

## Young People's Project

Young People who Sexually Abuse: Needs  
and Opportunities

Presenter: Rowland Coombes, Senior Therapist

# Introduction

- Probation; Wolvercote Clinic; YPP; (Wetherby and Castington YOIs)
- Funded by Youth Justice Board
- Carlford Unit, HMYOI Warren Hill
- 10 out of 30 beds in enhanced unit for 15-18 year olds with sexual convictions
- Consultancy to YOTs, STCs and Probation
- National Consultancy to S92/YJB
- NOTA: Branch; Training; Conference; Journal

# General Aims

- Validate old information; transferable skills
- Learn new information
- Raise new questions
- Increase motivation

# Specific Themes

- Adolescence
- Size of the problem – public health
- Cycles of Abuse – physical and/or sexual
- Possible Causes
- Intervention and Engagement of YP and Families

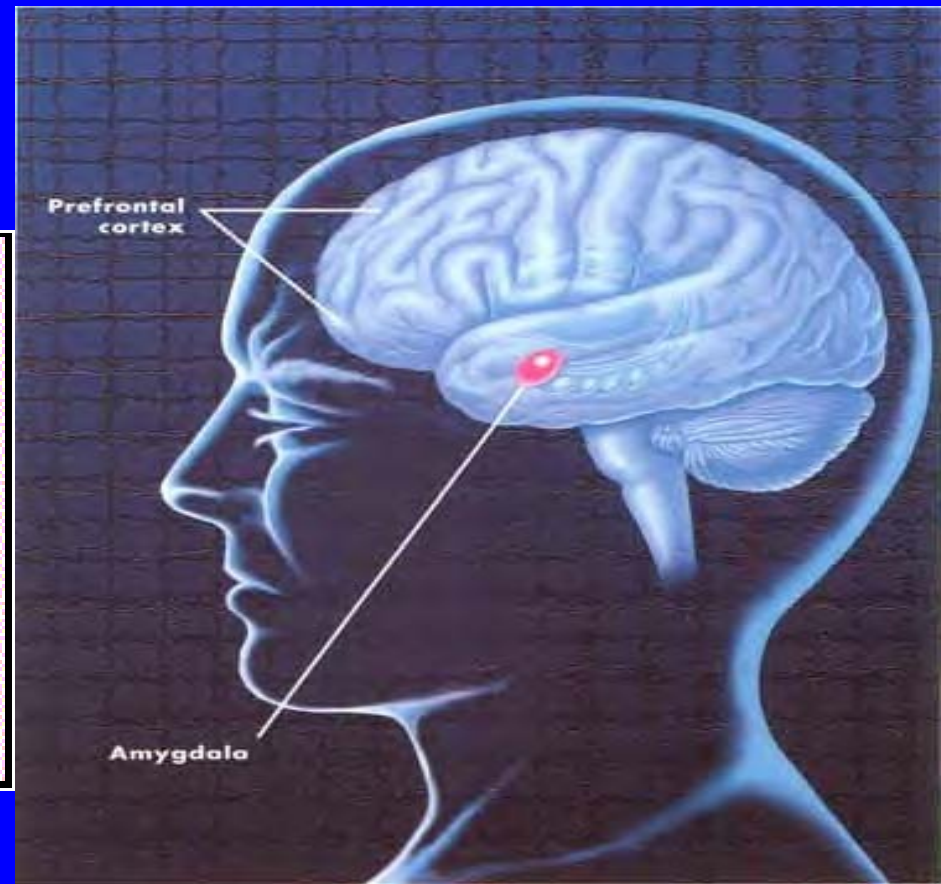
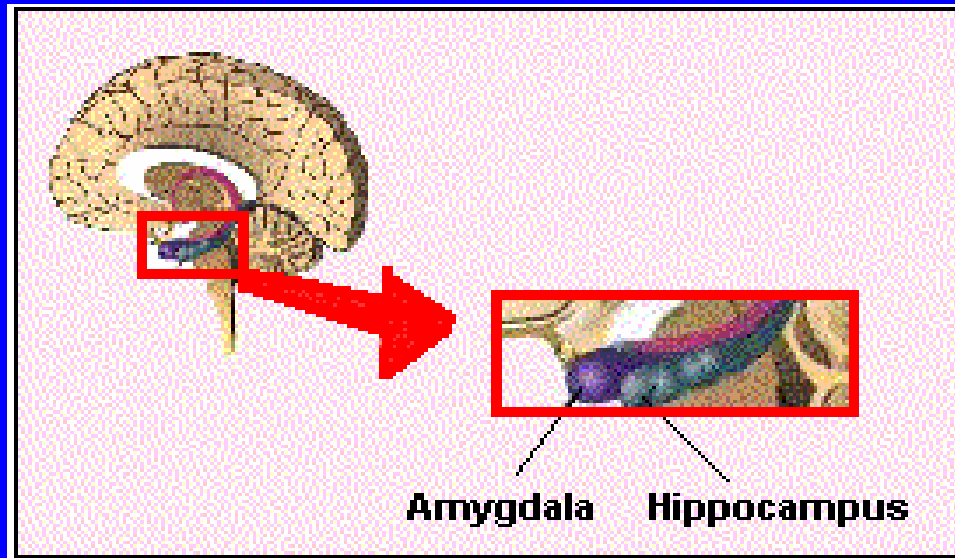
# What is adolescence?

- A time of major biological, psychological and social change
- A period of experimentation during which young people try to establish a sense of their own identity
- A time during which young people seek to separate themselves from their families (parents, carers, other adults) and identify more closely with their peers and other social groups
- A time of intense and often short term thoughts and feelings as young people “test out” their identities and relationships

# Developmental Changes

- Physical
  - Puberty: starting c. 4 years earlier compared to last century. **Hormones**
  - Brain development
- Cognitive
  - Abstract reasoning; cognitive controls
- Moral
  - Telling ‘right’ from ‘wrong’. Acute concern with fairness
- Social
  - Peer groups/Sexual relationships

# The Limbic System



# Brain Development

- 2 crucial periods – pre birth and adolescence: neuronal pruning
- Fewer but faster connections/synapses
- Loss of raw potential for learning and ability to recover from trauma
- Maturation from back to front



# Adolescent Behaviour

- Emotional outbursts; Moodiness
- Reckless risk taking and rule-breaking
- Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder

# The Size of the Problem

# Summary

- Between a quarter and one third of all SO
- Over half adult SO describe age of onset of deviant sexual interest before 18
- Only 7.5% to 14% reconvict sexually
- Life-course persistent vs adolescent limited
- Target scarce resources on higher risk
- Treatment reduces recidivism by about 10%

# Patterns of Sexual Offending

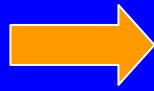
Low to Medium Risk

Higher Risk

**Sexual**

Social isolation

**Only**



Learning disability

Limited social

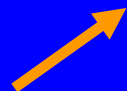
(child  
victims)

skills

**General**

Adolescence limited

**Offending**



(peer group pressure)

(peer/adult

victims)

# Patterns of Sexual Offending

Low to Medium Risk

Higher Risk

**Sexual**

**Only**

(child victims)

Social isolation  
(opportunity)  
Learning disability  
Limited social skills

Proto-paedophilia (possibly victim to victimiser), esp extrafamilial male victims

Arousal to forced sex

**General**

**Offending**

(sexual assaulters  
-peer/adult)

Adolescence limited  
(peer group pressure)

Life course persistent (early onset conduct disorders, early substance misuse, proto-psychopathy)

# Possible Causes of the Problem

# Possible Causes

- General antisocial behaviour and delinquency
- Education and academic problems
- Intellectual and neurological problems
- Psychiatric and personality problems
- Sexual victimisation
- Physical victimisation

# Possible Causes

- Social competence and peer relationship
- Self-image, identity problems and attitudes
- Substance abuse
- Sexual problems
- Use of pornography
- Sexual knowledge



# Vulnerability Factors

- Witnessing and experiencing intra-familial violence
- Parental emotional rejection
- Material neglect
- Lack of supervision
- Sexual abuse by a female relative

Salter, McMillan, Richards et al. (2002)

# Effects of Childhood and Adolescent Antecedents on Sexual Coerciveness

‘Children enmeshed in violent family structures often interact with delinquent peers and engage in anti-social behaviours. These delinquent experiences may in turn promote the further development of negative cognitions and subsequent aggression toward women’

Johnson and Knight (2000)

# Developmental Pathways

Sexual Abuse



- sexual compulsivity
- sexual preoccupation
- strength of sexual drive



Physical Abuse



- peer aggression
- adolescent substance misuse
- hypermasculinity



misogynistic fantasies factor

# The Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending

The early developmental experiences of boys who are later to become sex offenders inadequately prepares them for the dramatic changes in bodily functioning which occur at puberty and which initiate a strong desire to engage in sex and aggression. (Marshall and Barbaree, 1990)

# Media Messages

- pornography, advertising, television, movies, the internet and mobile phones, books and magazines
- ‘these boys lack confidence, are unskilled interpersonally, and may fear intimacy given their history of insecure attachments, they are likely to find appealing those sexual scripts that make no demands on their confidence or skills and that do not involve intimacy.’
- far more sex offenders (30% of rapists) reported having viewed explicit pornography before age ten than did non-offender controls (only 2% of whom reported such early exposure). Marshall (1993)

# Frequent Targets for Intervention

# Appropriate Teenage Relationships

- Forming relationships
- Power differences
- Consent
- Consequences of getting it wrong

# Considering Relationships

- Different Types
- Importance
- Qualities that make successful relationships
- Mutuality – what they contribute/receive



# Forming Relationships

- Skills
- Considering other people's perspective in forming/maintaining relationships
- **Exercise** – What do people want/not want when being asked out? Group the cards into categories of 'do' and 'don't' when asking someone out

# Power

- Definition
- Power differences: age, size, authority, fear
- Feelings when others have power over you
- Feelings when you have power over others
- Good and bad uses of power

# Consent

- In pairs, complete worksheet 6
- From the video decide whether you think what happened between the couples was consenting/not consenting – tick box
- Give reasons
- Handout: “What is consent?”

# Emotional Intelligence

- Rejection
- Jealousy
- Anger
- Self Esteem

# Conclusion

- Developmentally appropriate
- Particular needs of the individual
- Integrate an individual's treatment goals into their community and social systems

# Good Lives

- Life (including healthy living and functioning)
- Excellence in play and work (including mastery experiences)
- Agency (autonomy and self-directedness)
- Inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress)
- Friendship (including intimate, romantic and family relationships)
- Community
- Spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life)
- Happiness
- Creativity

# Invitation to Responsibility

A model of engagement by invitation aims to promote the discovery and construction of an alternative story of identity: one that is informed by qualities and practices of responsibility and respect. It proposes that the young man may have preferences and a capacity for responsible, equitable, and respectful behaviour; preferences, and a capacity that are likely to have been overlooked or ignored by others and by the young man himself.

(Jenkins, 1998)

# Denial to Family : Fear of Rejection

62.5% out of 40 young sex offenders at Feltham YOI were in denial to their families for fear of losing emotional support.

Kalsy (1997), unpublished paper cited by Barnes and Hughes (2002)  
‘Family Work with Adolescent Sex Offenders’, in M. C. Calder (ed) *Young People Who Sexually Abuse: Building the Evidence Base for your Practice*



# Young Person and Caregivers

‘The young person’s task is to accept full responsibility for the abusive behaviour. However it is the responsibility of caregivers to make this task accessible and to provide the extensive support that young men require to undertake it. Caregivers must assist the young man to discover, name, and attribute meaning to the steps he takes toward responsibility and respect.’

Jenkins (1998)

# Your Choice

Barnado's Taith Project

Tel: 01656 749235

# Contacts

- [RCoombes@LucyFaithfull.org](mailto:RCoombes@LucyFaithfull.org)
- **UK:** National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers. [www.nota.co.uk](http://www.nota.co.uk)
- **Europe:** ESSAY. [www.essay-eu.org](http://www.essay-eu.org)  
Office@essay-eu.org
- **USA:** National Adolescent Perpetrator Network: [www.oasotn.org/conference.html](http://www.oasotn.org/conference.html)