

## **Help Wanted: Lessons on Prevention from Non-Offending Young Adult Pedophiles**

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Child sexual abuse (CSA) impacts 27% of girls and 5% of boys before the age of 18, creating substantial risks for severe mental, physical, and behavioral health disorders as well as increasing the risk for subsequent victimization and perpetration of sexual and nonsexual harm across the lifecourse [1-5]. In 30% to 50% of all CSA cases, adolescents are the perpetrators [1, 6] and in some (but not all) of these cases, the adolescents were motivated by a sexual attraction to young children. Recent research indicates that between 1-3% of U.S. men (approximately 1.18 million to 3.54 million men) are sexually attracted to prepubescent children [7]. This attraction develops at an early stage, perhaps in utero [8-10] and typically emerges at the same time as gender preferences become clear – that is, in early adolescence.

As featured on a recent episode of NPR's *This American Life* [11] and described in a piece recently published by Luke Malone in *Medium* [12]—which featured interviews with Elizabeth Letourneau (co-author)—living with a sexual attraction to children can be difficult, especially for adolescents and young adults. Yet there are no treatment services or resources available for young people experiencing a sexual attraction to children before they perpetrate sexual harm. To address this need, ATSA members are working together to develop *Help Wanted*, a primary prevention program for adolescents who have expressed a sexual interest in prepubescent children. The goal of this intervention is to promote self-acceptance and self-esteem while maintaining the message that children must never be sexually touched or harmed. More broadly, this project aims to change the way we think and talk about CSA and prevention.

The purpose of the proposed paper presentation is to present findings from the first phase of this effort. This paper is directly responsive to the ATSA conference's theme of "Breaking New Ground: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Abuse" because it uses data from interviews with non-offending young adults with a sexual attraction to prepubescent children to guide discussions about preventing CSA. To date, more than 30 adults who are sexually attracted to children, but have not offended against a child, have contacted Elizabeth Letourneau and expressed an interest in sharing their own experiences. Qualitative interviews with these participants will focus on adolescent experiences with sexual attraction to children, coping strategies developed during adolescence, and needs that went unanswered—each component informing the subsequent development of the *Help Wanted* primary prevention program.

The proposed presentation will highlight results from this qualitative study of non-offending pedophiles. The discussion of results will include visual data maps depicting key patterns and relationships, as well as qualitative data summaries with illustrative

examples. Implications for prevention and the development of Phase 2 of *Help Wanted* will also be discussed.

Goals of the Poster Presentation:

1. To examine early adolescent experiences with sexual attraction to prepubescent children using a sample of non-offending young adult pedophiles.
2. To understand coping strategies or techniques used by study participants to manage their sexual attraction to prepubescent children.
3. To identify potential targets of intervention to inform the development of Help Wanted and other prevention projects.

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