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Towards a Typology of Youth Sexual Harmers in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Sixty seven characteristics, and demographic and offence data were used to explore patterns of similarity amongst a sample of 195 male youths aged 6-17 years who had been referred for treatment because of their sexually harmful behaviour. The overarching aim of the study was to investigate the possibility of developing a typology of youth sexual harmers in order to enhance assessment and treatment. Archival data were collected from three specialist treatment agencies providing services to nine locations across New Zealand. The characteristics were chosen to highlight a broad range of functioning and incorporated personality traits, social and family factors, education and developmental factors, mental health issues and antisocial behaviour as well as sexual behaviour and prior victimisation. Hierarchical cluster analysis was employed to determine whether certain characteristics and youth were similar and whether these similarities indicated clinically relevant profiles of youth were present within the sample. A review of the analysis suggested seven themes of characteristics were present: Sexual Deviancy and Delinquency, Trauma and Neglect, Sexual Abuse and Family Mental Health, Mood Disregulation, Personality and Social Deficits, Developmental Deficits, and Family Aggression and Abuse. A review of the analysis of the youth indicated four profiles of sexually harmful youth in this sample: Depressed Relationship Seeking, Trauma Reactive, Hostile/Versatile, and Controlling/Entitled. Demographic and offence data for each profile indicated within profile similarity, also. The analyses enabled a review of the inter-relationship of multiple characteristics and highlighted the way in which certain characteristics and life experiences can influence behaviour and learning. The results imply an inclusive typology of young sexual harmers is possible and this has implications for the assessment and treatment of these youth. Assessments that can define profiles may enhance treatment planning and delivery.

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