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2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

T-19

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: An Evaluation of Stop It Now! Flanders & the Netherlands

Symposium Chair: Kasia Uzieblo, PhD
Thomas More University College

The extensive harmful effects of child sexual abuse and the large numbers of victims worldwide necessitate dedicated attention to prevention efforts. Numerous efforts to prevent sexual violence perpetration have emerged in the last three decades. The current symposium will focus on three current trends and issues in child sexual abuse prevention programs. A first issue concerns the frameworks that are used for prevention programs. Prevention efforts are usually classified into three levels, i.e., the primary, secondary, and the tertiary level. Although this public health framework is used worldwide, the specific conceptual frameworks and subsequently, the implementation of the prevention efforts might differ across countries. In the first presentation a critical comparison of the conceptual frameworks for preventive strategies in North America and Europe will be described. The implications of conceptual differences for the implementation of these strategies will also be discussed. A second issue regards the increased attention for interventions in undetected (i.e., not yet been detected by the criminal justice system) and potential offenders (i.e., individuals struggling with their sexual interests in children who have not (yet) had any sexual contact with minors). Despite this enhanced attention, only a few European countries have developed initiatives for these difficult to reach target groups. The Stop it Now! projects in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) will be the focus of the second presentation. More specifically, the presentation will focus on the impact of the Stop it Now! projects, as well as on the challenges that these initiatives have been confronted with in its first years. The final issue that will be discussed in this symposium, regards the question how the general public feels about Stop it Now!. In the third presentation the results of a recent study on the general public's knowledge of and attitudes towards the Stop it Now! project will be depicted.

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Comparing the Conceptual Frameworks of Programs for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Kasia Uzieblo, PhD
Thomas More University College

Responses to child sexual abuse have long been focusing on child protection and offender management. In the last decade, there has been a growing interest in a broader public health approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse. NL-ATSA, the Dutch chapter of ATSA representing Belgium and the Netherlands, developed a task force on the prevention of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse. The first goal of this task force was to reflect on the conceptual frameworks of available strategies for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

In this presentation the results of these conceptual analyses will be presented. First, the conceptual frameworks of prevention efforts on primary, secondary and tertiary level as defined by ATSA will be compared to those frameworks that are applied in Europe. Second, the implementation of these prevention strategies in the aforementioned continents will be critically analyzed. Here we will mainly focus on the Stop it Now! project. This project aims to prevent child sexual abuse by providing information, advice, and guidance to those concerned about child sexual abuse through the use of an anonymous helpline.

Learning Goals:

This presentation aims to:

- Enhance knowledge on the conceptual frameworks of available prevention strategies for the prevention of child sexual abuse;
- Provide in-depth insights into the differences between the conceptual frameworks used across continents;
- Provide in-depth insights into the consequences of these conceptual differences for the implementation of prevention strategies.

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A Critical Evaluation of Stop It Now! Flanders and the Netherlands

Minne De Boeck, MCrim
University Forensic Centre

Stop it Now! aims to prevent child sexual abuse by informing the general public about pedophilia, by offering free, anonymous support to everyone who is concerned about their own sexual feelings, thoughts or behavior towards minors, and by offering support to those individuals who are concerned about the feelings or behavior of acquaintances, friends, and family members.

The Stop it Now! projects in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) were launched in 2012 and in 2017, respectively. In the current presentation the adaptation of the Stop it Now! project to the Belgian and the Dutch context will be described. The number and nature of the questions that these Stop it Now! programs have been receiving in its first years will be presented. The substantive and practical challenges that the programs have been dealing with, will be discussed and illustrated with two case studies. Suggestions for prevention programs will be formulated.

Learning Goals:

After the presentation you will know:

- How the Stop it Now! programs in Belgium and the Netherlands have been adapted to an European context;
- The number and nature of the cases that Stop it Now! Flanders and the Netherlands are confronted with;
- How these prevention programs might be improved.

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Understanding Public Attitudes Towards Stop It Now!

Kasia Uzieblo, PhD
Thomas More University College

Pedophilia is regarded as one of the most stigmatized mental disorders. The general public exhibits stigmatizing attitudes, and feelings of fear and anger towards pedophilic individuals. Given that a direct link between pedophilic interests and child sexual abuse is often assumed, it is no surprise that the general public is mostly in favor of punishing pedophilic individuals regardless of whether they engage in illegal or socially unacceptable activities or not. Taking these negative and punitive attitudes directed at pedophilic individuals into regard, negative attitudes towards prevention programs for people struggling with pedophilic interests can be expected.

The current study aimed to measure public attitudes and support for Stop it Now!, a primary prevention program for pedophilic individuals. Hundred thirty-eight participants ($M=19.44$ years, $SD=2.46$, range: 17-38; 74% female) recruited from the Belgian general population completed an online survey. Results indicate that the majority of the participants (93%) was unfamiliar with Stop it Now!. Those who were familiar with the program, learned about it through media (62%) or at school (38%). Although 88% expressed support for this prevention program, only a minority would contact Stop it Now! when experiencing romantic feelings towards minors (3%) or would refer others struggling with pedophilic interests to Stop it Now! (21%). Participants who were reluctant to use the helpline, indicated that it would be too difficult to talk about such deviant interests with others, even with professionals. These results suggest that despite recent media campaigns in Belgium a sizeable number of the general public remains unaware of Stop it Now!. Moreover, a supportive attitude towards the helpline doesn't seem to guarantee that the general public will contact the helpline when needed. Hence, efforts should not only be made to make people aware of available mental health services, but also to facilitate discussion about pedophilia.

Learning Goals:

The current presentation aims to

- Increase knowledge on public attitudes and support for Stop it Now!;
- Increase awareness of the relevance of the general public's knowledge of and attitudes towards prevention programs for pedophilic individuals;
- Elicit discussion about efforts that should be made to increase awareness of available mental health services.

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Kasia Uzieblo is the coordinator of the Applied Forensic Psychology research unit at Thomas More University College and is a visiting professor in forensic psychology at Ghent University (Belgium). She is also the founder and coordinator of the 2-year postgraduate course Forensic Psychological Assessment and Counseling. Her main research interests are psychopathy, sexual and partner violence, and psychological assessment in forensic populations. She has published several national and international papers and has given numerous presentations on psychopathy, (sexual) violence, and stalking. Kasia Uzieblo is currently the president of the Dutch chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers.

Minne De Boeck has a master's degree in Criminology as well as in Conflict & Development studies. She works at the University Forensic Centre (UFC) in Antwerp, Belgium. The UFC is Flanders' reference centre with regard to the guidance and treatment of patients with a paraphilia and/or sex offenders. The UFC also offers support to professionals from criminal justice and mental health settings. As a criminologist within the UFC, Minne De Boeck is responsible for the support centre and is part of the intake team of the treatment centre. She also coordinates the risk assessments and risk management conducted within the UFC. Furthermore, Minne De Boeck is the project manager of Stop it Now! Flanders and is a board member of the Dutch chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers.