Juveniles Who Commit Sex Offenses Against Minors

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is committed to improving the justice system’s response to crimes against children. OJJDP recognizes that children are at increased risk for crime victimization. Not only are children the victims of many of the same crimes that victimize adults, they are subject to other crimes, like child abuse and neglect, that are specific to childhood. The impact of these crimes on young victims can be devastating, and the violent or sexual victimization of children can often lead to an intergenerational cycle of violence and abuse. The purpose of OJJDP’s Crimes Against Children Series is to improve and expand the Nation’s efforts to better serve child victims by presenting the latest information about child victimization, including analyses of crime victimization statistics, studies of child victims and their special needs, and descriptions of programs and approaches that address these needs.

Although those who commit sex offenses against minors are often described as “pedophiles” or “predators” and thought of as adults, it is important to understand that a substantial portion of these offenses are committed by other minors who do not fit the image of such terms. Interest in youth who commit sexual offenses has grown in recent years, along with specialized treatment and management programs, but relatively little population-based epidemiological information about the characteristics of this group of offenders and their offenses has been available.

This Bulletin draws on data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to provide population-based epidemiological information on juvenile sex offending.

It is OJJDP’s hope that the findings reported in this Bulletin and their implications will help inform the policy and practice of those committed to addressing the sexual victimization of youth and strengthening its prevention and deterrence—considerations that are critical to success. Their efforts to protect youth from victimization, or from becoming victimizers themselves, have our support and commendation.

1 This Bulletin follows the common convention of referring to these youth as “offenders.” However, very few of the youth described with this label in the National Incident-Based Reporting System data are convicted as adults would be. Many were only alleged to have engaged in illegal behavior, and, if subject to justice system action, were adjudicated delinquent rather than convicted of a crime. Thus, the term “juvenile offender” should not imply shared status with convicted adult offenders, legally or otherwise.