

Female Sex Offenders

by Darcia Helle

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Female sex offenders receive more lenient prison sentences, suffer fewer prison assaults, and are granted earlier parole than their male counterparts. Overall, female sex offenders are not considered as dangerous as males. Females do not tend to use weapons, aggression, or violence during the commission of a sex crime. According to one study, less than 20-percent of female sex offenders ever resort to force. Even when it comes to sex crimes, women are viewed as the gentler sex.

Violent or not, these women are abusers and sex offenders.

While statistics vary slightly, the consensus is that, within the United States, women commit three- to four-percent of reported sexual assaults. Females commit less than 10-percent of all types of sexual offenses combined.

Janet Warren, a psychiatrist, and Julia Hislop, a psychologist, have researched the subject of female sex offenders. They divide these women into six separate categories:

1. Facilitators: These women intentionally help men gain access to children for sexual purposes.
2. Reluctant Partners: These women are in long term relationships and, out of fear, aid their partner in sexual exploitation of a minor.
3. Initiating Partner: These women want to sexually harm a child but might or might not do it themselves. At times, this type of offender may get a man or another woman to perform the act while she watches.
4. Seducers and Lovers: These women direct their sexual interest toward adolescents with whom they develop an intense attachment.
5. Pedophiles: This type of sexual offender is rare in females. These women desire an exclusive sexual relationship with a child.
6. Psychotic: These mentally ill women have inappropriate sexual contact with children.

Studies of female sex offenders are relatively rare. According to 2002 statistics by the U.S. Department of Justice, females comprise just 1.2-percent of arrests for rape and 8-percent of arrests for all other sex offenses combined. A 2002 assessment of female registered sex offenders shows that the offenders were almost all white, with an average age of 31 at the time of their first offense. A slight majority of their victims were female. An astounding 94-percent of the victims were related to the offender.

Contrary to the hype by some news media, the number of adult female sex offender has not increased in recent years. However, research does show that between 1997 and 2002, female *juvenile* sexual offenses rose 62-percent for violent sex crimes and 42-percent for non-violent sex crimes.

In 2004, the Department of Education commissioned a study called *Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature*. This study found that nearly 10-percent of students in U.S. public schools have suffered unwanted sexual advances, including groping and rape, by school employees. These offenders were not all teachers and the vast majority was not female. However, the numbers are alarming and should receive far more serious attention.

Teachers are in a unique position to target vulnerable children. Their behavior is often subtle and deceiving. The student may form a bond with the teacher and gradually become accustomed to inappropriate touching and remarks. By the time the student realizes what is going on, he or she may feel complicit and consequently fail to report the abuse.

Another large problem is our society's sad tendency to behave as if boys are not harmed by the sexual advances of an adult female. In fact, society often treats the boy as if he has received a largely sought after prize. The truth is that sexual abuse is psychologically damaging to both girls and boys. Several studies have shown that an overwhelming percentage of boys who were sexually abused by women grow up to be sex offenders themselves. These men target women, perhaps as a means of expressing their rage against the female who sexually and psychologically violated them.

Sexual contact at a young age by a trusted adult female breaches all boundaries and therefore the child may fail to learn appropriate behavior. Studies have shown that sexual abuse of a child causes psychological damage that extends into the child's adult life. Problems can include:

- Difficulty in forming long-term relationships.
- Sexually risky behavior that may lead to STDs, including AIDs.
- Physical ailments, immune system disorders, increased illnesses and hospitalizations
- Depression
- Suicide

The disparity in the way that our society views sexual offenders is extreme. A male teacher received a twenty-six year sentence for having sex with one teenage student, while a female coach received only thirty days for having sex with three students, one only eleven-years-old.

An adolescent boy being sexually used and manipulated is not cause for slaps on the back and calls of kudos from his pals. We need to remember that these are still the children whose care we entrusted to supposedly responsible adults. Male or female, boy or girl, the boundaries – and the punishment – should be the same.