Women Who Molest Children: Offender Typologies

Chief Bill Carson * Maryland Heights PD

Introduction – Speaker Background

- Police Experience
- 37 years as a police officer
- 16 years in criminal investigation
- St. Louis Area Major Case Squad
- State Child Fatality Review Panel
- Governor’s Task Force on CSA Prevention
- Research/Academic Experience
- Prison Interviews 2003-2005

What this workshop will cover

- Background/stats on female offenders
- Public & professional perceptions
- Dispel myths and misconceptions
- Victim impact data
- Offender typologies
- Points to remember
- Numerous case examples

Women who molest children

- When you hear about women molesting children, is there a particular case that comes to your mind?

Mary Kay Letourneau

- Public reaction - mixed.
- Many saw it as a romantic love story between a woman and a teenage boy
- Many believe it was not a serious offense
- Media used different terminology – an affair, a sexual relationship
- Is there a double standard here?
An explosion of reports since the Mary Kay Letourneau case

Which one is the child molester?
Child Molestation by Women: Is it a new phenomenon or has it always been there?

- NIBRS files for 1991-1995 show that 6% of the offenders who molested children were female. It jumps to 12% for children under the age of 6.
- Note: These are cases that were reported to law enforcement in the years prior to the Mary Kay Letourneau case.

Other Sex Offenses by Females (UCR) (except rape and prostitution)

- 1991 - 7.5% of the arrests
- 1998 - 7.4% of the arrests
- 2000 - 7.5% of the arrests
- 2007 - 7.5% of the arrests
- 2009 - 8.6% of the arrests

Sex Offenses by Juvenile Females

(Snyder & Siskind, 2006)

- In the years 1997-2002, juvenile records show females accounted for:
  - 5% of forcible rape referrals
  - 5% of other violent sex offenses
  - 15% of non-violent sex offenses
- These were increases of 6%, 6.4%, and 4.2% respectively
CSA by Females

- ATSA suggests that 20% of sex offenses against children are committed by females.
- Whether it is 5%, 10% or 20%, the overall number is still very significant.

Why is it under-reported?

- Women are still viewed as primary caretakers—they are expected to bathe, touch, examine, and dress children.
- Societal denial—child molesting is still viewed by many people as a crime that is only committed by men.
- The victim-offender relationship is different with female offenders.

Under-reported continued

- Males are reluctant to report because of the shame associated with being victimized, controlled, and dominated by a female.
- Society still believes many of the myths and stereotypes such as "males cannot be victims" and "all boys want sex".

CSA by Females

- Even when it is discovered, there is still a perception that it is not as serious of a crime and there is little or no harm experienced by the victims.

Remember Debra Lafave?

- [Images of Debra Lafave]
Typical responses heard on the Debra Lafave case

- He got lucky
- He was just educated by an older woman
- Boys will be boys
- That is every boy's fantasy
- I wish I had a teacher like that when I was thirteen

Sometimes we hear the same response from professionals

- There are "ambivalent and sometimes dismissive responses to allegations ... at all points in the child welfare system" (Demas, 2003)
- Cases involving female offenders are less likely to result in arrest or prosecution (Hetheron & Heardsall, 1998)

"I really don't see the harm that was done and certainly society doesn't need to be worried. It's just something between two people that clicked beyond the teacher-student relationship."...the words of New Jersey Superior Court Judge Bruce A. Gaeta as he sentenced 43-year-old Pamela Diehl-Moore to five years probation for molesting a 13-year-old student (many times over a six-month period)

Additional comments on this case by Judge Gaeta

- "I do not believe she is a sexual predator"
- There was "mutual consent" involved
- The relationship "allowed the boy to satisfy his sexual needs"

Consequences of CSA by Female Offenders

- When an adult, an older more powerful person, uses a child as a sexual object, it is always abusive
- Mental health professionals who have treated clients sexually abused by females have reported emotional, behavioral, sexual and relationship difficulties
Consequences continued

- The offender is not teaching the victim about sexuality, "she is teaching him about sexual abuse" (Duncan, 2006)
- Male victims often suffer depression, anxiety and later have trouble trusting women. "Self-esteem and self-image problems are common" (Duncan, 2004)
- Confusion, guilt, shame, self-blame, a sense of betrayal (Saradjian & Hankis, 1996)
- Depression, sexual confusion, even PTSD (Roys & Timms, 1995)

Typologies for the Female Child Molester

- Matthews et al. (1987) study of 16 female offenders introduced three main typologies for female child molesters:
  1. Teacher/lover
  2. Predisposed
  3. Male-Coerced

- Faller (1987) study of 40 female offenders listed five case types:
  1. Polyincoisuous
  2. Single-parent abuse
  3. Psychotic abusers
  4. Adolescent perpetrators
  5. Noncustodial abusers

- Correctional Service of Canada (1995) study listed four typologies:
  1. Teacher/lover
  2. Predisposed
  3. Angry-impulsive
  4. Male- Accompanied / Male-Coerced

- Warren & Hislop (2000) listed six types of female child molester:
  1. Facilitators
  2. Reluctant partners
  3. Initiating partners
  4. Seducers & lovers
  5. Pedophiles
  6. Psychotic
Typologies for the Female Child Molester

- Carson (2006) study listed five typologies for female offenders:
  1. Teacher/lover
  2. Seducer
  3. Molester
  4. Helper
  5. Male-Coerced

1. Teacher / Lover

- Example—Mary Kay Letourneau
- Offender seeks a loving sexual interaction with her victim, usually an adolescent male, often one who is troubled or needy
- The offender may view this as a "consensual love affair" and may also view the victim as an emotional equal
- Victims can be male or female

2. Seducer

- This relationship is not a love affair
- The offender seduces children, usually an older child or adolescent, for a variety of reasons: lust, power, control, revenge, or simply for recreational sex.
- Victims can be male or female
- Can be single or multiple incidents

Debra LaFave
Case of Jennie Overstreet

- Canon City, CO
- 2005-2006
- 33 years old
- Divorced
- Mother of two; a girl age 6
- 6th Grade Teacher at Lincoln Elementary

Jennie Overstreet – Red Flags

- Overstreet was seen driving around town with 12 year old boys in her car – on one occasion she had alcohol on her breath
- People in the community learned that Overstreet was "tutoring" 12 year old boys at her home after school hours
- Staff at Lincoln Elementary learned that Overstreet was hosting "sleepovers" at her home involving some of her 12 year old male students

Jennie Overstreet – Red Flags

- Staff at Lincoln talked to Overstreet about having better boundaries with her students
- Some parents began to question gifts that Overstreet had given to their children, including tennis shoes, a hoodie, music & video game CD's, a cell phone, etc.
- Police received a Crime Stopper hotline tip that Overstreet was furnishing alcohol and marijuana to pre-teen boys

Jennie Overstreet – Investigation

- Police interviewed co-workers, neighbors, current and former students
- Police subsequently identified 6 boys that Overstreet had furnished alcohol, marijuana and/or pornography, and 4 boys that she had sexually abused
- Police served several search warrants and recovered some significant evidence
Really? You would have saved all this work? Are you sure? Wasn't that too much? No, I'm just saying... it's a mess! I just want to go on a date... maybe... to see him... or maybe... separate... as though you... you...
3. Molester

- This offender molests younger pre-adolescent children
- Question for the audience—Is it possible for a female to be a pedophile?
- The definition of pedophilia is not gender specific
- "... recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with prepubescent child or children..."DSM-IV

3. Molester - continued

- The 'Molester' offender may be a pedophile, a curious teenager, or someone predisposed w/ a history of incest & abuse
- Victims may be their own biological children
4. Helper

- This offender aids or collaborates with another person in the sexual abuse
- She may be a procurer of victims, an observer, or an active participant
- She may be involved because she wants to please the other adult
Police: Woman Admits Sexual Contact With Two-Year-Old

WINDSOR, Del. — A 25-year-old Delaware County woman has been charged with indecent acts with a child andDevon sexual assault of a child.

The suspect, identified only as A.L., was arrested Thursday after she allegedly had sexual contact with a 2-year-old and tried to have sexual contact with the 3-year-old.

Police said A.L., a woman under the age of 25, had sex with the 2-year-old.

Police said the woman had sex with the 2-year-old and the 3-year-old.

Michael Marceau & Lisa Ford
Aloha, Oregon

5. Coerced

* This offender participates in the sexual abuse of children because she is being dominated and controlled by another person
* She is usually in an abusive relationship
* She tends to be passive with low self-esteem, and is dependent on the other person
Points to Remember About Female Child Molesters

- They rarely molest strangers
- They tend to molest either their own children or those with whom they are very well acquainted
- Most of them molest for reasons other than a "love affair"
- They are capable of molesting children of all ages, and both sexes

Points to Remember continued

- They can target and groom children just like male offenders
- They may furnish alcohol, marijuana, pornography to their victims
- They may threaten their victims
- They are capable of committing violent acts, inflicting physical as well as emotional pain/trauma on their victims

Points to Remember continued

- They may have multiple victims
- They are more likely to come from a dysfunctional and sexually abusive background
- Many of them struggle with adult relationships and lack the social skills to have their needs met with adult partners

Points to Remember continued

- You may see some of the same "red flags" that are commonly associated with male offenders - past complaints, boundary issues, leaving past employment under suspicious circumstances, etc.

Recommended Reading

[Image of book cover]

Recommended Reading
Contact Information

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