

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Responsible Behavior with Younger Children: A School-Based Prevention Intervention

Symposium Chair: Elizabeth J. Letourneau, PhD
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a serious public health problem that is experienced by 1 out of every 4-5 girls and 1 of every 15-20 boys in the United States (Finkelhor et al., 2014). It increases the risks for mental and physical health disorders and behavioral problems across the lifecourse of victims (Dong et al., 2004; Noll et al., 2003; Putnam, 2003) and has been recognized as a preventable risk factor that substantially contributes to the global burden of disease by The World Health Organization (U.S. Burden of Disease Collaborators, 2013). However, it is not widely known that youth under the age of 18 perpetrate between 30-50% of all CSA offenses and more than half of offenses against children under the age of 12 (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2014). Youth who are adjudicated for CSA-related offenses have high rates of desistance from sexual offending after their first offense, suggesting that there may have been a way to prevent their initial offense (Letourneau et al., 2017). In addition, the epidemiology of CSA implies that it is relatively common for young adolescents to engage in sexually inappropriate behaviors with younger children, often motivated by preventable factors.

The goal of the proposed symposium is to demonstrate how a school-based universal prevention program might be used to prevent CSA perpetrated by adolescents. The first presentation will examine lessons learned from current prevention approaches and how these lessons have been used to develop the program Responsible Behavior with Younger Children (RBYC). The second presentation will walk through the development and content of the RBYC curriculum and share feedback received on the curriculum from relevant stakeholders including parents, teachers and students. The third presentation will share the preliminary results of a small pilot test of the RBYC intervention tested in four U.S. based middle schools.

References:

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Preventing the Onset of CSA: Responsible Behavior with Younger Children

Elizabeth J. Letourneau, PhD
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Although society is beginning to accept the idea that child sexual abuse (CSA) may be preventable, most current methods to address CSA are still reactive criminal justice interventions that are extremely costly and only put into action after a child has been harmed (Letourneau et al., 2017). Current prevention programs are mostly victim-focused interventions designed to make an institution more difficult to infiltrate or a specific child more difficult to victimize (Whitaker et al., 2008, Wurtele, 2009). The effectiveness of these programs has not been clearly established still leaving us with the question of “what does prevention look like?” Research has indicated the need for a more comprehensive approach to prevention, including approaches that specifically target potential perpetrators and the onset of CSA (Letourneau et al., 2014; Smallbone et al., 2008; Whitaker et al., 2008; Wurtele, 2009.)

This presentation will introduce one example of what CSA prevention might look like. The process of how known risk and protective factors for CSA perpetration, and characteristics of programs that have been effective at preventing adolescent dating violence and other serious problem behaviors formed the basis for Responsible Behavior with Younger Children (RBYC) will be discussed. Co-authors (who will not be presenting include Cindy Schaeffer (University of Maryland School of Medicine) and Catherine Bradshaw (University of Virginia, Curry School of Education).

References:

Letourneau, E. J., Schaeffer, C. M., Bradshaw, C. P., & Feder, K. A. (2017). Preventing the onset of child sexual abuse by targeting young adolescents with universal prevention programming. *Child Maltreatment, 22*(2), 100-111.

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Whitaker, D. J., Le, B., Karl Hanson, R., Baker, C. K., McMahon, P. M., Ryan, G., ...Rice, D. D. (2008). Risk factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse: A review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32, 529-548.

Wurtele, S. K. (2009). Preventing sexual abuse of children in the 21st century: Preparing for challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 18, 1-18.

Learning Goals:

- To review existing methods aimed at preventing child sexual abuse.
- To examine how known risk factors for CSA perpetration and adolescent prevention interventions for other problem behaviors can guide best practices for CSA prevention.
- To introduce a new prevention program aimed at preventing the onset of CSA by targeting young adolescents with universal prevention programming.

Responsible Behavior with Younger Children: A Glimpse Inside the Intervention

Amanda Ruzicka, MA
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Youth under the age of 18 perpetrate more than half of child sexual abuse (CSA) offenses against children younger than 12 (Finkelhor, Shattuck et al., 2014), yet there are no prevention programs that specifically target the sexual abuse of children by adolescents (Letourneau et al., 2014). Adolescent-perpetrated CSA incidents are often “crimes of opportunity” (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2001) and “crimes of ignorance” that result from factors such as a lack of adult supervision or lack of knowledge about appropriate sexual behaviors (Letourneau et al., 2014). Responsible Behavior with Younger Children is a school-based universal prevention program targeting adolescents and their parents with knowledge, skills and tools to avoid sexual behavior with younger children.

This presentation will examine the RBYC curriculum including the learning objectives for each session, examples of in-class activities, and feedback from students, parents, and educators involved with the program. Lessons learned during curriculum development and implementation will also be shared. Co-authors (who will not be presenting include Cindy Schaeffer (University of Maryland School of Medicine) and Catherine Bradshaw (University of Virginia, Curry School of Education).

References:

Finkelhor, D., & Ormrod, R. (2001, September). *Crimes against children by babysitters* (OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin NCJ 189102). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H. A., & Hamby, S. L. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 55*, 329-333.

Letourneau, E. J., Eaton, W. W., Bass, J., Berlin, F. S., & Moore, S. G. (2014). The need for a comprehensive public health approach to preventing child sexual abuse. *Public Health Reports, 129*, 222-228. PMID: PMC3982542.

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Learning Goals:

- To provide a glimpse of the RBYC curriculum and examples of interactive activities presented in class.
- To discuss feedback on the RBYC curriculum provided by middle school students, teachers, and parents in focus groups and interviews.
- To examine lessons the study team has learned throughout the process of intervention development and implementation.

Responsible Behavior with Younger Children Pilot Study

Elizabeth J. Letourneau, PhD
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Young adolescence represents the riskiest time for perpetrating sexual harm against younger children (Letourneau, et al., 2017). Research has indicated that 14 years of age is the peak age for sexual offending against children among offenders of any age and typically occurs in common settings such as homes and schools (Snyder, 2000). Responsible Behavior with Younger Children (RBYC) was designed to prevent the onset of CSA perpetration by targeting boys and girls who are 12 and 13 years old with important knowledge and skills to interact appropriately with younger children in the common situations where CSA can occur.

This presentation will provide preliminary results from a pilot test of the RBYC intervention conducted in 6th and 7th grade classrooms in Baltimore City Public Schools in Baltimore, MD. Four Baltimore City Middle Schools partnered with us to test the RBYC program (randomized wait-list design); two schools served as intervention schools and two schools served as wait-list control schools. Participating students in all schools were given a brief computer-based assessment at three timepoints (baseline, midway through the study, and at the end of the study) to measure the intervention's impact on select proximal outcomes (e.g., increased empathy for the needs of younger children). Schools in both the intervention and control conditions received the RBYC intervention at different timepoints throughout the study. Study results as well as

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challenges and lessons learned throughout the study will be discussed.

Recommendations for future research on this topic will be shared.

References:

Letourneau, E. J., Schaeffer, C. M., Bradshaw, C. P., & Feder, K. A. (2017). Preventing the onset of child sexual abuse by targeting young adolescents with universal prevention programming. *Child Maltreatment, 22*(2), 100-111.

Snyder, H. N. (2000). *Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident and offender characteristics. A NIBRS statistical report*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved July 19, 2016, from <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pu/pdf/saycrle.pdf>

Learning Goals:

- To examine the preliminary results of a pilot test of the RBYC intervention on select proximal outcomes (e.g., increased knowledge of developmental differences between adolescents and younger children).
- To discuss challenges and lessons learned while conducting a study about CSA in a U.S. based public school system.
- To describe next steps (based on study results) to design, test, and disseminate effective prevention programming.

Elizabeth J. Letourneau, PhD, is Professor, Department of Mental Health, and Director, Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Letourneau is an internationally recognized expert whose research has examined child sexual abuse prevention, policy, and practice. Her work has influenced the manner in which children with sexual behavior problems are assessed and treated, legal policies that pertain to youth who sexually offend, and international strategies to address child sexual abuse. As the inaugural director of the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse Dr. Letourneau's efforts now focus on developing, evaluating, and disseminating child sexual abuse prevention interventions. She leads the *Help Wanted Prevention Project*, which was featured on Luke Malone's *This American Life* podcast (<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/522/tarred-and-feathered/act-two-0>) and in Dr. Letourneau's 2016 TEDMED talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2iV3Gf0lVA>).

Amanda E. Ruzicka, MA, is a research associate at the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Department of Mental Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Amanda has a background in clinical psychology. Her work centers around the development and testing of CSA prevention interventions targeted at youth and young adults. Amanda has research experience designing, implementing, and managing research projects at non-profit and academic institutions and completed a clinical internship at a residential treatment facility for youth with problem sexual behaviors. At the Moore Center, she focuses on research project and intervention development and manages the Center's research studies, events, and administrative functions.