

# **SAN DIEGO COUNTY SEXUALLY ABUSIVE YOUTH PROFILE**

MARCH 24, 2003

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## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

A typology for sexually abusive youth does not currently exist. This is because the range of offenses and behaviors vary across demographics. However, other research has identified some characteristics that are frequently shared by sexually abusive youth (Becker, 1998; Bourke & Donohue, 1996; CSOM, 1999; Knight & Prentky, 1993; Martin & Pruett, 1998).

To aid in the development of standardized protocols for the assessment, treatment, and management of sexually abusive youth in San Diego County, a profile of juvenile sex offenders in San Diego was created and compared to other studies. A total of 60 juveniles were randomly selected from 101 youth identified as sexually abusive by the San Diego County Probation Department between June 1998 and June 2002. This profile is one of several research activities being conducted by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) in order to assist the Sex Offender Management Council (SOMC) in developing a system for managing adult sex offenders and sexually abusive youth.

Information regarding these juveniles was obtained by SANDAG through review of Probation case files. The data collection instrument was based on an instrument recommended by the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) to obtain data about juvenile sex offenders. This instrument was modified to incorporate specific variables of interest to SOMC. The data were collected by SANDAG staff and reviewed to insure consistency and accuracy.

The goal of the data collection effort was to examine the characteristics of sexually abusive youth and to identify risk factors and behavioral issues, which should be addressed in treatment and management of sexually abusive youth.

When interpreting these findings, it is important to keep in mind that the sample population only includes juveniles referred to Probation for a sex offense where the outcome of the offense resulted in adjudication (or continued adjudication) of the youth for a sustained sexually violent offense. Youth referred to Probation for a sexually violent offense whose petitions were dismissed were not included. With this caveat in mind, the following profile is a description of the characteristics of a sample of sexually abusive youth in San Diego County.

## **OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS**

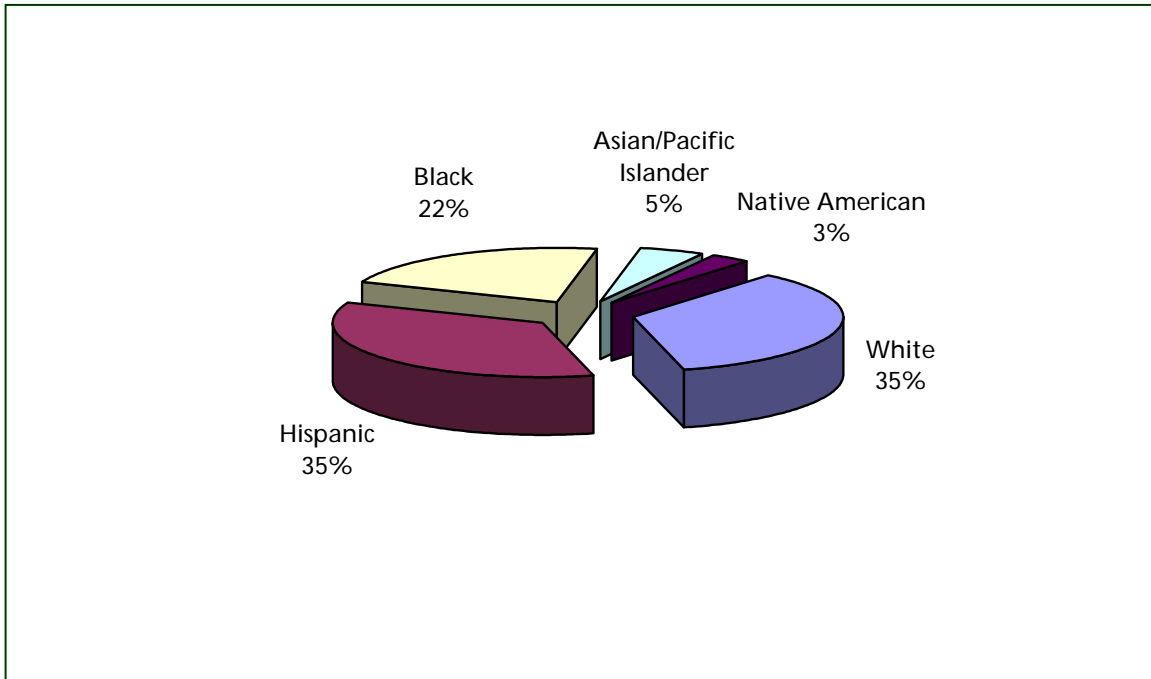
### **Gender**

The majority of the sexually abusive youth under probation supervision were male (98%) (not shown). Other profiles also show that these offenders are predominately male (Becker, 1998 and CSOM, 1999).

## Ethnicity

The sexually abusive youth sampled were from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Thirty-five percent (35%) were White<sup>1</sup>, and another 35 percent were Hispanic. Nearly one-quarter (22%) of the youth were Black, and the remainder were Asian or Native American (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**RACE/ETHNICITY**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



Total = 60

## OFFENDER PROFILE AT TIME OF OFFENSE

The following information describes various characteristics of 60 sexually abusive youth at the time of the instant offense.

### Age

The average age of the juvenile at the time of the sex offense was 13.2 years old, ranging from 10 to 17. A profile published by CSOM states that the majority of sexually abusive youth are ages 13 to 17 (CSOM, 1999). The majority (68%) of the youth in the San Diego profile fall into the same age range, with the remaining one-third less than 13 years old at the time of the offense (not shown).

<sup>1</sup> The ethnic groups in this report are referred to as Hispanic, White, Black, Asian, and Native American in the text. While many people may prefer to identify themselves as African American rather than Black, Latino rather than Hispanic, or as a member of a particular ethnic group rather than White or Asian, SANDAG uses the terminology consistent with the 1990 Census questionnaire to ensure comparability with historical data.

## Living Situation

Table 1 shows, the majority (83%) of sexually abusive youth on formal probation were living with their mother at the time of the offense. Seventy-eight percent (78%) were living with siblings, including biological siblings and stepsiblings. Thirty-eight percent (38%) were living with their father, and one-quarter (25%) were living with a stepparent. The rest were living with other family members or in other situations, including custody.

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**Table 1**  
**HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS/LIVING SITUATION AT TIME OF OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

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Mother	
Siblings	78%
Father	38%
Stepfather	18%
Other family members	17%
Stepmother	7%
Other	5%
Custody	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>

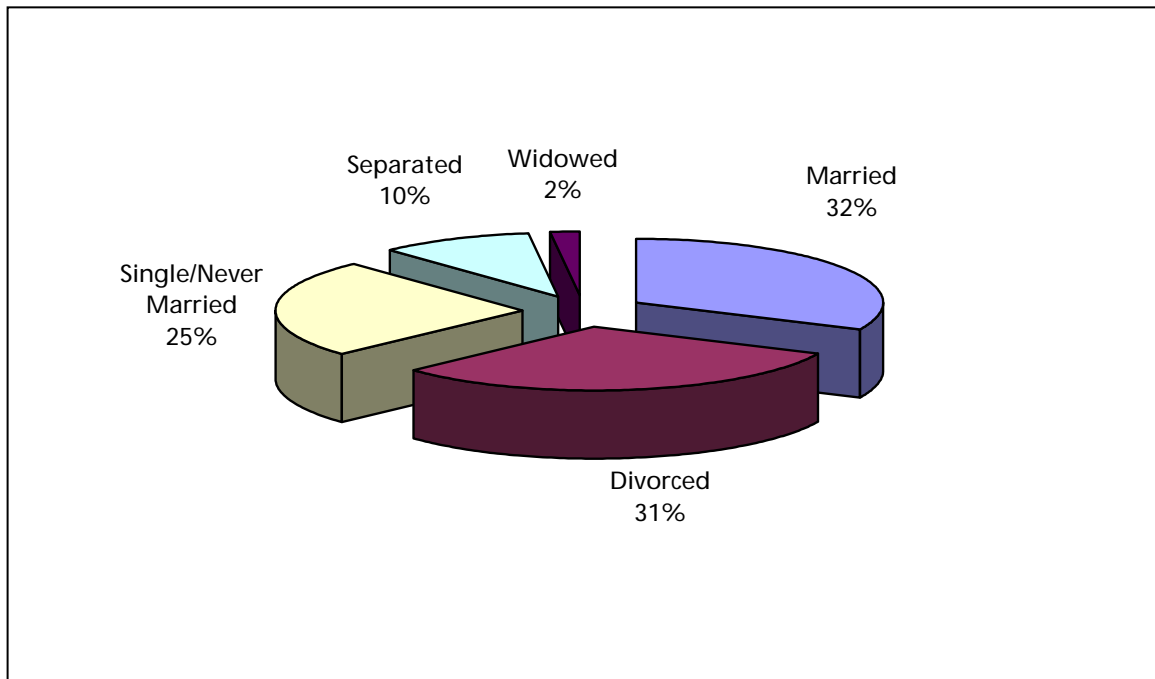
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*Note: Percentages based on multiple responses.*

In terms of legal guardianship at the time of the sex offense, the majority of youth (88%) were under the legal care of their mothers. For 40 percent of the youth, their father was a legal guardian. Stepparents and other relatives were the legal guardians of the remainder of the youth (not shown).

At the time of the offense, most of the sexually abusive youth had parents who were not married. The parents of over 40 percent of the youth were either divorced (31%) or separated (10%), and one-quarter (25%) of the youth had biological parents who were never married. Only one-third (32%) of the youths' biological parents were married (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
**PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

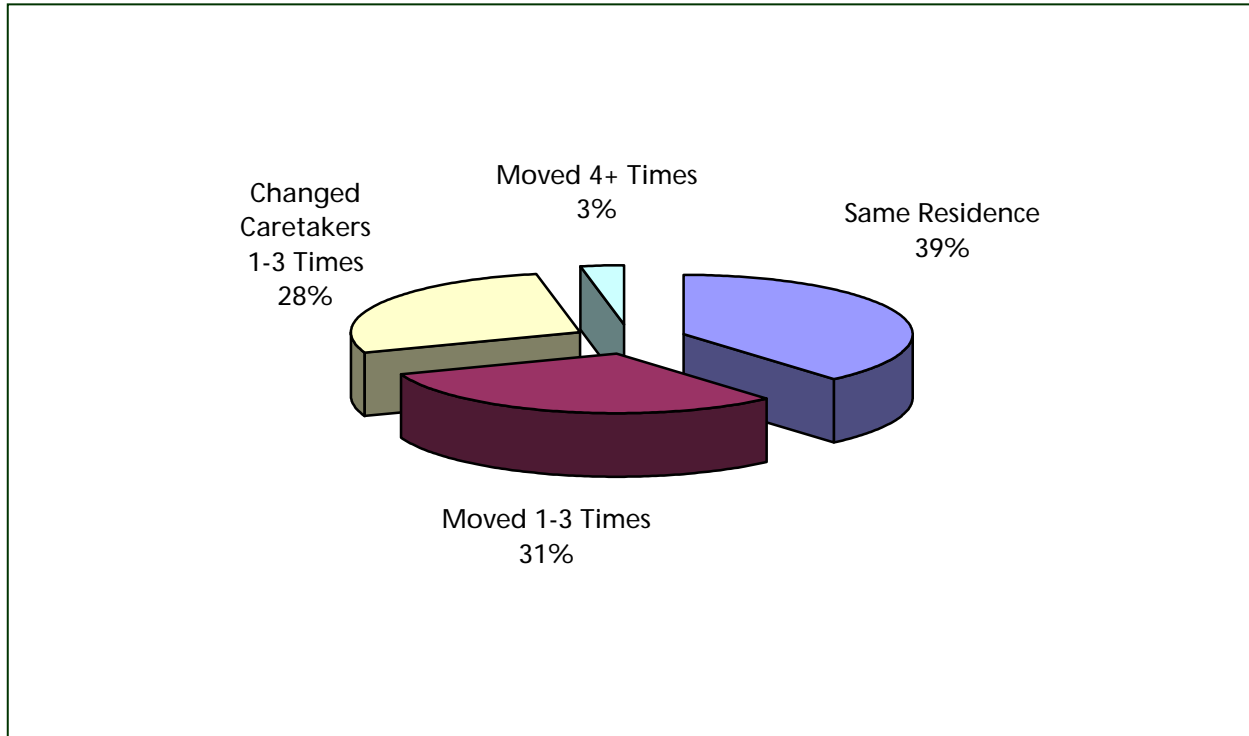


**Total = 59**

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

In regards to residence stability, over 60 percent of the sexually abusive youth have either moved (34%) or changed relative caretakers (28%) within the two years prior to the instant offense (Figure 3). The remainder (39%) had continually resided at the same address in the same two-year time period. Nearly half (45%) of youth also had a parent or guardian with a criminal history (not shown).

**Figure 3**  
**RESIDENCE STABILITY**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 36**

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

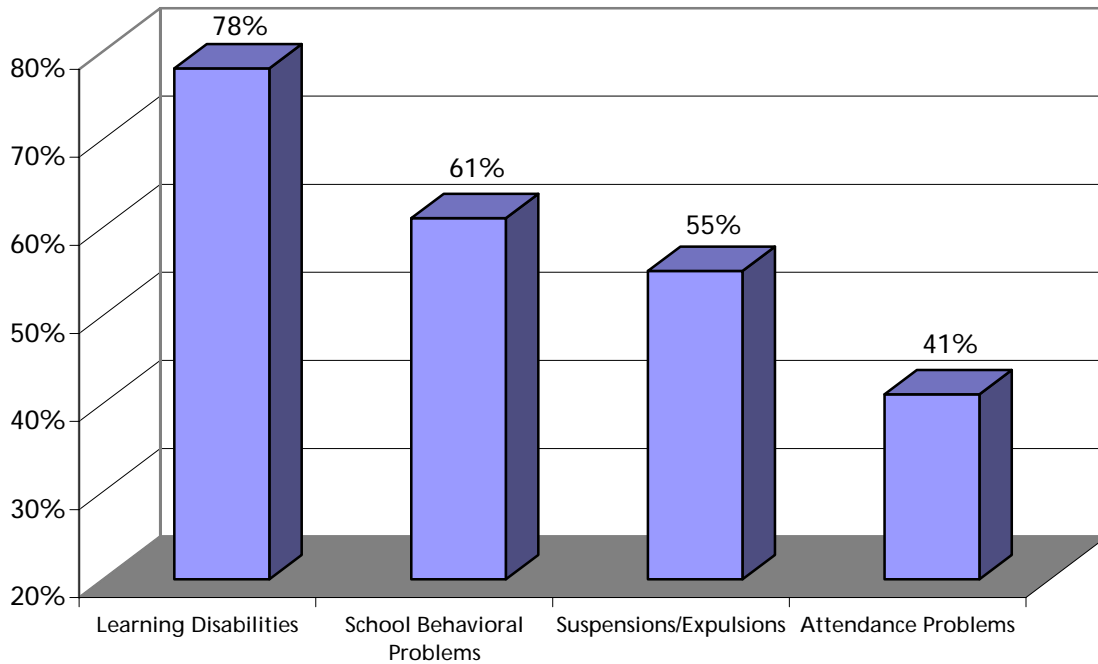
## Education

According to Probation Department case files, the majority (59%) of sexually abusive youth attended regular public school at the time of the instant offense. Nearly one-quarter (24%) were in special education, and the rest were in home study (8%), court school (5%), or alternative school (3%) (not shown).

Although the sample population ranged in grade from fifth to twelfth at the time of the sex offense, the majority of youth fell into the middle school grade range, with the largest percentage of youth (33%) in eighth grade (not shown). In terms of academic achievement, the largest percentage (39%) of youth had a C average (not shown).

According to recent literature, school issues such as learning disabilities and behavioral problems tend to be major risk factors for sexually abusive youth. Consistent with previous findings, school performance and behavioral problems were also evident for a large percentage of the sample of sexually abusive youth in San Diego County. As illustrated in Figure 4, over three quarters (78%) were diagnosed with learning disabilities, visual, speech or reading disabilities, or had a learning disability but the type of learning disability was not specified. Sixty-one percent (61%) were reported as having school behavioral problems, including disruptive classroom behavior, fighting, defiance, and use of profanity. Forty-one percent (41%) of the youth had attendance problems, and over half (55%) had either been suspended or expelled prior to the instant offense. In addition, four youth were documented in Probation Department case files as being severely emotionally disturbed and one youth was noted as receiving AB2726 services, which are mental health services administered to special education students (not shown).

**Figure 4**  
**PERCENT OF YOUTH WITH SCHOOL-RELATED RISK ISSUES**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 45-56**

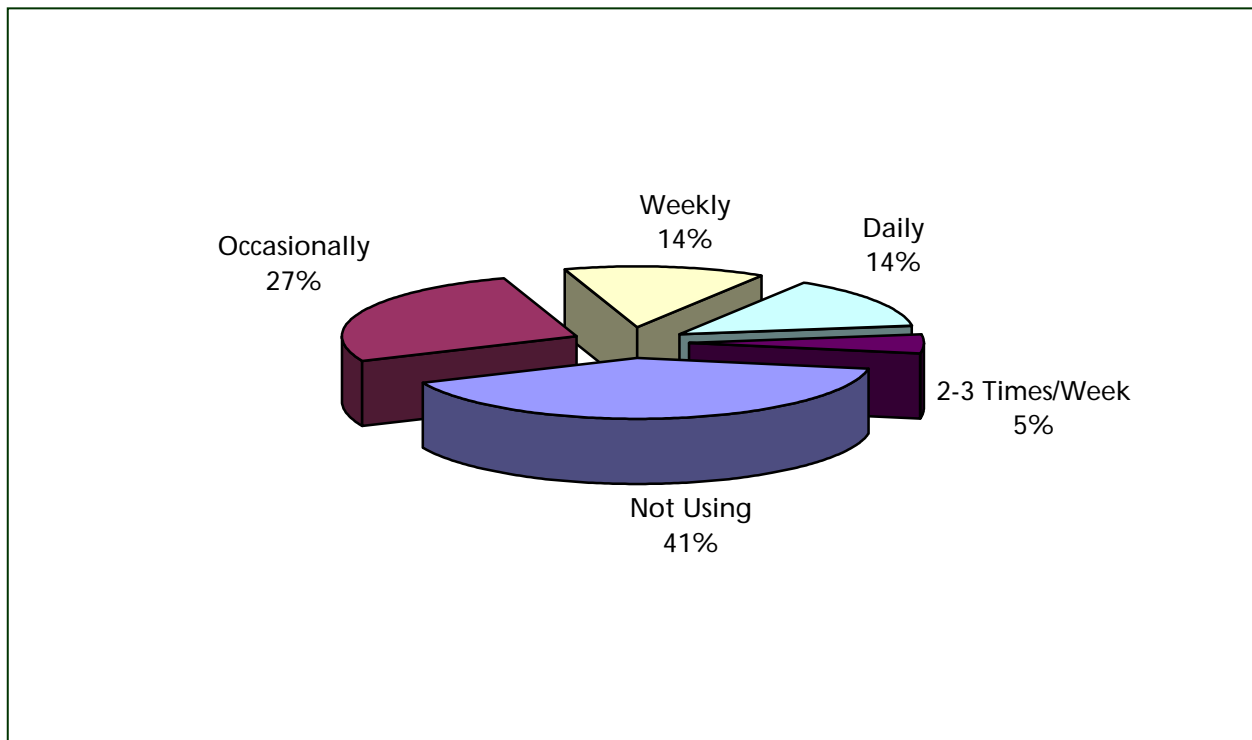
*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

## Substance Abuse History

Forty-one percent (41%) of sexually abusive youth had experimented with drugs prior to the instant offense. On average, youth were 12.5 years old at the time of their first use, ranging from 8 to 18 years old. Although more youth had tried drugs at some time in their life, only 23 percent of youth were using drugs at the time of the offense (not shown).

As illustrated in Figure 5, of those with a history of drug use, the largest percent of youth (41%) were no longer using at the time of the offense. Over one-quarter (27%) were using occasionally, 14 percent were using weekly, another 14 percent used daily, and the remaining youth (5%) were using a few times a week. Only one sexually abusive youth received previous treatment for drug abuse, but the treatment program was not completed prior to the instant offense (not shown).

**Figure 5**  
**DRUG USE AROUND THE TIME OF THE INSTANT OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 22**

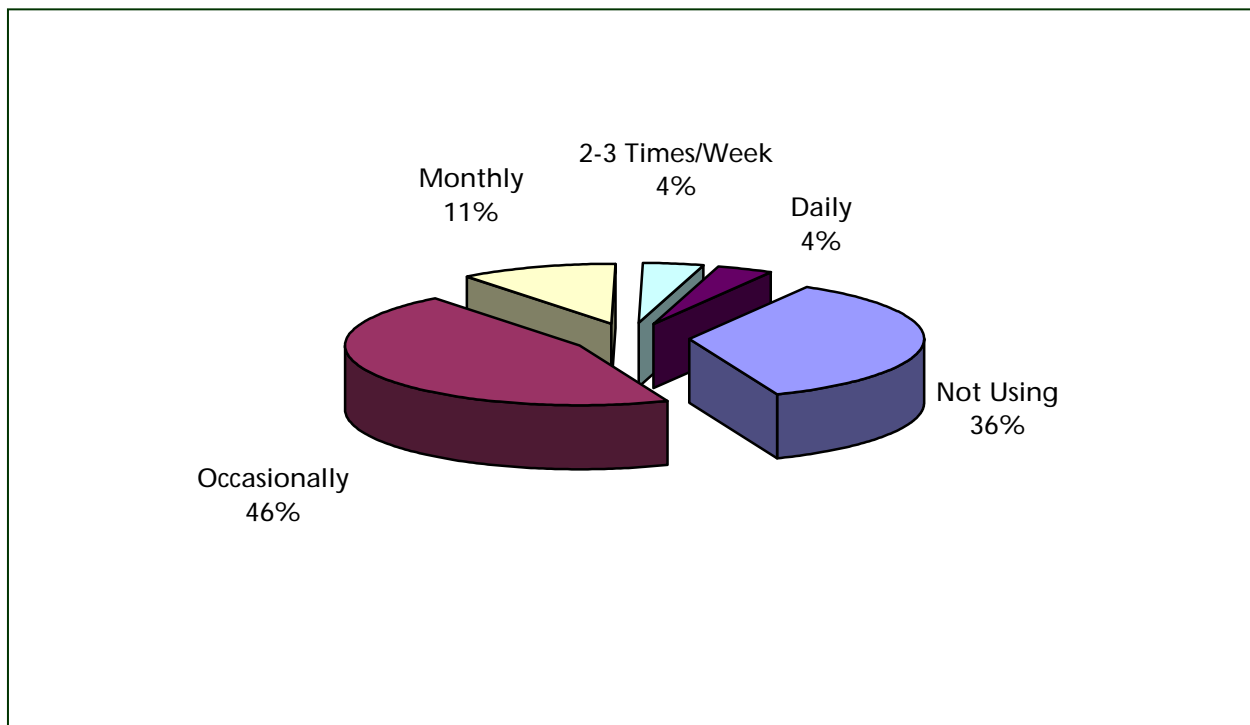
*Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding. Cases with missing information not included.*



In regards to alcohol consumption, half (50%) of the sexually abusive youth had a history of alcohol use at some point prior to the instant offense. The mean age of first use was 12.0 years and ranged from 6 to 18 (not shown). At the time of the sex offense, 31 percent of the sample population was still using alcohol.

As illustrated in Figure 6, of those with a history of alcohol use, over one third (36%) were no longer using around the time of the offense. Forty-six percent (46%) were using only occasionally and the rest were using monthly (11%), a few times a week (4%), or daily (4%). There was no documentation of prior alcohol abuse treatment for any of the sexually abusive offenders sampled.

**Figure 6**  
**ALCOHOL USE AROUND THE TIME OF THE INSTANT OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 28**

*Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding. Cases with missing information not included.*

For nearly half (49%) of the youth there was a history of drug use by another household member. Of the known relationships, the parent(s) or guardian(s) was always identified as the household drug user. There was also a history of alcohol abuse in the households of over half (52%) of the sexually abusive youth. Again, the parent(s) or guardian(s) was identified as the household user for all of the known relationships (not shown).

The literature to date is inconclusive about the propensity of substance abuse as a risk factor for sexual offenses. The prevalence and intensity of use by sexually abusive youth is often lower than youth who commit non-sexual offenses, for which substance abuse is a risk factor. One literature review found that the percentage of sexually abusive youth who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense varies from 3 to 72 percent (Lightfoot & Barbaree, 1993

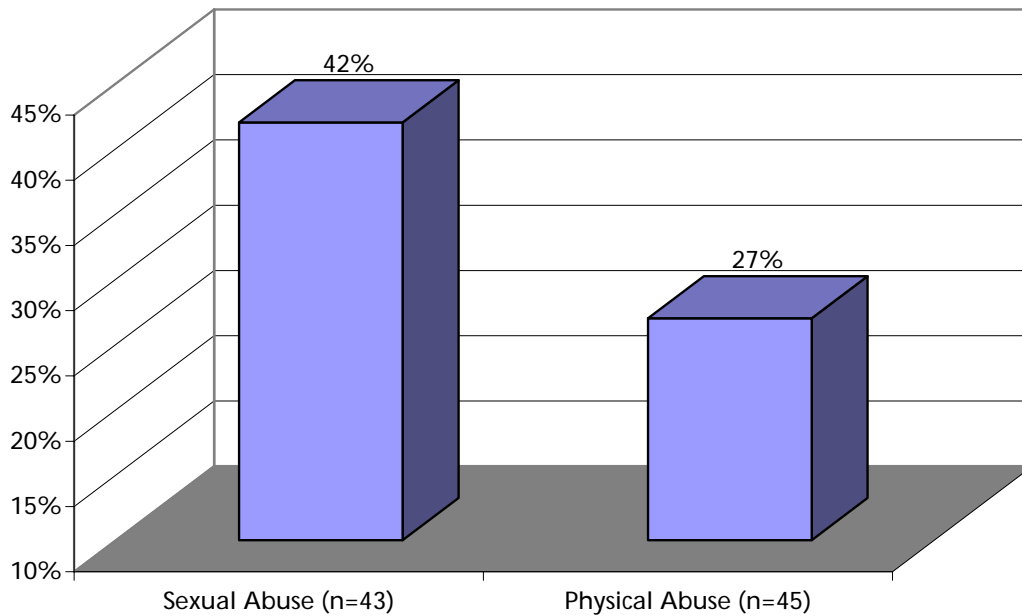
cited in Becker 1998). This high variance makes it difficult to determine the relationship between sexual offending and substance abuse.

### Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Abuse History

Adolescent sexual offenders have been noted to have a higher frequency of sexual and physical abuse in their backgrounds (Becker, 1998). Many (42%) of the sexually abusive youth in the San Diego profile had themselves been victims of sexual abuse prior to the instant offense (Figure 7). The majority were abused by a relative, including a parent/stepparent (12%), a sibling (6%), or another relative (41%). Acquaintances (12%), neighbors (6%), and strangers (6%) were some of the non-related perpetrators. The youth were 7.4 years old, on average, at the time of the first sexual abuse incident and ages ranged from 3 to 15 years old (not shown).

Also illustrated in Figure 7, over one-quarter (27%) of sexually abusive youth were victims of physical abuse prior to the instant offense. On average, these youth were 8.8 years old when the first physical abuse incident occurred and ranged in age from 1 to 12. For 83 percent of the physical abuse cases, the perpetrator was a parent or stepparent (not shown).

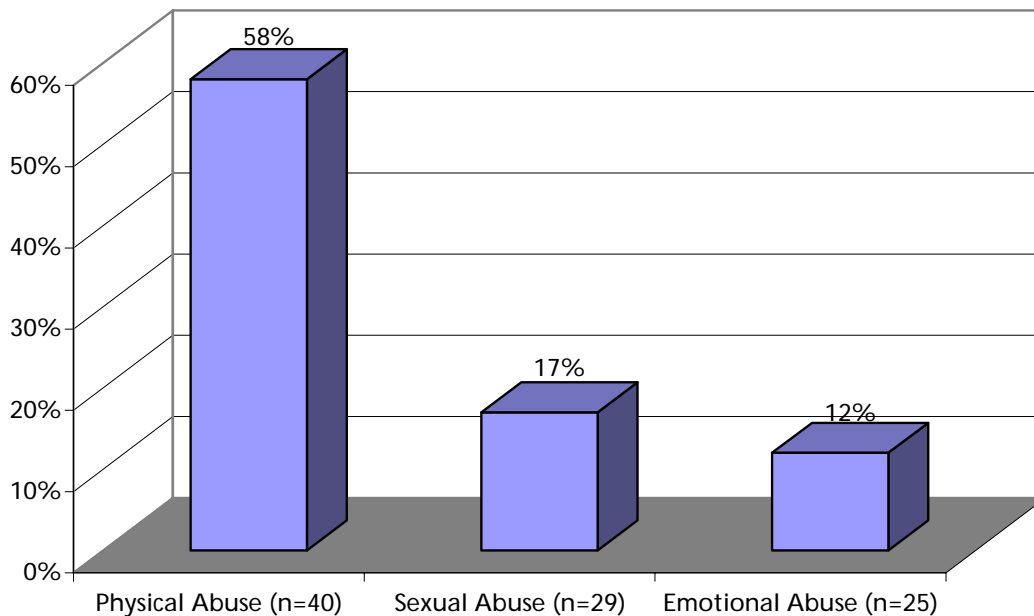
**Figure 7**  
**PRIOR SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE OF OFFENDER**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

In regards to family violence within the youth's household (but excluding the youth), physical abuse (including domestic violence and child abuse) was documented for over half (58%) of the youth's families. Seventeen percent (17%) of the households had a history of sexual abuse within the family, and 12 percent had a history of emotional abuse (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**  
**OFFENDER FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

When reviewing Child Protective Services (CPS) records, the families of nearly half (48%) of the sexually abusive youth had at least one referral to CPS. Of the families with CPS records, these families had an average of 6.8 referrals (ranging from 1 to 24). For over one quarter (28%) of these families, at least one of the referrals was substantiated (not shown).

## Mental Health History

At or prior to the instant offense, 82 percent of the sexually abusive youth received an Axis I diagnosis for a clinical disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). A report published by CSOM (1999) has estimated that up to 80 percent of sexually abusive youth have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, most often youth suffer from depression or anti-social disorders. Two major risk factors for sexually abusive youth are deficits in self-esteem and social isolation. In a study by Fehrenbach (1986), two-thirds of the sexually abusive youth showed signs of social isolation, with 32 percent reporting no friends at all. The poor social skills of these youth isolate the juvenile from meaningful peer relationships and impede appropriate social relationships (Greaves, OPenshaw & Adams, 1992). Social isolation can often manifest in clinical diagnoses.

The most common diagnoses for the San Diego profile includes dysthymia, parent-child relational disorder conduct disorder, depression, impulse control disorder, adolescent anti-social disorder, and substance abuse. Table 2 shows the percentages for some disorders that may result in inappropriate behavior. Often the youth were diagnosed with more than one disorder. For example a youth may have had depressive disorder and self-medicated through illegal drug use and therefore, was also diagnosed with substance abuse disorder. Dysthymic disorder was diagnosed for twenty percent of the youth. This disorder is characterized by a depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, as indicated either by subjective account or observation by others for at least two years. For children, the duration must be at least one year (PsychologyNet, 2002).

The case files showed that some youth were diagnosed with adolescent anti-social behavior disorder, and others were diagnosed with conduct disorder. Both diagnoses pertain to behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. As noted above, a risk factor for sexually abusive youth is difficulty interacting appropriately with peers. Possibly, the fear of rejection from a peer or inability to act in age-appropriate ways directs the juvenile to commit sexual offenses, in which children were targeted.

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**Table 2**  
**PERCENT OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE YOUTH WITH SPECIFIC CLINICAL DISORDERS ACCORDING**  
**TO DSM-IV DIAGNOSES**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

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Depression (Dysthemic Disorder, Depression, and Major Depressive Disorder)	35%
Conduct Disorder/Adolescent Anti-Social Behavior Disorder	17%
Adjustment Disorder	12%
Impulse Control Disorder	5%
Anxiety Disorder	5%
Other (e.g., ADHD, Substance Abuse, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)	60%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>

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Sixty-two percent (62%) of youth were previously prescribed medication for mental health disorders. The medications prescribed were primarily used to treat depression and ADHD. None of the sexually abusive youth were diagnosed with mental retardation or developmental disabilities. Two of the 60 youth had documentation of psychiatric hospitalization prior to the instant offense (not shown).

## Risk Indicators

All sexually abusive youth were assessed for having various sex offense-related and non-sex offense-related risk indicators at the time of the instant offense. Table 3 shows the percent of youth assessed as having each of the captured risk factors.

<b>Table 3</b>	
<b>PERCENT OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE YOUTH DEMONSTRATING RISK INDICATORS</b>	
<b>San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003</b>	
Viewed Pornographic Materials (magazines, movies, internet)	98%
Masturbatory Patterns	81%
Have Not Discussed Sex With Parents	74%
History of Assaultive Behavior	62%
Deviant Sexual Fantasies	39%
History of Deviant Non-Sexual Interests	38%
Sexually Active (consensual)	36%
History of Enuresis	33%
History of Animal Cruelty	17%
Prior School Record for Sexual Offenses	16%
Gang Association/Involvement	16%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18-49</b>

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

The majority of juveniles in the San Diego profile had viewed pornographic materials. Becker and Stein (1991) found that 89% of sexually abusive youth reported using sexually explicit materials, mainly magazines.

Also measured as a risk fact, was lack of involvement in pro-social activities. Oftentimes, delinquent non-sexually abusive youth demonstrate little positive involvement in their communities. However, unlike the typical juvenile offender, over half (59%) of the sexually abusive youth sampled did participate in pro-social activities prior to the instant offense, often including sports and church youth groups (not shown).

## Offender Prior Criminal History

At the time of the instant offense, 82 percent of the sexually abusive youth had no prior interaction with the criminal justice system. One of the typical characteristics of sexually abusive youth profiles is that these youth often have prior law enforcement referrals for sex offenses (Martin and Pruett, 1998). If this is typical, then San Diego law enforcement and Probation Department are in a unique position to manage sexually abusive youth before they re-offend since the majority of sexually abusive youth in this profile do not have a prior referral for a sex offense. However, this does not mean that for the youth sampled that this was their first sex offense, rather the first that was captured by the criminal justice system.

Of those few youth with a criminal history, three were prior Counseled and Closed or Informal Probation cases (two for a property offense and one for an "other"<sup>2</sup> offense), and one youth had a prior Juvenile Traffic Citation for an "other" offense. Two youth received a sustained petition for a violent offense at the misdemeanor level, three youth had a true finding for a property offense (two at the misdemeanor level and one at the felony level), and another three had sustained petitions for "other" offenses (two at the misdemeanor level and one at the felony level). Only one youth in 60 had a true finding for a sex offense (at the felony level) prior to the instant sex offense, and this incident included penile vaginal penetration of the victim. Seven (12%) of the youth were made wards prior to the instant offense, and none of them had completed their wardship prior to the time the instant offense was committed (not shown).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRENT OFFENSE

### Offense Level and Type

The majority (63%) of the sexually abusive youth were referred to Probation for 288(A) P.C., "Lewd or Lascivious act with a child under 14." Other referral charges included continuous sexual abuse of a child, forced oral copulation, sexual penetration by force, rape, and sexual battery. Almost all (92%) of the youth had a referral for a sexually violent offense at the felony level. On average, youth were referred for 3.7 sex offense counts (ranging from 1 to 9)(not shown).

In regards to the sustained offenses, half (50%) of youth received a true finding for committing a lewd act with a child, with the other sustained sex offenses similar to the referral charges. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the youth received a sustained petition for a sex offense at the felony level.<sup>3</sup> On average, 1.2 sex offense counts were sustained (ranging from 0 to 3), most of which were at the felony level. The remaining referral counts were dismissed with Harvey Waivers (not shown).

### Co-Participants

Most of the sexually abusive youth did not have a co-participant during the offense. Only five offenders (8%) committed the sexual abuse act with the help of one or two other juvenile co-participants. For some of these cases, information was available on the outcomes of the co-

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<sup>2</sup> Offense type categories include sex offenses, *other* violent offenses, property offenses, drug offenses, and "other" offenses.

<sup>3</sup> For one case out of 60, the sex offense was dismissed with a Harvey Waiver, and the youth received a sustained petition for a non-sex offense. Because this youth would still be placed into the Juvenile Sex Offender Unit of the San Diego County Probation Department, the case was included in the analysis.

participants' involvement, although to varying degrees. Three files documented the co-participant receiving a referral to Probation for his/her involvement, one which only reported a referral was made, and two cases reported that referrals were made for violent sexual offenses (one at the misdemeanor level and another at the felony level). One co-participant had a true finding at the felony level for being an accessory to the offense, and in the second case, the co-participant did not receive a sustained petition (not shown).

## **Victim Characteristics**

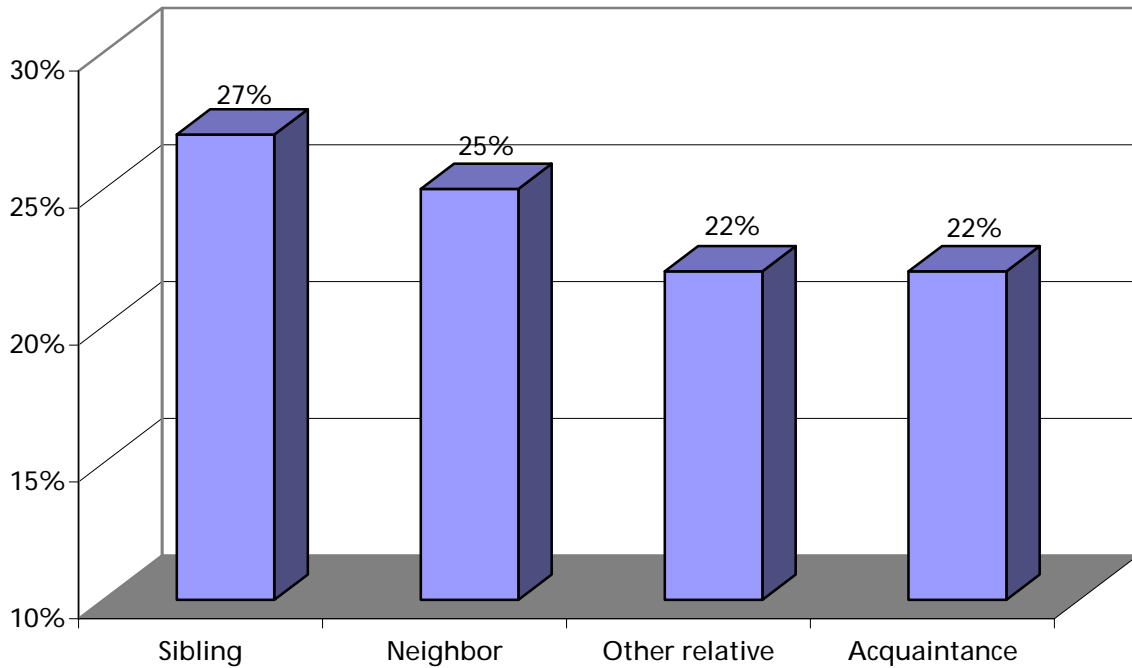
For all of the sexual offenses committed by the 60 youth sampled, there were a total of 98 victims, with slightly more female (51%) victims than male (49%). The majority of the sex offenses (52%) only involved one victim, while the total number of victims ranged from one to four (not shown).

In terms of gender preferences, 47 percent of the offenders exclusively targeted males. Thirty-two percent (32%) victimized only female, and for the remaining 22 percent of offenders, targeted both male and female victims in the instant offense (not shown).

The average victim age was 8.6 years, with the male victims tending to be slightly younger (7.5 years, ranging from 3 to 15) than the female victims (9.9 years, ranging from 3 to 16, with one 51 year old) (not shown).

As Figure 9 shows, the most common relationships between the offender and the victim were siblings (27%), neighbors (25%), other relatives (22%), and acquaintances (22%). Other offender relationships to the victim include authority figures (3%), boyfriends/girlfriends (3%), friends (2%), and strangers (3%). Forty percent (40%) of the offenders lived with the victim at the time of the offense (not shown).

**Figure 9**  
**OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP TO THE VICTIM IN THE INSTANT OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 60**

*Note: Percentages based on multiple responses.*



Perpetrators whose victims were siblings were most likely to have a history of physical or sexual abuse. Table 4 shows the frequency of physical or sexual abuse by perpetrator relationship to the victim. Over half of the sexually abusive youth who victims were sibling had themselves been physically abused and over on-quarter had been sexually abused.

**Table 4**  
**PERCENT OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY OR SEXUALLY**  
**ABUSED BY PERPETRATOR RELATIONSHIP TO THE VICTIM**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

<i>Perpetrator Relationship to Victim for the Instant Offense</i>	<i>Physical Abuse</i>	<i>Sexual Abuse</i>
Stranger/casual	8%	0%
Acquaintance	8%	17%
Friend	0%	0%
Sibling	58%*	28%
Date/Girlfriend or Boyfriend	0%	0%
Other relative	8%	22%
Babysitter/tutor/mentor	8%	11%
Neighbor	17%	28%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	

\* Note: Difference significant at the .01 level. Statistical test, Chi-Square Results  $\chi^2 (1, N=45)=6.91$

The behavior of the juvenile offender during the instant offense was captured using a list of 32 possible actions against the victim. Table 5 illustrates the percent of sexually abusive youth who had sustained counts for each of the possible offensive behaviors. The most common behavior against the victim was touching the victim's body parts "skin to skin," which occurred in almost half (47%) of the instant offenses. Offenses documented as "other" include urination on the victim and forcing multiple victims to commit sexual acts with each other. While the list below provides the frequency of behaviors, in most cases the offender committed a combination of offense behaviors, rather than just one.

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**Table 5**  
**JUVENILE OFFENDER BEHAVIORS IN THE INSTANT OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

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Touching body parts ("skin to skin")	47%
Sodomization of victim	33%
Fellatio by victim	28%
Frottage	25%
Physical force	25%
Fellatio on victim	23%
Digital vaginal penetration of victim	22%
Penile vaginal penetration of victim	20%
Cunnilingus on victim	18%
Masturbation during offense	13%
Verbal coercion	12%
Anal penetration by victim	10%
Exhibiting	7%
Masturbation by victim	7%
Digital anal penetration of victim	5%
Object penetration of vagina of victim	3%
Weapon possession	3%
Weapon use	3%
Masturbation of victim	2%
Other	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59-60</b>

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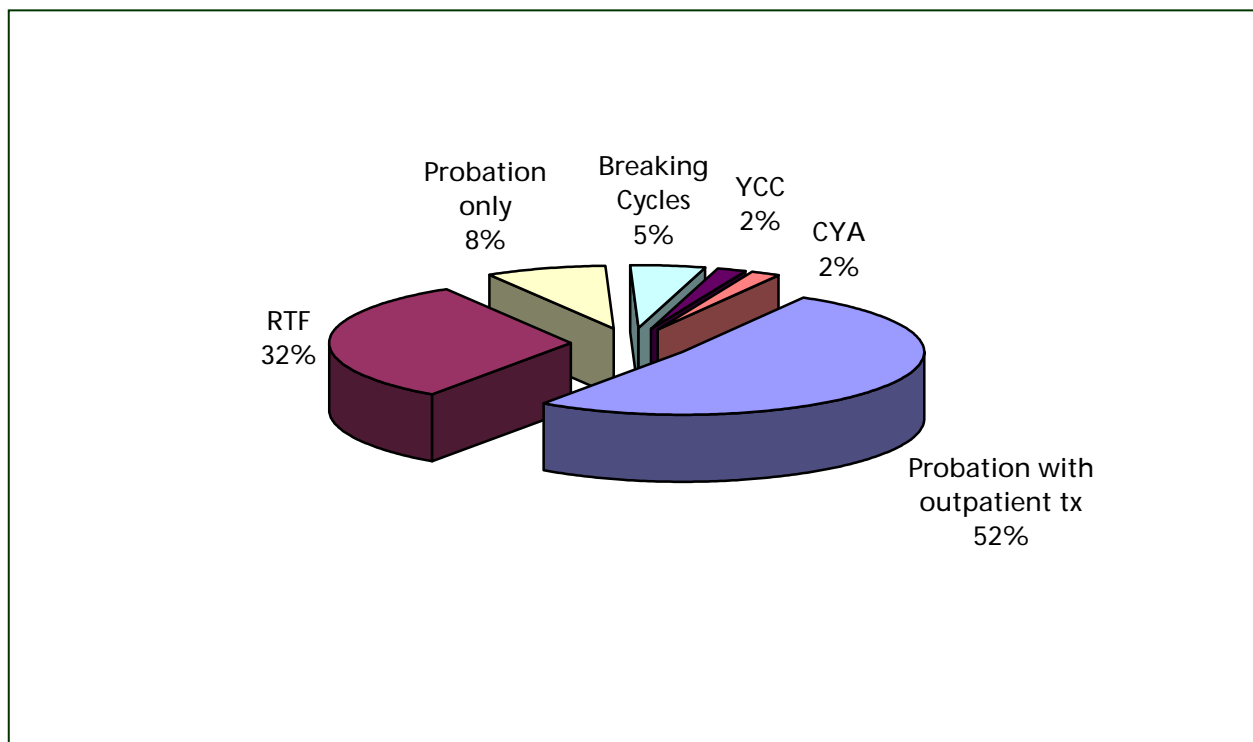
*Note: Percentages based on multiple responses. Cases with missing information not included.*

The sexually abusive youth were also assessed on three risk indicators specifically related to the instant offense including; denying responsibility for the sex offense, minimizing guilt, and parental minimization of the sex offense. As documented in the Probation case files, when interviewed by law enforcement, 21 percent denied the offense completely. Forty-four percent (44%) admitted to the sexual incident, but denied or minimized their guilt (i.e., claimed the act was consensual). Furthermore, over half (53%) of the juveniles had parents who denied or minimized the offense (not shown).

## Disposition

As mentioned earlier, half (50%) of the sexually abusive youth had a sustained petition for lewd acts on a child. As shown in Figure 10, over half (52%) of the youth received formal probation supervision with outpatient sex offender treatment. Nearly one-third (32%) were placed at a residential treatment facility (RTF) that provides treatment for sexually abusive youth. Additional dispositions include formal probation (8%), commitment to Breaking Cycles (5%) (a juvenile delinquency program in San Diego County that provides a variety of rehabilitative and preventative services to delinquent youth and their families), and placement at a juvenile correction center, such as Youth Correctional Center (YCC) (2%) and California Youth Authority (CYA)(2%).

**Figure 10**  
**DISPOSITION FOR INSTANT OFFENSE**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 60**

*Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.*

## Completion of Probation

Considering that the dates of the instant offenses span from 1996 to 2002, the status of the sexually abusive youth in terms of completing their court orders varied with the length of time the juvenile had been on probation. The majority (86%) of the youth were still on probation at the time of data collection, attempting to satisfy their court-ordered requirements. Only 14 percent had their probation jurisdiction terminated, 10 percent successfully and another 3 percent unsuccessfully (not shown). While those still in the process of completing probation at the time of data collection had been under formal probation supervision for slightly over one and a half (1.6) years, those who successfully completed probation had an average probation length of 2.6 years, implying that

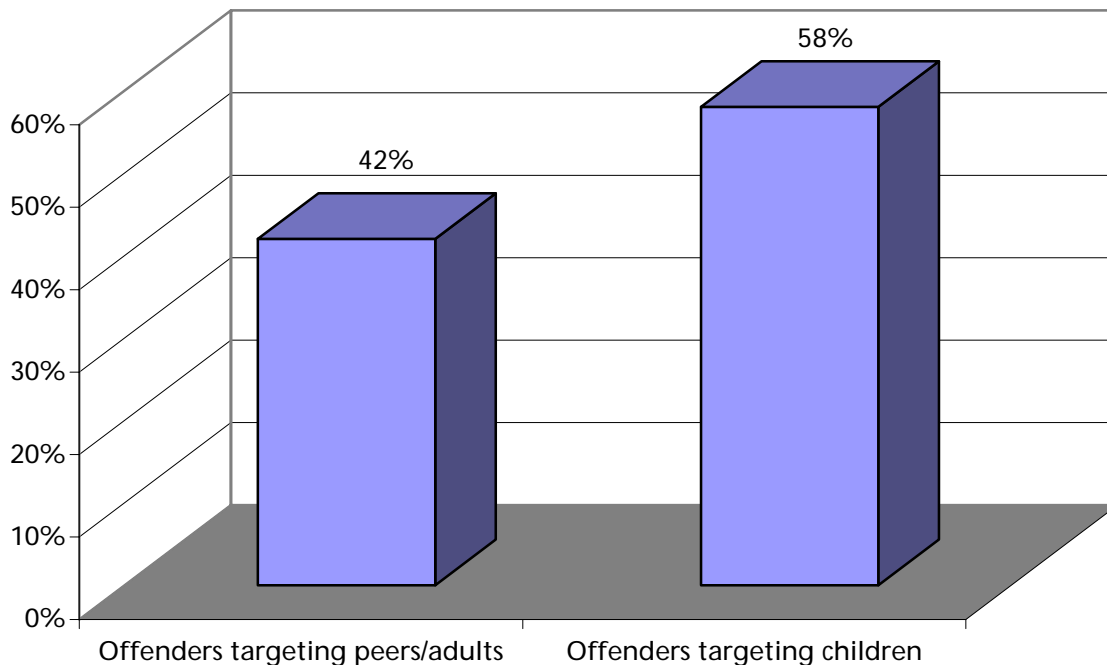
additional time will allow sexually abusive youth still on probation to complete their court-ordered requirements successfully.

## CHILD PERPETRATOR TYPOLOGY

A child perpetrator is defined as a perpetrator who targets children five or more years younger than him/herself (CSOM, 1999). In this profile, there were 57 cases in which the age of the victim was identified in the case files. Of these 57 youth, two-thirds (67%) had at least one victim that was at least five years younger than him/herself, and the remaining youth (33%) victimized only peers or adults.

CSOM (1999) has published a comparison of youth who offend against peers or adults and those that offend against children, which shows some particular differences between the two sub-groups. This study showed that for both groups, females are victims more often than males. For child perpetrators, females are only slightly more likely to be victimized and nearly half of the offenders assault at least one male. However, for the San Diego sample, the mean number of victims for peer perpetrators was .7 male victims and 1.1 female victims. Child perpetrators had a mean of 0.8 male victims and slightly lower mean for female victims (0.7). Offenders who targeted children were slightly more likely to target males, rather than females. When looking at the offenders in terms of having any male victims, 58 percent of the child perpetrators victimized one or more males, compared to 42 percent of the peer/adult perpetrators (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**  
**PRESENCE OF MALE VICTIMIZATION FOR PERPETRATOR SUB-GROUPS**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**



**Total = 57**

*Note: Cases with missing information not included.*

According to prior research, the child perpetrator is also more likely to victimize siblings or relatives (CSOM, 1999). For San Diego, 45 percent of the child perpetrators lived with their victims, whereas only 29 percent of the offenders who targeted peers or adults lived with the victims. Table 6 shows the frequencies for offender relationship to the victim. The victims of child perpetrators were most likely to be other relatives (34%), siblings (26%), or neighbors (24%). For offenders who target peers or adults their relationship to the victims was mostly likely as an acquaintance (32%), sibling (32%), or neighbor (32%).

**Table 6**  
**OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP TO THE VICTIMS FOR PERPETRATOR SUB-GROUPS**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

	<i>Child Perpetrator</i>	<i>Peer Perpetrator</i>
Stranger/casual	0%	5%
Acquaintance	13%	32%
Friend	3%	0%
Sibling	26%	32%
Date/Girlfriend or Boyfriend	0%	11%
Other relative	34%	0%
Babysitter/tutor/mentor	5%	0%
Neighbor	24%	32%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>57</b>

*Note: Cases with missing information not included. Percentages based on multiple responses.*

The sexually abusive youth who targets peers or adults is more likely to be forceful with the victim and the offense is occur in conjunction with other criminal activity; whereas, the child perpetrator performs only the sex offense and relies on coercion (CSOM, 1999). In this study 47 percent of the offenders who victimize peers or adults used physical force, and only 16 percent of the offenders who target children did. Generally, peer/adult perpetrators have a delinquent history. Overall, few of the sexually abusive youth had prior criminal history; however, gang membership for the San Diego youth was higher for peer/adult perpetrators (27%) than child perpetrators (7%). Likewise, a history of assaultive behavior was higher for peer/adult perpetrators (78%) than child perpetrators (44%) (not shown).

Over 85 percent of the youth in the San Diego sample who targeted children had clinical diagnoses, compared to 68 percent of those who targeted peers or adults (not shown). Social skills deficit and peer isolation are primary risk factors that may predispose adolescents to commit sexual crimes against younger children, which can often manifest in a clinical diagnosis. However, when the types of diagnoses were compared, child perpetrators were almost as likely as peer perpetrators to have diagnoses for disorders that can affect self-esteem and socialization. Table 7 shows the percentages for these diagnoses. The largest difference between the two perpetrator groups is for conduct disorder/adolescent anti-social behavior, in which 32 percent of the peer perpetrators had this diagnosis compared to only 5 percent of the child perpetrators. CSOM (1999) reports that sexually abusive youth who target peers or adults are more likely to be generally delinquent. The higher percentage of peer perpetrators who have conduct disorder or adolescent anti-social behavior disorder may point to this characteristic. Only in the case of dysthymic disorder were child perpetrators more likely to have the disorder than peer perpetrators. CSOM (1999) reports that child perpetrators are more likely to be depressed. Dysthymic disorder is characterized by a depressed mood for most of the day (PsychologyNet, 2002).

**Table 7**  
**PERCENT OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE YOUTH WITH SPECIFIC CLINICAL DISORDERS ACCORDING**  
**TO DSM IV DIAGNOSES BY PERPETRATOR SUB-GROUPS**  
**San Diego County Sexually Abusive Youth Profile, January 2003**

	<i>Child Perpetrators</i>	<i>Peer Perpetrators</i>
Depression (Dysthymic Disorder, Depression, Major Depressive Disorder)	37%	32%
Conduct Disorder/Adolescent Anti-Social Behavior Disorder	5%	32%
Adjustment Disorder	18%	0%
Impulse Control Disorder	3%	5%
Anxiety Disorder	5%	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	

For the San Diego sample, offenders who target peers or adults were more likely to have a learning disability (92%) than those who target children (72%) (not shown).

The profile published by CSOM (1999) states that youth who have the highest levels of deviant sexual arousal are typically those who exclusively target young male children, and whose sex offense includes penetration. These youth are most likely to represent early onset pedophilia. While the San Diego profile shows that the majority of sexually abusive youth target children, only a small subset of child perpetrators represent cases that may be at risk of early onset pedophilia. Of the 57 sexually abusive youth in this sub-group comparison, there were 8 male offenders (14%) who exclusively targeted young male children and committed sodomy against the victim.

## SUMMARY

To enhance the understanding of the characteristics of sexually abusive youth in San Diego County, a sample of 60 juvenile probationers was selected to aid in the establishment of standardized protocols for assessing, treating, and monitoring juvenile sex offenders. This study, coupled with other assessments conducted by SANDAG, will assist SOMC in developing and implementing a system to manage adult sex offenders and sexually abusive youth.

This profile shows that sexually abusive youth in San Diego County tend to be 10 to 17 year old, males who are ethnically diverse, and primarily live with their mother and siblings. In terms of education, most attend regular public or special education school, earn average grades, and exhibit disruptive classroom behavior. Approximately half had experimented with drugs and alcohol, although only one-quarter were still using at the time of the instant offense. Though substance abuse is often a risk indicator of juvenile criminal repeat offending, a correlation between risk and sexually abusive youth is inconclusive due to high variation across studies.

Many of the offenders were themselves the victims of abuse, primarily sexual, and almost all were diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Some of these disorders are often a manifestation of low self-esteem and social isolation, which is destructive for these youth. Over 80 percent of the youth in this profile had clinical (Axis 1) diagnoses, according to the DSM-IV.

Most of the juveniles have been exposed to pornographic material, reported masturbatory patterns, and exhibited assaulted behaviors, and yet many also participated in pro-social activities such as sports and church groups.

Few had prior law enforcement referrals, and for almost all, the sexual offense was their first referral. Most received sustained petitions for lewd acts with children at the felony level. The most frequent offender behaviors were touching body parts, sodomy, fellatio by victim, frottage, and fellatio on victim. These acts were committed against siblings and other relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances, and nearly half of the victims were living with the offender at the time of the instant offense. A large percentage of the offenders received formal probation with outpatient sex offender treatment or were committed to residential treatment facilities specializing in sexual offenders. At the time of data collection, most of the sexually abusive youth were still in the process of completing their court ordered requirements.

A comparison of sexually abusive youth who target peers or adults and those who target children shows that the San Diego sample displays most of the same characteristics described in a profile published by CSOM. The child perpetrators were more likely to victimize males who were siblings or relatives, and often this victim was living in the same house. Child perpetrators were not any more likely to have psychiatric disorders; however, peer perpetrators were more likely to be diagnosed with anti-social behavior disorder, which may point to a tendency for these offenders to be generally delinquent. Child perpetrators were more likely to be diagnosed with dysthemic disorder

According to a study published by CSOM (1999), youth who are at greatest risk for early onset pedophilia are those males who exclusively target young males and whose offenses include penetration. For San Diego, only 14 percent of the offenders in which age of the victim was known were at risk for early onset pedophilia.

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