifth chapter, the psychological characteristics measured by the ASAP-D are compared between juvenile sex offenders who completed their sex offender treatment and juvenile sex offenders who did not. The psychological characteristics of these two groups are also compared with those of a control group of non-delinquent youngsters. The differences found are indicative of a higher prevalence of anger

management problems in the non-completer group. The implications for treatment are discussed. In the treatment completers, the differences in the measured psychological characteristics before and after treatment are assessed. The results of this comparison indicate clear ameliorations in many of the measured characteristics, and thus of generally positive treatment results.

In the sixth chapter, the psychological characteristics as measured by the ASAP-D are compared between several categories of juvenile sex offenders and a control group of non-delinquent youngsters. Again, only few significant differences were found between the studied groups. Both the theoretical and the practical implications of these results are discussed.

In the seventh chapter, a theoretical framework is presented in an attempt to find an answer to the question why some juveniles display sexually abusive behavior and others do not. Until recently, this question had only been approached in terms of the presence of mental illness, deviant sexual interests and/or impaired psychosocial development. It is a common assumption that sexually abusive behavior in juveniles is associated with such illnesses or anomalies. So far, however, empirical research has generally failed to prove this assumption to be true. Only a relatively small proportion of juvenile sex offenders appear to show some kind of psychological or developmental deviance. The theoretical framework presented here approaches sexually abusive behavior in juveniles both in terms of normal developmental processes and in terms of psychosexual and psychosocial deviance. It describes this behavior, and its presence or absence, as a result of the interaction of biological, psychological and situational factors.

Finally, the eighth chapter offers a general discussion of the complete research project and its results. The strengths and limitations of the studies that were conducted are highlighted.