

Sexual Offender Subtyping: The Incest Offender Question

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Abstract

Aim/Background: Current wisdom in the risk assessment of sexual offenders is that incest offenders have a small chance of re-offending. Previous research has shown that re-offense rates even for untreated offenders who choose victims from within the family, range from 4-10%. Flowing from this belief are further assumptions that they are less dangerous and do not require intensive treatment, if they require any at all.

Material/Methods: The paper summarizes the findings of two prior reports which examined a sample of in-patient child molesters attending treatment at the Phoenix Program.

Results: Findings reveal a great deal of overlap between categories with incestuous offenders having numerous non-incestuous victims, and non-incestuous offenders also having incestuous victims. There was also a great deal of overlap between these two groups in terms of their erotic preference testing responses. This was the finding even when biologically related fathers were examined separately, and when exclusively incestuous fathers were considered.

Conclusions: If there were a pure form of incest offender who poses little risk to other children, it is virtually impossible to discriminate who fits this category at the outset of treatment. Neither index offense nor erotic preference testing are very helpful in distinguishing this group from extrafamilial offenders. Beliefs about treatment requirements for incest offenders and their potential risk to victims outside their own family need to be reconsidered.

Key words: Incest, pedophilia, child molester, intrafamilial, extrafamilial, risk assessment, treatment, psychotherapy

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