



# From sexual thoughts to sexual offences

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## What is a sexual thought?

A thought with sexual content and/or a thought about something that's sexually arousing.

The thought could be a sexual fantasy but it might not be.



## Sexual thoughts and sexual offending

Theories of sexual offending argue that sexual thoughts play a role in sexual offending and reoffending.

(e.g. Abel & Blanchard, 1974; McGuire, Carlisle & Young, 1965; Ward, Polaschek & Beech, 2006).

Sexual offenders' sexual thoughts are examined during assessment and are addressed in interventions.

(e.g. Brown, 2005; Thornton, 2002).

## 4 The Sexual Thoughts Project

🔍 If and how are sexual thoughts related to sexual offending?

🔍 Detailed and completely anonymous computerised survey.

🔍 6289 men aged 18 – 90 including men from the community and from prison.

🔍 54 to 262 open- and closed-ended questions on sexual thoughts.



## Questions for today

- Prevalence of sexual thoughts of children?
- Which offenders most likely to have these thoughts?
- Link between sexual thoughts of children and committing a sexual offence?
- Do sexual offenders and non-offenders experience different sexual thoughts of children?
- What are the implications for preventing sexual abuse?

## Sexual offenders

93 men from a medium security prison convicted for one or more sexual offences.



## Non-offenders

Selected 93 men from the UK who had not committed any offences (non-offenders).

Each non-offender matched to a sexual offender on age, education and gender of adult sexual partners.

28%

of sexual offenders  
had sexual thoughts  
of children



15%

of non-offenders had  
sexual thoughts of  
children



Children = Age 15 and under



## Which sexual offenders experience them?

- A high sexual interest in children.
- Offended against children, or adults and children.
- A greater number of victims.
- Male victims.
- Victims who aren't related to them.

# Relationship with likelihood of sexual offending and reoffending



## Examining the content of the thoughts

- Open-ended description with follow-up questions.
- Coded the characteristics of the sexual thought (people, events, setting, dynamics, etc.), ignoring group membership.
- Used a statistical technique (latent class analysis) to group together codes that occurred together.

# Self

44%

of total sample

Sex offenders

Non-offenders

Oral and vaginal sex with an attractive pubescent school girl, occasionally with a fetishistic element. Focuses on his sexual desire and enjoyment.

# Mutual

38%

of total sample

Sex offenders

Non-offenders

A man and prepubescent child he knows take turns to engage in a range of sexual acts with each other in a home setting. Focuses on mutual desire.

# Prompted other

38%

of total sample

Sex offenders

Non-offenders

Non-specific description of sexual activity with a female child he knows. Child's emotions given only when asked, often their sexual desire.

## Treatment implications of the typology

Each type might indicate different treatment needs.

- Self type: Sexual interest in children and sexual objectification of children.
- Mutual type: Emotional congruence with children.

# Conclusions for interventions with potential perpetrators

- Sexual thoughts of children experienced by 1 in 7 non-offenders.
- These thoughts do appear to be a risk factor for sexual offending.
- Reports of experiencing the Mutual type of sexual thought might be particularly concerning.

# Conclusions for interventions with perpetrators

- Sexual thoughts of children do appear to be a risk factor for sexual reoffending.
- These thoughts don't need to be a treatment target for all perpetrators.
  - Most common in persistent sexual offenders with a sexual interest in children and who offend against boys outside of the family.
- The interpersonal context within perpetrators' sexual thoughts might indicate different treatment needs.

Thank you

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