The Berlin Prevention Project for Juveniles with a Sexual Interest in Prepubescent Children

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The Berlin Prevention Project for Juveniles (PPJ) offers diagnostic and therapeutic help to 12- to 18-year-old juveniles with a sexual preference for the prepubescent and/or early pubescent body of children who apply for treatment on a voluntary basis. The project goal is to prevent primary or recurrent child sexual abuse as well as primary or recurrent use of child abuse images. Treatment aims to enable affected juveniles to obtain control over their conflictual sexual behaviors. The PPJ study is being carried out by the Institute of Sexology and Sexual Medicine of the Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin in cooperation with the Department for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, and Psychosomatics at Vivantes Hospital in Berlin-Friedrichshain. The analysis is based on a sample of juveniles who contacted the project on a voluntary basis within the first 30 months of the project (from April 2014 to October 2016).

The Berlin Prevention Project for Juveniles – Results and Demographic Characteristics

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The Berlin Prevention Project for Juveniles (PPJ) is a primary prevention project that offers diagnostic and therapeutic help to 12- to 18-year-old juveniles with a sexual preference for the prepubescent and/or early pubescent body of children. This presentation aims to give an overview of the project and presents sexual medical and sociodemographic characteristics of participants within the first 30 months of the project.

The diagnostic approach focuses on sexual preference operationalized by orgasmic masturbatory fantasies. During a two-hour clinical assessment interview, juveniles and, if available, their legal guardians were assessed by a trained sexual therapist to gather data from self-report and a third-party perspective. Masturbatory fantasies were assessed by what the participant was aroused by, what was fantasized about while masturbating, and what finally caused sexual climax. In addition, juveniles and their legal guardians were asked to complete a test battery to assess sociodemographics, sexual preference and sexual behavior, possibly committed sexual abuse and/or use of child abuse images, as well as possibly existing psychiatric comorbidities (e.g. personality styles, distinctive psychiatric features). Also, the participants’ viewing time while looking at and rating the Not Real People Visual Stimulus Set was unobtrusively measured to get an objective measurement of sexual preference.
The PPJ’s therapeutic approach encourages behavioral control. Apart from general education regarding sexuality and pedophilic preference, the project aims to encourage acceptance for the juvenile’s specific sexual preference among persons involved in the therapy process. The desired aim is to increase family functionality and to modify cognitive distortions among family members for them to provide support and to help prevent the juvenile’s social isolation. On the part of the juvenile, the aim is for him to assume responsibility for his doings.

Results show that all included participants were of male gender and in most cases a first contact was initiated by parents or legal guardians, supervisors or youth facilities. Participants’ median age was approximately 15 years and more than 75% had shown sexually abusive behavior in the past (child sexual abuse, use of child abuse images, or both). About half of the assessed juveniles met diagnostic criteria for pedophilia (exclusive or non-exclusive). However, since some of the juveniles were below the age of 16 years, the authors decided not to apply the diagnosis of pedophilia, but instead categorize juveniles into juveniles with a sexual preference for the pre- and/or early pubescent body and in juveniles without a respective sexual preference.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- To describe the project’s diagnostic approach.
- To describe the project’s therapeutic approach.
- To show that juveniles are aware of and willing to talk about their sexual preferences
- To present juvenile participants’ sociodemographic and sexual medical (e.g. sexual preference) characteristics
- To present juvenile participants’ offending status

Clinical Interview vs. Objective Measurement – Which is Superior for Gaining Sexual Preference Related Information?

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In the Prevention Project for Juveniles (PPJ), sexual preference was operationalized by masturbatory fantasies. Therefore, the participating juveniles’ masturbatory fantasies were assessed in a clinical interview carried out by trained psychologists. This part of the assessment depends on the juvenile’s self-reports. To complement data gained from self-report, an objective measurement method was used: the unobtrusively measured viewing time. For this purpose, participants were asked to rate the subjectively felt attraction to pictures displaying male and female bodies in all five Tanner-stages. The presented pictures were from the Not Real People Visual Stimulus Set. The participants’ viewing time was unobtrusively measured and rated on a four-point Likert scale. The underlying psychological assumption is that people tend to look at stimuli which they value positively for a longer time (and therefore have a longer viewing and reaction time) compared to pictures that are not positively valued.
Different Roles, Same Goals: Preventing Sexual Abuse
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Data gained from participants’ self-reports on their sexual fantasies were compared to the results of the unobtrusively measured viewing time to find out whether these information coincide. The results supported our assumption that an objective measurement like the unobtrusively measured viewing time can be applied to complement information gained from clinical interviews. However, we believe that an objective measurement method should not replace a clinical interview, because in some cases the clinical interview was able to gather information that was not covered by the unobtrusively measured viewing time. Second, in some cases the participant needed more time to build up trust, and only began to talk about his masturbatory fantasies at a second or third interview.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- To inform that it is possible to assess juveniles’ sexual preference
- To inform that a sexual preference for prepubescent children does occur under the age of 16 years.
- To look at information about participants’ sexual preference, gathered via clinical interview (carried out by a trained sexual therapist).
- To look at information about juveniles’ sexual preference, via unobtrusively measured viewing time (as an objective measurement method).
- To raise the question, which assessment-method (clinical interview vs. viewing time) could be preferred.

Mental Health Problems in Juveniles with a Sexual Interest in Prepubescent Children

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As previous research has shown, juveniles who sexually offend against children are at high risk of having deviant sexual interests, in particular a sexual preference for prepubescent children, as well as having comorbid mental disorders. For this reason, participants in the Prevention Project for Juveniles (PPJ) underwent a detailed diagnostic assessment, including these three aspects. Sexual preference was operationalized by self-reported masturbatory fantasies during a semi-structured clinical interview carried out by trained clinical psychologists. Comorbid mental health problems were assessed with a structured diagnostic interview for psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents. In cases of justified indications of a psychiatric disorder, specific diagnostics were initiated at the Department for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, and Psychosomatics at Vivantes Hospital in Berlin-Friedrichshain. Moreover, preliminary diagnoses by children and adolescent psychiatrists were taken into account. Sexual offending behavior against children was measured via self-report during the clinical interview and paper-and-pencil questionnaires.

Data gained from the participants in the PPJ were analyzed, focusing on the relationship between sexual preference for prepubescent children, comorbid mental health problems and sexual offending against children. It was expected that the majority of juveniles with
a sexual preference for prepubescent children met the criteria for at least one mental disorder with a heterogeneous distribution. Moreover, it was hypothesized that juveniles with a sexual preference for prepubescent children as well as a comorbid externalizing mental disorder were more likely to sexually offend against children compared to juveniles with a similar sexual preference, but an internalizing mental disorder. Finally, yet importantly, it was expected that juveniles with a sexual preference for prepubescent children, but without a comorbid mental disorder, were more likely to be non-offenders when compared to juveniles with the same sexual preference, but at least one comorbid mental disorder.

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**

- To describe the prevalence of comorbid mental health problems in juveniles with a sexual interest in prepubescent children in general
- To show the heterogeneity of comorbid mental health problems
- To present the prevalence of comorbid mental health problems in relationship to sexual offending against children
- To raise the question of a relationship between comorbid mental health problems and sexual offending against children
- To raise the question of the influence of different comorbid mental health problems relating to sexual offending against children