

# RAP Sheet

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*Thank you to everyone who returned the survey we included in the last issue. We found the feedback you provided to be extremely helpful, and we will endeavor to continue to make adjustments and improvements. If you would like to receive an email when the new RAP Sheets are posted on-line, email the Editor. Quarterly, you will receive a text-only email with a link to the new issue.*

## **MEDICAL EVALUATION RESULTS MAY NOT CONFIRM SEXUAL ABUSE, EVEN WHEN CHILD HAS DISCLOSED**

Given the proliferation of child advocacy centers, photo-documented medical evaluations are becoming more widely available for cases of suspected child sexual abuse. However, there is a concern that too much reliance may be placed on the results of medical examinations in determining whether or not sexual abuse has occurred. Investigators in this study reviewed the medical findings and case histories of 2,384 children who had been referred to a Los Angeles child advocacy center as suspected victims of child sexual abuse (either because of disclosure, possible medical conditions, behavioral changes, or possible exposure to an abusive situation). Exam results were deemed normal for 96.3% of the cases. Of the children who had disclosed sexual abuse, only 4.4% had findings that were diagnostic of abuse. Of the children who had disclosed an abusive incident including penetration, only 5.5% had abnormal exam results. The authors offered several reasons for the low occurrence of medical evidence suggestive of abuse even when the child had disclosed. First, children, especially younger children, are more vulnerable to coercion and are less likely to disclose immediately. Children's bodies tend to heal more rapidly than adults, reducing the likelihood of discovering physical evidence. Second, children are more likely to be abused by someone they know than by a stranger. As these perpetrators tend to want continued access to their victims, they are less likely to engage in the more violent assaults for which evidence would be more obvious and longer lasting. The authors advocate for the use of multiple sources of information when investigating and prosecuting suspected cases of child sexual abuse, and caution against ruling out sexual abuse solely based on a medical exam.

Heger, A., Ticson, L., Velasquez, O., & Bernier, R. (2002). Children referred for possible sexual abuse: Medical findings in 2384 children. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 26, 645-659.

## **JUVENILE OFFENDERS REPORT THAT CORRECTIONAL STAFF ALLOW AND SOMETIMES ENCOURAGE PEER VIOLENCE IN SECURE FACILITIES**

Inmate-on-inmate violence may be allowed or even encouraged by staff in secure juvenile facilities, as reported through interviews by 100 male juvenile offenders who were residing or had resided in secure facilities. A quarter of these juveniles reported that in their last stay in a secure facility, staff had used "too much force" at least once in handling them, and over half reported seeing "excessive force" being used by a staff member on another inmate. In addition, almost half of the juveniles stated that staff had turned a blind eye to inmate violence or had done or said something that had placed an inmate at risk. Over half of the juveniles viewed their

experience in secure facilities in negative terms, with 30% reporting concerns about physical safety and 26% reporting problems with staff. The authors caution that the credibility of juvenile offenders' self reports may be questionable. However, the juveniles' reports were not uniformly negative. For example, while a quarter of juveniles stated they could not think of anything positive about their stay in a secure facility, many could identify some positive aspects, especially in the programming available to them. In addition, a majority stated that during their most recent stay, they had received help from staff and felt protected by staff. Still, the reports of staff's direct and indirect contributions to peer violence suggest that staff behavior must be addressed in any program designed to prevent peer violence in secure facilities.

Peterson-Bidali, M. & Loegl, C. J. (2002). Juveniles' experiences of incarceration: The role of correctional staff in peer violence. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30, 41-49.

## **SERIOUS JUVENILE OFFENDERS PERCEIVE GREATER BENEFITS FROM MORE INTENSIVE JUVENILE PROGRAMS**

Most studies of programs for juvenile offenders compare recidivism rates across programs of different intensities to determine what is most effective. Less attention has been paid to variables that might help explain why some programs have lower recidivism rates. For example, whether or not the youth perceive a program to be beneficial (and why) may provide information about what works in preventing youth from re-offending. One recent study compared male youths' perceptions of lower intensity juvenile sanctions (judicial warning, juvenile probation, and less restrictive/shorter placements), higher intensity sanctions (more restrictive facilities and longer stays), and adult sanctions (adult probation, jail, and prison). Researchers interviewed 144 serious juvenile offenders about their experiences with each type of sanction. Higher intensity juvenile sanctions received the highest percentage of "beneficial overall" ratings (58% of offenders) compared to adult sanctions (33% of offenders said the experience was beneficial overall) and lower intensity juvenile sanctions (20% of offenders said the experience was beneficial overall). These serious offenders characterized lower intensity programs as "too little, too late," meaning that the programs did not provide them with skills they needed, and that their problems were already beyond the level that could be helped by such low grade interventions. Higher intensity programs were perceived as more beneficial because they were longer (providing more time for the youth to reflect on, and want to change, behavior) and allowed youth to advance their education and job skills and receive counseling. Adult sanctions were criticized as being detrimental because youth in adult facilities lose not only comforts and freedom, but also hope and safety. These perceptions came from juveniles who had experienced multiple correctional encounters, so the results should be interpreted as the experiences of serious, repeat offenders. Perceptions of less serious offenders may differ significantly from those reported here. The authors suggested that policymakers consider high-intensity juvenile programs as a possibly more effective alternative to the adult system for serious juvenile offenders.

Lane, J., Lanza-Kaduce, L., Frazier, C. E., & Bishop, D. M. (2002). Adult versus juvenile sanctions: Voices of incarcerated youths. *Crime & Delinquency*, 48, 431-455.

## OCCUPATIONAL ROLE PREDICTS PUNITIVE ORIENTATIONS AMONG JUVENILE JUSTICE PERSONNEL

The attitudes held by those who work in the juvenile justice system can greatly affect whether the system is a more punitive or more rehabilitative model. Therefore, in order to implement a juvenile justice system's policy change regarding a punitive or rehabilitative stance, the nature and conditions of the work environment must be addressed. Researchers compared the views of different groups of juvenile justice personnel with respect to the system's role in the lives of youth offenders. In their sample of 253 personnel in Iowa, probation officers were found to have less punitive views than teachers in correctional institutions and correctional officers. With regard to educational experience, less punitive attitudes were related to higher levels of education, but not related to whether or not an individual had an educational specialization in one of the social sciences. In a combined analysis, occupational role was a much stronger predictor of punitive orientation than was educational level. Thus, a person's particular job in the juvenile justice system appears to be more important in determining punitive orientation than is level of education. The authors suggest two possible reasons for this association. Juvenile justice personnel's attitudes may be shaped by the kind of work they perform. Alternatively, particular people may be drawn into particular roles because of their attitudes. Policy makers and administrators would do well to take these differences into account when trying to implement changes to the juvenile justice system in their area.

Leiber, M. J., Schwarze, K., Mack, K. Y., & Farnworth, M. (2002). The effects of occupation and education on punitive orientations among juvenile justice personnel. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 30*, 303-316.

## ADOLESCENT PURGING BEHAVIORS MORE COMMON IN PHYSICALLY ABUSED GIRLS, BUT RISK CAN BE REDUCED

Past research has consistently shown that children who experience maltreatment are at increased risk for later adverse outcomes. A recent study focused on physical abuse and subsequent bulimic (intentional purging/vomiting) behaviors. The researchers analyzed survey data from over 100,000 female adolescents who had either never engaged in purging or who were currently purging two or more times per week. Although the total percentage of girls reporting purging was low (2% of the sample), those who had been physically abused were at higher risk of purging than those who had not been physically abused. In addition, having been sexually abused further increased the risk of purging in adolescence. The researchers next analyzed only the data from the female adolescents who had been physically abused, to determine factors that reduced the risk of purging. In other words, given a history of physical abuse, what distinguishes the girls who engage in bulimic behaviors from girls who do not? Girls who had previously been physically abused but reported higher levels of family support and more positive school climate were less likely than other physically abused girls to purge. African American girls who had been physically abused were

significantly less likely to purge than European American girls who had been physically abused. Surprisingly, higher levels of support from adults outside the family were related to increased risk of purging behaviors in physically abused girls. This finding may be the result of vulnerable girls (who have a history of physical, and possibly sexual, abuse) becoming reliant on inappropriate adult role models. For prevention and treatment of purging, it will be important to provide girls who have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse with appropriate extra-familial support and role models.

Perkins, D. F., Luster, T., & Jank, W. (2002). Protective factors, physical abuse, and purging from community-wide surveys of female adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 17*, 377-400.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF ENHANCED SUPERVISION PROGRAM RELIANT UPON LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

The Anchorage Coordinated Agency Network (CAN) project pairs volunteer police officers with probation officers to provide enhanced supervision of juvenile probationers. In this program, police officers assigned to juvenile probationers make random visits each month, to supplement those of the probation officers. The goal of the program is two-fold: to provide increased supervision of the youth, and also to provide a role model for the juvenile. An evaluation of the pilot program found that for 155 juvenile probationers (91 CAN juveniles and 64 control), CAN juveniles were more likely to have new technical violations, but no more likely to have new charges as compared to juveniles in the regular probation program. Almost 30% of CAN juveniles were reported for new technical probation violations, while only 17.2% of the control group were. However, this is likely due to the fact that the increased supervision allowed for greater detection of the violations. While there was no difference in the rate of new offenses between the two groups, it was found that as the number of police visits increased, a smaller proportion of juveniles had new charges filed against them. The total number of visits by police officers ranged from 0 to 7 during the 9-month period, and the mean number of visits was only 2.01. Thus, the pilot program suggests that in order to be effective, a certain threshold number of quality visits may need to be made.

Giblin, M. J. (2002). Using police officers to enhance the supervision of juvenile probationers: An evaluation of the Anchorage CAN Program. *Crime & Delinquency, 48*, 116-137.

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