

Sex Offenders

Information Sheet

Who is a sex offender?

A sex offender is **anyone** who forces or coerces another person to engage in sexual contact against his or her will. They do so by using physical force, threats, or trickery. Sex offenders are overwhelmingly heterosexual men (between 80% and 90%).¹ Women who commit sexual offenses usually do so against children or adolescents.

Sexual offenses may include a variety of behaviors such as voyeurism, exposing one's genitals, fondling of another person, penetration of another person, making child pornography, or secretly filming or photographing other people having sexual relations.

There is no typical sex offender. However, sex offenders are more likely to be people we know and trust, and could even be people we care about, rather than strangers.

Prevalence

Most sex offenders develop their deviant sexual interests at a young age, often before the age of 18.²

Most sex offenses are undetected by authorities. This is especially true of serial rapists, male oriented pedophiles, exhibitionists and voyeurs who typically have especially large numbers of victims.

Although many sex offenders limit their offending behavior to only one type of sexual offending, there is evidence that some sex offenders progress to commit multiple types of sexual offenses. For example, a small proportion of men who begin as exhibitionists go on to commit rape and child molesting offenses. Some men who molest boys also molest girls. Some men who molest children also sexually assault adults. In 1998 the Colorado Department of Corrections Sex Offender Treatment and Monitoring Program reported that the incarcerated offenders in their program disclosed an average of 161 victims each. Over 80% of those offenders also reported crossover in types of relationships to their victims.³ They assaulted strangers, acquaintances, relatives, and others who held them in a position of trust.

What motivates people to commit sexual offenses?

Usually, committing sexual assaults satisfies an emotional, *not sexual*, need of the offender. Hurting others sexually may make an offender feel powerful; others find ways to justify what they are doing through fantasies or think that they aren't actually hurting anyone.

Help is available

If a sex offender has hurt you or someone you love, call the sexual assault/domestic violence crisis center nearest you at (866) 95-DOVES (36837) for support.

¹ Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. (1996). Reducing Sexual Abuse Through Treatment and Intervention With Abusers. Beaverton, OR: Author.

² Able, G.G., Osborn, C.A., Twigg, D.A. (1993) Sexual assault through the life span: Adult offenders with juvenile histories. In H.E. Barbaree, W.L. Marshall, & S.E. Hudson (Eds.), The juvenile sex offender (pp. 104-117). New York: Guilford.

³ Heil, M. & Ahlmeyer, S. (1998) Colorado Department of Corrections Sex Offender Treatment and Monitoring Program Statistics presented to the Sex Offender Management Board: Denver, CO.