

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION TO INCIDENTS AND ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is a complex problem that encompasses psychological, social and legal considerations. Research and theory have sought to understand the various motivations for abuse as well as characteristic offender behaviors that lead up to and occur during abuse. In order to understand child sexual abuse, it is important to understand the motivation to begin offending (the preconditions to child sexual abuse), how child sexual abusers get children to participate in sexual activity ("grooming"), and how and why the abusers are able to maintain this course of abusive actions through rationalizations of the behavior.

When considering why men sexually abuse children and adolescents, researchers have identified a number of preconditions to child sexual abuse. These include, but are not limited to: the offender's "emotional congruence" to youths (the link between the offender's emotional needs and the children's characteristics), low self esteem, deviant sexual arousal, "developmental blockage" (the failure to develop the appropriate social skills and self-confidence necessary to form effective intimate relations with adults), "situational blockage" (when an adult's sexual interests are blocked from normal sexual expression owing to the loss of a relationship or some other transitory crisis), and disinhibition (the factors that help a child sexual abuser overcome his inhibitions so that he allows himself to abuse a child or adolescent, e.g., use of alcohol or other substances).<sup>1</sup> These preconditions are each variable in strength; while some abusers may act out as a reaction to transitory stress, others seem to be driven by such a strong compulsion that situational factors play only a minor role, if any at all.

In order to get the children to go along with the abuse, many child sexual abusers indulge in what is termed "grooming," or premeditated behavior intended to manipulate the potential victim into complying with the sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> Grooming tactics include verbal, emotional and/or physical intimidation, seduction, and the use of enticements such as candy, money, or other gifts. Emotional manipulation and verbal coercion seem to be the most common tactics used by offenders to groom their victims, including doing favors for the victim in exchange for sex and/or emotionally blackmailing the victim into compliance.<sup>3</sup>

In order for the child sexual abuse to continue, child sexual abusers often rationalize their behavior through "cognitive distortions," or distorted thinking patterns. Like any other type of offender, child sexual abusers may subconsciously use a "neutralization technique" to defuse any feelings of remorse or guilt they have for committing the abusive act or for the consequences of that act.<sup>4</sup> They do so by excusing or justifying their actions, often acknowledging their guilt but not taking responsibility for the acts. Commonly, they blame the victims for their offenses or justify their offenses through the victims' actions.

We used the vast body of research findings in the area of offender characteristics and childhood victimization as a guide in crafting the choice of questions (e.g., the type of enticements used to "groom" children) which would help enable us to understand this subgroup of abusers and, ultimately, their similarities and differences with the distribution of child sexual offenders in the general population.

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<sup>1</sup> David Finkelhor, *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV TR* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Douglas W. Pryor, *Unspeakable Acts: Why Men Sexually Abuse Children* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Greshan M. Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency," *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957):664-670.