

# Young people with problem and abusive sexual behaviours

Presentation of key literature and research findings

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**Australian Government**

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Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault

- The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault is funded by the Office for Women, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, through the Women's Safety Agenda.
- The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) aims to improve access to current information and resources in order to assist those committed to working against sexual assault. ACSSA will help to support and develop strategies that aim to prevent, respond to, and ultimately reduce the incidence of this crime.

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- Regular publications on sexual assault issues
- Enquiry service
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- Online subject-specific bibliographies
- Links to statistical information

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All publications are available online and in hard copy

## Key themes for today

1. Offence and victim characteristics
2. What can the research tell us about young people & SAB (Sexually Abusive Behaviours)?
3. Child Protection and Intervention

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Note: I will be covering Australian research where this is available, as well as drawing on relevant overseas research. I also want to raise some 'critical reflections' on the current state of research- what counts as evidence, who gets studied, etc.

# 1. Offence and victim characteristics

- What kind of abusive behaviours?
- Who do YP (young people) target?

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## Defining 'abusive'

- Law
- Victims' perspectives
- Consent, equality, coercion (Gail Ryan, 1997)

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Some behaviours are clearly abusive in any context, but context is always important. Some behaviours are not intrinsically abusive, but may be abusive in the context.

## Contexts of SAB

- Peer sexual abuse (including rape)

Relationship, school, acquaintance, multiple assailants

- Child sexual abuse

Sibling sexual abuse, other relatives, younger school children, child pornography (internet), child-minding, clubs/groups etc.

- Adult sexual abuse

Sexual assault of adults by young people

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I am raising this because we often tend to think of yp w SAB as offending against children- while the offender groups tend to be distinct (there is some overlap) I suggest it is helpful to think of these SAB's as related. But offences against children are the most common.

Sibling csa is increasingly being recognised, perhaps as prevalent or more prevalent than parental abuse. There are unique barriers preventing the disclosure of sibling csa. (e.g. the access and opportunity for grooming, the difficulty for parents in seeking help, etc).

### Queensland Police Statistics 2006/7

source <http://www.police.qld.gov.au>

Age		10 - 14	15	16	17	18	19
<b>Offence*</b>							
Sexual Offences	M	255	98	120	106	92	101
	F	42	21	8	1	3	0
Rape & Attempted Rape	M	33	20	23	29	25	23
	F	1	0	0	0	1	0
Other Sexual Offences	M	223	78	97	77	67	78
	F	41	21	8	1	2	0

\* # of offences, not individuals

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Note the male majority in each age group, becomes more and more marked as age increases. (see upcoming slide for more details on types of offences).

## Queensland Police Statistics 2006-7 Non-Indigenous Offenders

Offence		Arrest	Caution	Community Conference	Notice to Appear	Summons	Warrant	Other
Sexual Offences	J	46	225	37	37	2	0	83
	A	1398	3	0	395	26	27	303
Rape & Attempted Rape	J	18	8	11	2	1	0	12
	A	351	0	0	32	5	10	53
Other Sexual Offences	J	28	217	27	35	1	0	71
	A	1049	3	0	363	21	17	250

Source: [www.police.qld.gov.au](http://www.police.qld.gov.au)

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This slide compares adult to juvenile offenders as they show in police statistics. Discuss reporting issues for each group (including sibling abuse). Overall it is fairly certain that the majority of sexual abuse in all cases goes unreported.

Vast majority of offences are 'other', includes csa.

Queensland Police Statistics 2006-7

Indigenous Offenders. source <http://www.police.qld.gov.au>

Offence		Arrest	Caution	Community Conference	Notice to Appear	Summons	Warrant	Other
Sexual Offences	J	34	40	4	13	0	0	23
	A	249	2	0	34	2	9	49
Rape & Attempted Rape	J	19	2	0	2	0	0	2
	A	100	0	0	5	0	0	5
Other Sexual Offences	J	15	38	4	11	0	0	21
	A	149	2	0	29	2	9	44

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The corresponding stats for Indigenous offenders in Qld.

	10-14 years			15 years		16 Years		17 years		
	Male	Female	Unknown	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Unknown
Rape	35	1	0	22	0	19	2	27	1	0
Rape - Attempted	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Indecent assaults on adults	11	1	0	1	0	6	0	2	0	0
Indecent treatment of children	197	28	2	44	21	45	3	30	1	1
Assault with intent to commit rape	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual Assault (Other)	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Unlawful carnal knowledge	19	19	0	25	15	37	5	37	2	0
Incest	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sexual offences - consent prescribed (other)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bestiality	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Indecent practices between males/gross indecency	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual offences (other) 18 and over	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	0
Sexual offences (other) child under 18	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Wilful Obscene Exposure	16	0	0	6	0	10	0	9	0	0

Source: Qld Police Statistical Services [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa)

Police stats for Qld 2006/7. Focus on the offence categories (again, # of offences not persons).

Note male offenders- more offences against children but less as age increases.

Note the drop off for female offenders by age.

Young women's main offences- 10-15 yrs old. 'Unlawful carnal knowledge' defined in next slide.

## Unlawful carnal knowledge

- **Class Definition** - Any person who has or attempts to have carnal knowledge, (excluding sodomy), with consent, of a child under the age of 16 years. - Carnal Knowledge occurs when the complainant under the age of 16 years consents, but is legally unable to do so due to age.

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## Unlawful carnal knowledge (continued)

**Includes but not limited to** · [Section 215 Criminal Code](#) · Obtain a child, (including an intellectually impaired child), for the purpose of engaging them in carnal knowledge in Queensland or elsewhere [Section 217 Criminal Code](#);

**Exclusions** · Unlawful carnal knowledge of intellectually impaired persons under the age of 16 years [Section 216 Criminal Code](#) · Consensual sodomy, on a child under 16 years of age [Section 208 Criminal Code](#)

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## Victim characteristics- some recent studies

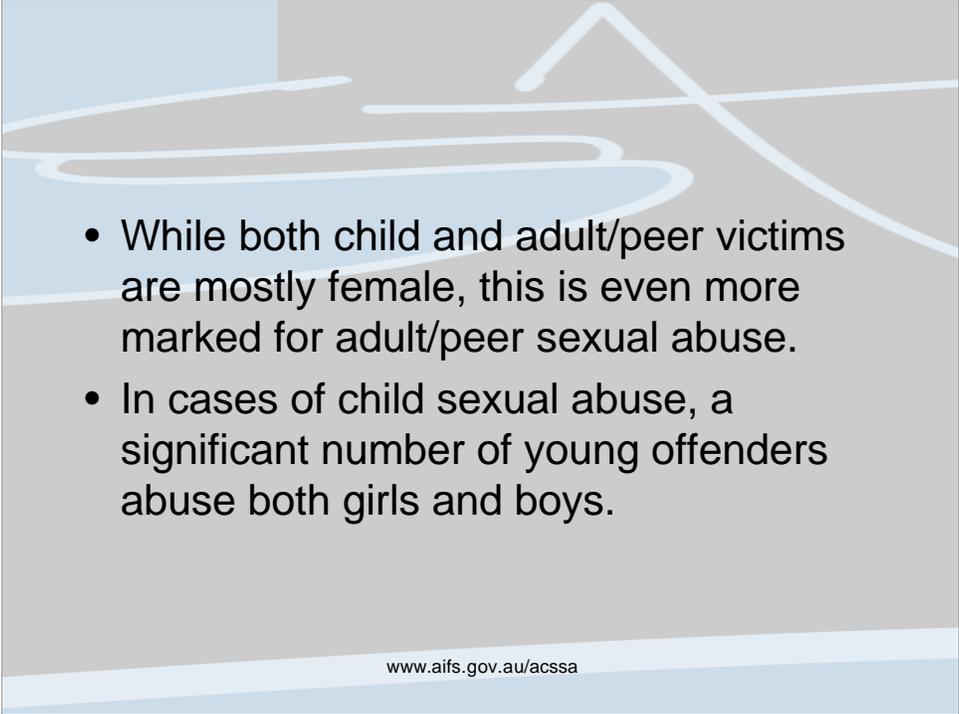
Study	Number of young people	Age range	Abused girls only	Abused boys only	Abused both
Leclerc et. al. (2008) Canada	103	13-17	59%	22%	19%
Viljoen et. al. (2008) (US)	169	12-18	46%	24%	29%
Nisbett et. al. (2004) (Aus)	75*	10-17	72%*	20%*	8%*
Hatch (2005) (Aus)	55	12-18	42%	27%	31%

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Earlier reviews suggested boys and girls were roughly equally victimised by adolescent offenders, more recent studies suggest more girls than boys.

Gender difference in victims more marked when peer/adult victim.

- \*Total sample was 303, but only 75 where hands-on offence and victim gender known.
- \*victims in this study included adult/peer victims as well as children, likely reason for greater proportion of female victims,

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- While both child and adult/peer victims are mostly female, this is even more marked for adult/peer sexual abuse.
  - In cases of child sexual abuse, a significant number of young offenders abuse both girls and boys.

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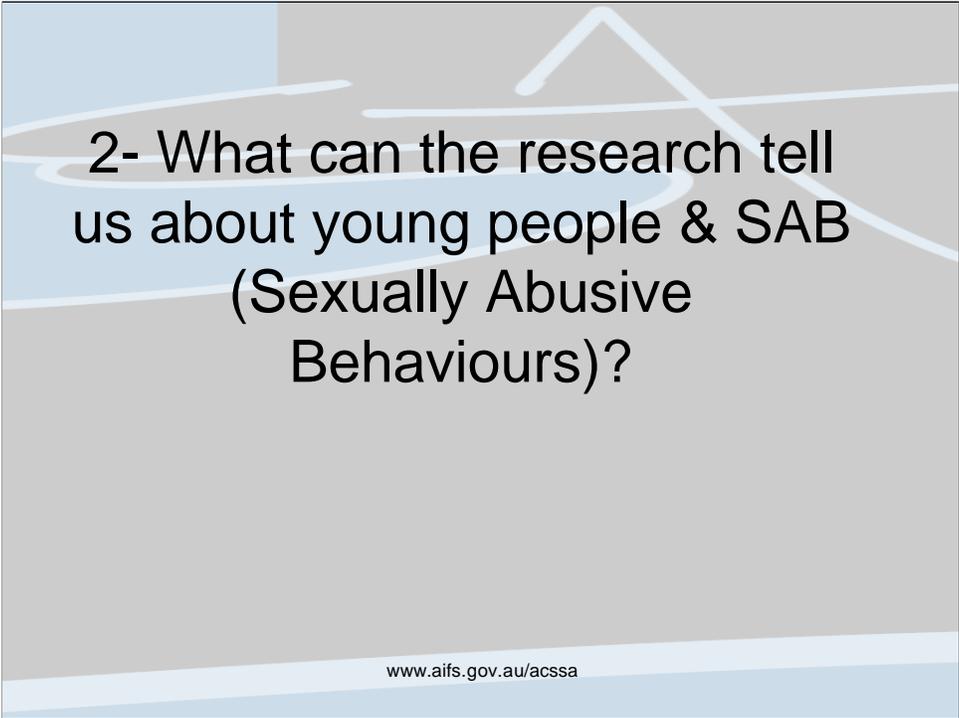
## Peer sexual abuse (including 'dating' violence)

- US: 3-10% of young people report having *used* sexually abusive behaviour in a relationship (review in Sears et al., 2007)
- Young men use sexual violence more often than young women
- Their Canadian sample of 10-18yo's found 17% of boys and 5% of girls self-reported use of sexually abusive behaviour

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The 3-10% is their review of the research, the 5-17% is from their own sample.

Of course, self-reports of such behaviours are likely to be lower than actual occurrences.



## 2- What can the research tell us about young people & SAB (Sexually Abusive Behaviours)?

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Yp who sexually abuse are not an homogenous group- ongoing research efforts are directed at creating typologies, based on such things as their perception of the victim, various psychological traits, offending patterns, extent and type of coercion/aggression used, etc.

Note that research generally distinguished between child victimisers and adult/peer rape. As a general rule, it is thought that child-victimisers are more socially isolated, peer-adult victimisers are more aggressive. BUT these are generalisations and are challenged by other research. Also, consider the complex social competencies involved in 'grooming' for csa- suggests ability to be socially competent (Lambie & Seymour, 2006).

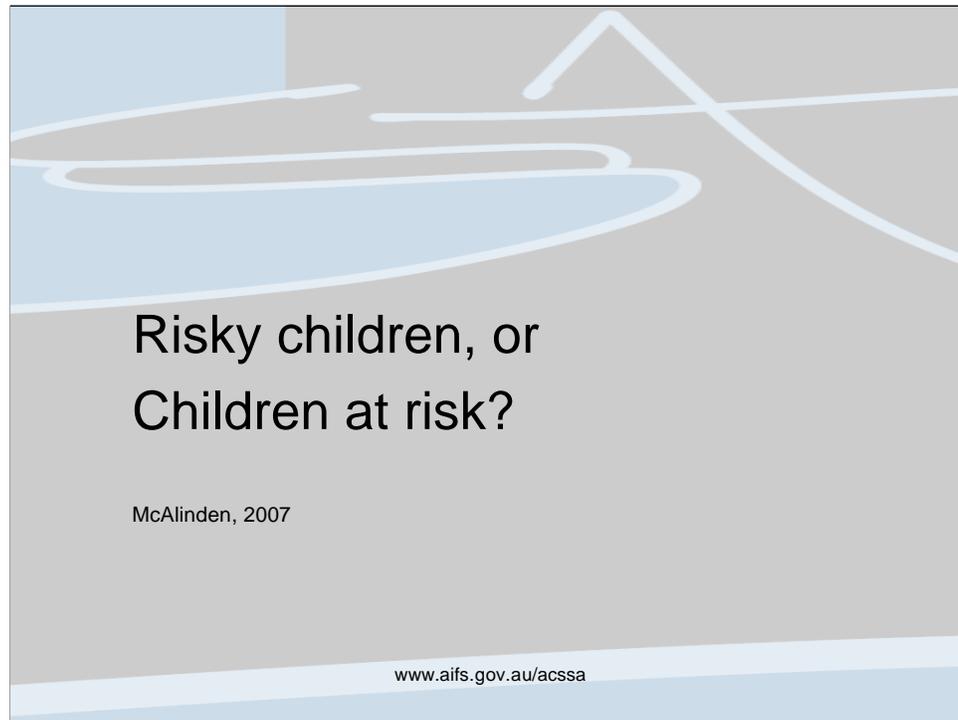
In fact, it is fair to say that for many characteristics that have been studied, there is a lack of consensus on it's role in SAB.

## Children, Adolescents, Adults

- Adolescence as a developmental category
- Raises questions of responsibility, empathy, capacity to understand consequences, appropriate treatment

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These questions can muddy the waters as much as they are necessary to consider. What is it about SAB by adolescents that makes it different from problem sexualised behaviours in children, and sexual abuse by adults?



Juvenile justice or child protection response? See recent developments in Vic- Therapeutic Treatment Orders. Suggests the view is becoming one of 'children at risk'- this does raise questions for victim justice & accountability.

## What is a 'juvenile sex offender'?

- In the 1940s-1950s, psychiatrists would sometimes describe boy victims of child sexual abuse as 'sex-offenders' or 'sex-delinquents', especially if the abuser was an adult or adolescent male.
- Doshay, 1943; Hartogs, 1951.

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That is, we no longer consider boy victims of sexual abuse to be 'deviants'- they are not put in the same category as offenders.

Also, same-sex activity is no longer pathologised- but (as a later slide shows) some authors still link a lack of 'heterosocial competence' to SAB.

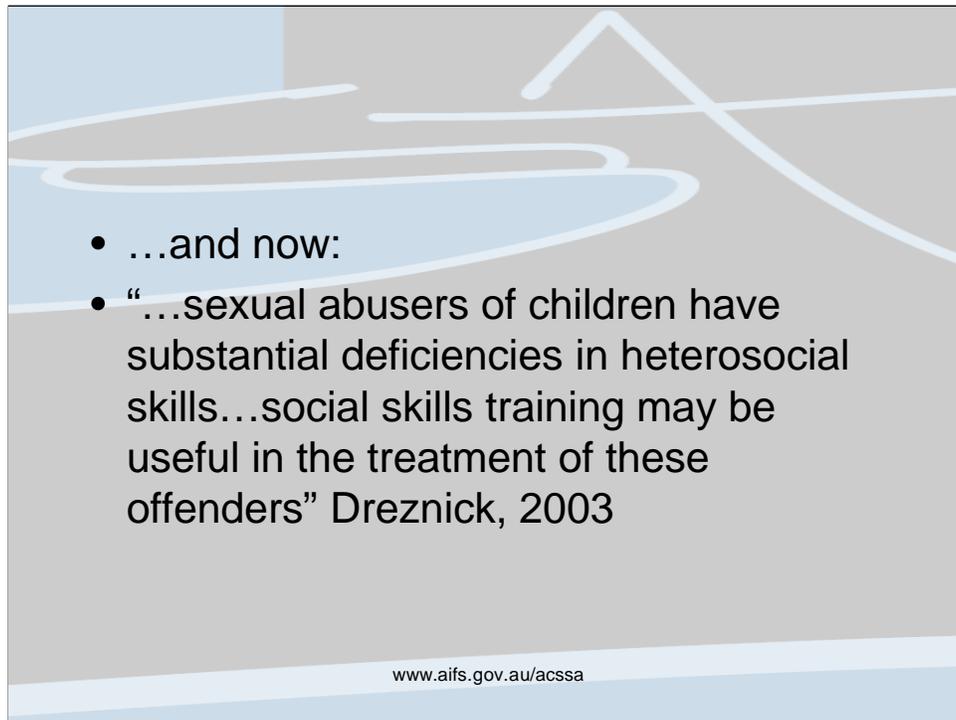
There is now more focus on the abuse, rather than the 'deviance'.

## Some persistent themes, for example...

- Heterosexuality as 'normal'- then...
- “Such delinquencies, then, are failures or faults in the customary maturation of the child in which we expect that all such infantile partial pleasures will lose their independence and be unified under the domination of the heterosexual impulse” Gardner, 1949.

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Of interest here is the strong idea that heterosexuality is the outcome of normal sexual development- which brings us to the next quote:



- ...and now:
- “...sexual abusers of children have substantial deficiencies in heterosocial skills...social skills training may be useful in the treatment of these offenders” Dreznick, 2003

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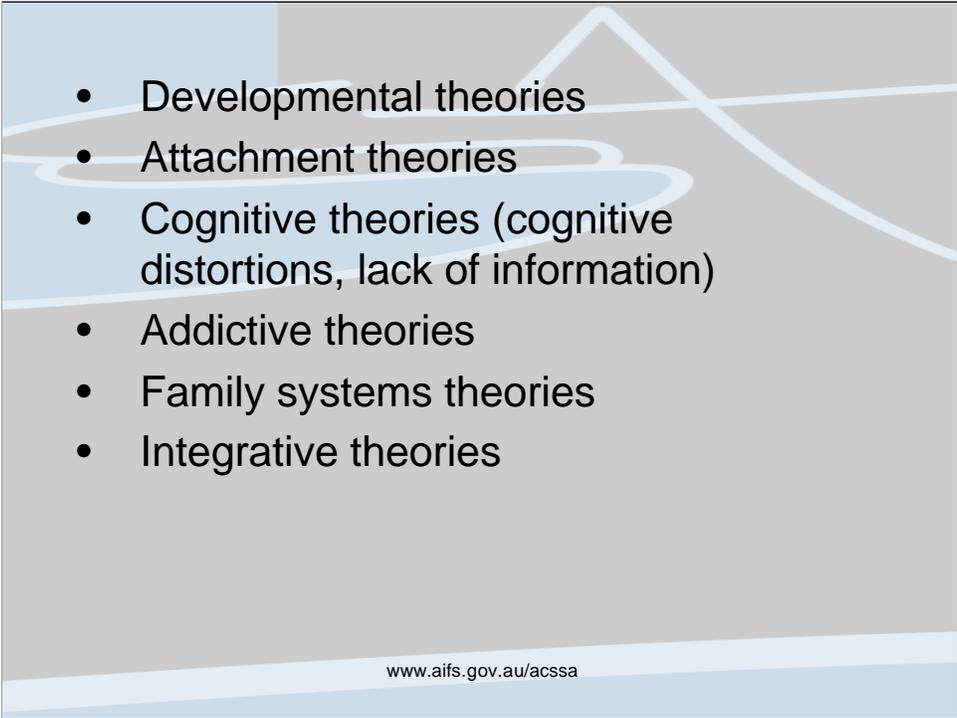
NB- not discussing adolescent offenders specifically- the point I am making is the persistence of the idea that normal=heterosexual.

# Types of theories to explain SAB

(Ryan, 1997, cited van Outsem, 2007)

- Psychosis theories (some form of mental illness)
- Physiological theories (some form of physiological dysfunction)
- Intrapsychological theories (inner conflict in the psyche of the individual)
- Learning theories (learning processes and conditioning)

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- Developmental theories
  - Attachment theories
  - Cognitive theories (cognitive distortions, lack of information)
  - Addictive theories
  - Family systems theories
  - Integrative theories
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From the above list, only learning theory has the capacity to take gender seriously as a factor, but with limited scope. Despite the enormous contribution of feminist activism and theory in placing CSA on the public agenda and analysing sexual violence, there has been a general lack of engagement with this work in the offender treatment field (Chung, O'Leary & Hand, 2006). Discuss Ann Cossins 2000 work arguing that heterosexuality, or at least dominant masculinity, is the foundation for CSA. Psychological/therapeutic vs social justice/power.

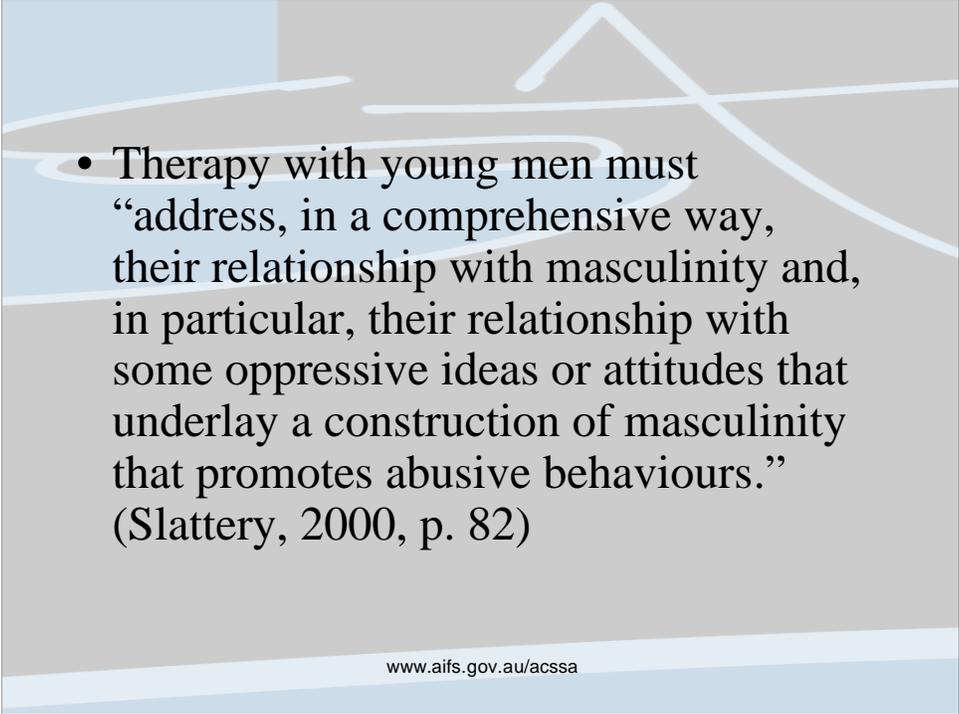
## Sexually abusive behaviour- a gendered problem

Boys and men make up the vast majority (over 90%) of people who sexually abuse.

Some ways of 'being male' include exercising power and control over others. (see Alan Jenkins recent work)

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Also see Messerschmidt (2000) 'Nine lives', the idea that families are already gendered and are sites for the (re)production of masculine identities.

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- Therapy with young men must “address, in a comprehensive way, their relationship with masculinity and, in particular, their relationship with some oppressive ideas or attitudes that underlay a construction of masculinity that promotes abusive behaviours.” (Slattery, 2000, p. 82)

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## Peer influence

- “boys who were more accepting of sexually abusive behaviour in a dating relationship, had peers who they view as being sexually abusive in their dating relationships” (Sears et al , 2007, p. 498)
- Boys may see sexual coercion as normative rather than abusive (i.e. they do not see their behaviour as abuse, but as gendered ‘script’)

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## Families and SAB- common research themes

- unstable and disorganised
- rigid and enmeshed or
- chaotic and confused
- poor parenting- inconsistent and cold
- discipline is too harsh or too lax
- poor supervision

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Note that this may reflect 'sample bias': I.e. which young people and families come into contact with sites of research (such as therapy, youth justice and child protection systems).

## Family violence

- In the development of SAB, recent research suggests a higher correlation with witnessing DV/Family Violence than having personally experienced sexual victimisation.

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Correlation, doesn't always mean causation.

## Attachment theory

- Arguably becoming the dominant model for responding to young people with abusive sexual behaviours.

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Through attachment theory, focus has returned to the mother, especially in intervention practice. (see Allan 2004)

Ultimately, the value of attachment theory may be as a framework for therapy that enhances relationships and connections, rather than as an explanation for why young people sexually offend (Rich, 2006). There are number of criticisms of attachment theory that need to be adequately addressed including; it is a Western model (Yeo, 2003), it is prone to over-emphasising the role of mothers (and what they 'do wrong'); and in relation to SAB's specifically, it fails to account for the male dominance of abusive sexual practices (see Boyd, 2007).

# Parents and families: treatment program

## Five 'domains of experience' for parents:

- Impact of disclosure- includes a range of negative and self effacing feelings, and feeling de-skilled as parent and reliant on professional intervention (also includes verbal abuse and threats from the community).
- Positive change for parents over course of program
- Observations of their sons- divided loyalties
- Parents group- supportive and positive
- Comments on program- generally increased knowledge of sexual abuse, child protection and their son's progress.
- Duane & Morrison, 2004).

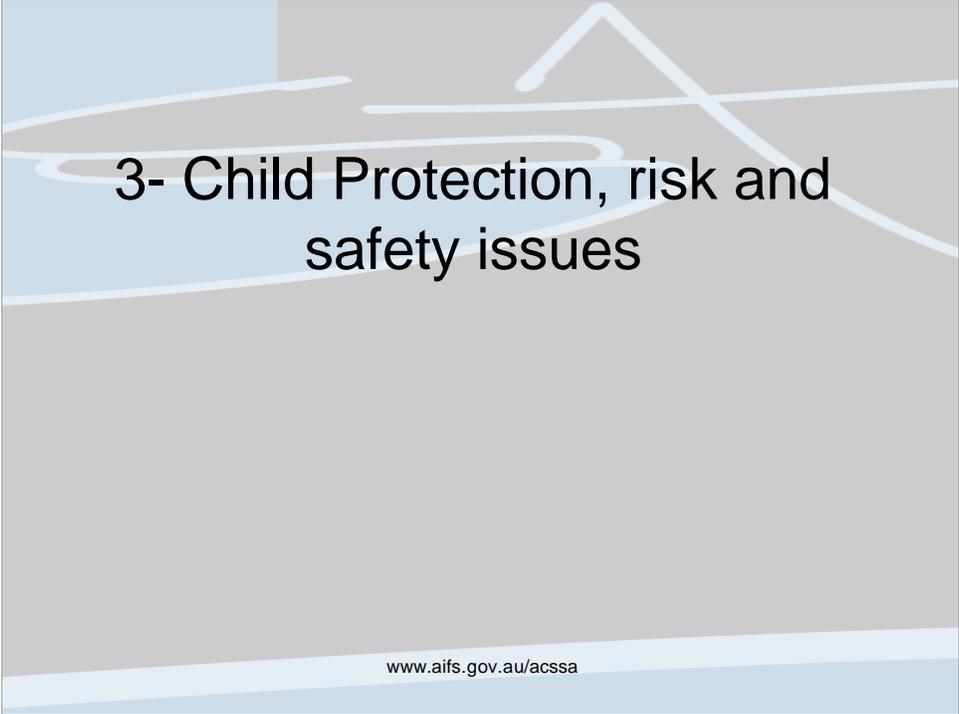
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# Empathy

- Empathy work is part of many therapeutic programs
- Difficult to assess empathy in adolescence
- May be victim-specific but not generalised empathy problems (Varker & Devilly, 2007)

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Varker & Devilly (Australia) studied 16 adolescent offenders, compared to non-offending adolescents did not have general empathy 'deficits', there were no differences in empathy regarding sxa victims in general, but there were differences in empathy when related to their specific victim.



## 3- Child Protection, risk and safety issues

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## Do young people continue offending?

The consensus is that while many adult offenders began offending as adolescents, most adolescent offenders do not continue to offend as adults.

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## Risk of further offending

- 15% or fewer are rearrested or reconvicted of sexual offenses as adults, although a more substantial proportion commit nonsexual offenses (ViJoel et al, 2008; Worling & Långström, 2003; Worling & Curwen, 2002).
- Nisbett et. al. (2004) found that 25% of adolescents reconvicted as adolescents, 9% charged as adults
- Those who abuse children less likely to re-offend than those with peer/adult victims (Nisbet, Wilson, and Smallbone, 2004).

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Most authors recognize that sexual abuse is vastly under-reported- this would impact findings of recidivism studies.

However it is difficult to get an accurate measure as how would you find out? You can ask past victims, this is also limited.

What is a 'low' level of recidivism? Many studies report low rates of recidivism, giving figures of 9-20%- is this low?

## Limitations of recidivism studies

Recidivism studies face numerous methodological challenges:

- Duration of follow up period
- Rely on self-report or official records
- Intervention itself??

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The size of the gap between actual SAB's and reported offences is assumed to be substantial- does this apply to recidivism studies?

Reconviction/ rearrest rates are a disputable basis on which to establish the occurrence of sexually abusive behaviours.

A concern that is frequently raised about many 'behaviour change' programs, in DV as well as SXA, is the possibility that they inadvertently teach how 'not to get caught' (e.g. learning about grooming and the abuse cycle)

## Risk assessment

- Actuarial and clinical
- J-SOAP-II widely used, but may not be very reliable at predicting recidivism (Viljoen, 2008).
- Dynamic and static risk factors

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Ironically, the J-SOAP-II is better at predicting non-sexual re-offending than sexual re-offending. A common research finding is that young people who have sexually offended are more likely to be reconvicted of a non-sexual, rather than sexual, offence.

## Where to live?

- Safe placement, especially sibling abuse
- Trend is away from automatic removal from home: what is the risk, what is the parental capacity to ensure safety?

(Grant, J., Thornton, J., & Chamarette, C., 2006)

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# Situational Prevention

- Environmental factors
- Focus on both removing 'enablers' and increasing 'inhibitors' (cost-benefit)
- Not meant to replace individual responsibility
- Wortley & Smallbone, 2006

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Emerging framework for prevention

## Situational prevention (con't)

- Rational Choice Theory, and environmental psychology
- Individuals act purposively to achieve some particular purpose or benefit.
- Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

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## Four environmental influences

- Cues to prompt a behaviour
- Social pressure
- Weaken moral constraints
- Produce emotional arousal
- (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006)

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## Implications for intervention

- Increase effort required for the person to commit the abuse
- Increase risk of detection
- Controlling prompts
- Reducing permissibility

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## Multi-Systemic Therapy

- Collaborative
- Strengths and needs
- Includes family, schools, workers, statutory bodies
- Nisbett, Rombouts & Smallbone (2005)
- Diverse group= diverse interventions (no 'one size fits all' approach)

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Looking to engage the young persons' networks, includes 1-1 work with yp.

Involves significant case-management- typically around 4 months with 15 contact hrs per week-

duration of treatment- opinions vary- some advocate 6 month expectation. Therapeutic Treatment Orders (Vic) are for a year and can be extended for another year. There are also strong arguments for long-term treatment for severely traumatised young people especially re: attachment/relationships issues

## Emerging Issues

- Use of technology (video phones, SMS, MSN, chat rooms, etc)
- Indigenous young people who sexually abuse
- Young men from 'CaLD' backgrounds, especially those who arrive as refugees
- School responses to student-student sexual assault

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Indigenous communities have their own histories of responding to sexual abuse issues- important to acknowledge.

CALD women's advocates also note the lack of services for adult men who are abusive to women.

Schools face the complexity of student-student sexual assault- it is a criminal matter requiring sensitive and appropriate victim support. (see Quadara, 2008)

## Contact

- [cameron.boyd@aifs.gov.au](mailto:cameron.boyd@aifs.gov.au)
- Online resources & Research enquiry service
- [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa)

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I can send details of any references I have used.