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## **A Comparative Study of Juvenile Sex Offenders and Non-Sex Offenders**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Presented in this report are the findings of a study that compares the background characteristics and offense behavior of a group of juveniles who have been convicted of at least one sex offense to a group of delinquent offenders who have never been convicted of a sex offense. The sample for this study consists of 256 convicted male juvenile offenders included in a needs assessment survey conducted in 1990 by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

The results of the needs assessment served as the source of baseline descriptive information on each member of the sample. Additional descriptive data on the sexual offending behavior of the juveniles who were convicted of sex offenses were collected from DSHS Division of Juvenile Rehabilitation case files. Criminal history and reoffense information during a three-year follow-up period was collected from multiple official sources. This information included new convictions as juveniles or adults, as well as length of incarceration in juvenile or adult facilities within the State of Washington.

The study found that:

- Juvenile sex offenders have some unique characteristics, but share many more characteristics with non-sex offenders. The sex offenders were significantly more likely than the non-sex offenders to have been victims of sexual abuse. They were also more likely to be assessed as having a major mental health dysfunction, to need health or dental hygiene education, to have no age appropriate peer relationships, and to have problems with sexual identity.
- Juvenile sex offenders may comprise a “hidden” population that more closely resembles normative adolescent populations than delinquent populations on a number of variables related to problem behaviors. The juvenile sex offenders were more likely to have been performing adequately in school prior to commitment. They were less likely to have prior convictions of any kind, and had fewer convictions. The sex offenders were far less likely than the non-sex offenders to be using or abusing drugs and/or alcohol.
- The sex offenders presented a lower risk of reoffending during the follow-up period than the non-sex offenders. None of the sex offenders were convicted of a new sex offense during the follow-up period. When the sex offenders did commit new offenses, they were generally non-sexual, non-violent offenses.
- The likelihood of reoffense for both the sex and non-sex offenders was highest during the first year at risk.

In terms of offense specialization, the results provide evidence that juvenile sex offenders are not specialists, but rather are involved in other types of criminal behavior, generally to a greater extent than their involvement in sex offending. By the end of the follow-up period, only 22% of the sex offenders in this study had been exclusively convicted of sex offenses. The other 78% had been convicted on both sex and non-sex offenses.