

Survey Eyes Cycle of Sexual Abusers and Victims

BY TIMOTHY F. KIRN
Sacramento Bureau

ATLANTA — Current data on sexually abusive adolescents who molest others are consistent with those of previous studies, which showed that they tend to have been molested before the age of 9 years, two researchers said at a meeting of the National Adolescent Perpetration Network.

Among girls who were abused and became abusers, a common characteristic is that they were abused by a woman, reported Dr. Gene G. Abel and Nora Harlow of the Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute, Atlanta.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of the latest investigation for males who have been abused and become abusers is that they report knowing almost nothing about sex before their molestation, Ms. Harlow said at the conference.

That finding suggests that early sex education might have an impact on reducing sex offenses, she said.

The research presented by Dr. Abel and Ms. Harlow was an investigation of more than 10,000 adolescents who took the Abel Assessment for Sexual Interest for Boys and Girls, a test designed by Dr. Abel, a past president of the Society of Behavioral Medicine. The test, administered at more than 500 sites, can be administered for a variety of reasons, including self-referral. Most often, it was administered after referral by law enforcement or a mental health professional because of known or alleged sexual misconduct of some sort.

Of the more than 10,000 adolescents in the study, 5,678 had sexually abused younger children. Analysis of the 2,811 boys in the study who had been child victims of sexual abuse revealed that 2,034

had abused others. Among the 390 sexually abused adolescent females, 187 had abused others.

Because the research had been put together only recently before the conference, Dr. Abel said, the researchers did not have much information on the characteristics of the sexually abused adolescents who had not abused anyone, such as why they had taken the test.

However, the researchers did present the molestation factors that were significantly associated with becoming an abuser (*P* value less than .06) and their rank of importance.

Some of those attending the conference were bothered by the lack of detail. "I think a lot of it probably is useful," but it is difficult to judge without information on who constituted the comparison group and little information on the strength of association, said Michael H. Miner, Ph.D., a psychologist with the Center for Sexual Health at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, in an interview.

Ms. Harlow said many of the factors identified by their analysis seemed to reflect that it was the "inner experience" of the molestation that appeared to be a determining factor.

For example, those who had abused others tended to still be tormented by the experience, had experienced sexual arousal, and, for the males at least, had tended to be molested by someone they looked up to, she noted.

Dr. Abel said it is not surprising that the children reported experiencing arousal, because abusers generally want the child to be compliant and to believe that the child is enjoying the experience. As a result, the abusers work hard to stimulate the child.

Ms. Harlow said she was "stunned" to

find that so many of the females who became abusers reported that they had been molested by a woman.

She also said that the fact that the second most associated factor among the boys was that they were completely uninformed about sex before their abuse suggested that sex information, given early to children as a social norm, could be beneficial.

Among the other findings from the survey are:

► The number of times the child was molested correlated significantly with the number of victims they abused. Among the male abusers who were not molested themselves, the average number of victims they had was three, but it was eight for those who had been molested 50 times or more. The pattern was the same for females.

"In other words, it is a marker," Ms. Harlow said. "If you see a child who has been abused a lot, pay attention to that child."

► The data from 16,000 adult males who also have taken the test show that 70% of adult men who molest boys score as being heterosexual on the Kinsey Scale.

That is the exact percentage of men in the general population who score as heterosexual on the Kinsey Scale, Dr. Abel said.

► Of the adolescent boys who were abused, 55% were abused by an older boy, 40% by a man, 27% by an older girl, and 14% by a woman. (The percentages add up to more than 100% because some had multiple abusers.)

Of the adolescent females who were abused, 66% were abused by a man, 63% by an older boy, 20% by an older girl, and 13% by a woman. ■

Past Experiences Of Abusive Youth

For males, factors significantly associated with abuse of others were:

1. I was less than 9 years old when sexually abused.
2. I knew nothing about sex before I was sexually abused.
3. I wish the molestation did not bother me so much.
4. I was abused by my idol.
5. Sometimes I got a strong sexual feeling between my legs when I was being sexually abused.
6. I was touched by a boy more than 3 years older than me.
7. I took baths or showers with my sexual abuser.
8. The abuser put their tongue in my mouth.
9. The abuser was a relative living in my house.
10. I was molested by more than one person.

For females, significant factors were:

1. I was less than 9 years old when sexually abused.
2. I was touched by a woman.
3. Sometimes when my girlfriend or boyfriend rubs my chest, I have flashbacks of when I was abused.
4. Sometimes I got a strong sexual feeling between my legs when I was being sexually abused.

Source: Dr. Abel and Ms. Harlow

One-Third of U.S. Girls Sexually Active by Age 15, CDC Says

BY COLIN NELSON
Contributing Writer

BOSTON — By age 15, more than a third of American girls say they are sexually active, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey. About 26% have had oral sex, 26% have had vaginal intercourse, and another 8% have had oral sex without intercourse. The proportion that is sexually active grows substantially every year thereafter, according to a presentation at a conference on contraceptive technology sponsored by Contemporary Forums.

Accurate data on teenagers' sexual behavior is important for any clinician concerned about unintended pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (as well as the psychological and emotional health of young women). If, as expected, the Food and Drug Administration approves a human papillomavirus vaccine in mid-2006, public health officials will need to accurately predict the age when girls become sexually active in order to recommend an age for vaccination.

Media reports increasingly suggest that as conventional teen dating and romance plunge, oral sex and casual sexual "hookups" among so-called "friends with

benefits" have become commonplace. Anecdotal reports of teen promiscuity have seemed to proliferate, after a reporter described teenagers he met through an Internet site where high school and college students post their profiles, chat, and arrange meetings for sex in, "Friends, Friends With Benefits, and the Benefits of the Local Mall" (New York Times, May 30, 2004).

According to the CDC data, the typical teen who is sexually active has one or two partners, though a substantial minority have many more. Among the 15- to 19-year-olds surveyed, girls had a median of 1.4 sexual partners and boys a median of 1.6. Among all 15- to 19-year-olds, 45% had no sexual partner in the last 12 months, 30% had one opposite-sex partner, and 22% had two or more opposite-

sex partners. The percentage with same-sex partners was less than 1%. The results were released in late 2005 and are based on 2002 data (CDC Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics, Sept. 2005;362:1-56).

The proportion of all young women having oral sex is relatively high, according to the survey—more than doubling from 26% at age 15 to 70% by age 18 (see table). The gender gap on giving and receiving oral sex was small: Among 15- to 19-year-old females, 44% gave oral sex and 50% received. Among males of the same age 39% gave oral sex and 52% received.

Amid all this activity, the use of condoms is less than full-fledged. Only 44% of female teens said their partners used condoms. The prevalence of STIs remains relatively low. Among all females aged 15-19 years in the survey, some 3% reported genital herpes, genital warts, syphilis, or pelvic inflammatory disease. ■

