



ASSERTION: EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS CAN RELIABLY REDUCE NEW SEXUAL OFFENSES AND THUS MAKE OUR COMMUNITIES SAFER

Executive Summary

Current sexual offense policies focus their resources on punishing offenders for offenses committed and virtually none on rehabilitation or prevention programs. Programs that are aimed at helping former offenders find housing, employment, support systems, and effective treatment programs all help prevent sexual re-offense. Our current judicial system focuses almost exclusively on the post-release aspect; however, they miss the biggest segment of the population that commits new sexual offenses – those who are not on the registry. Education and prevention programs prior to a sex crime being committed, programs that educate the public to the truths of sexual offenses and how to keep children safe, and those that offer resources for those who want to seek help before they offend would go much further toward reducing sexual offenses than does the current system.

Current sexual offense policies are based on myths that 1) persons convicted of sexual offenses always reoffend and 2) abuse is committed by strangers. This assumes that by placing these persons on a registry and making that information public, the public will know who the dangerous people most likely to abuse their children are and make sure their children are nowhere near the registrants.

However, studies have shown that 95% of offenses are committed by someone not on a registry, and 93% are committed by someone known to the child, either an acquaintance or family member.¹ Studies also show that when a former offender has access to affordable housing, employment, and a support system, his recidivism rate is reduced.²

The current policies in place have not eliminated sexual abuse or assault. Initial research, however, has shown that educational programs, such as what **Erin's Law** is attempting to implement in every state, shows promise in reducing child sexual assault. These programs teach children in an age-appropriate way how to recognize sexual abuse and

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how to react to it, and they teach school personnel, as well as parents and guardians, about the warning signs and provide information and resources to support abused children and their families.³

Erin's Law is named after Erin Merryn, who is a sexual abuse survivor and the founder and president of the organization. Erin's Law requires that all public schools implement a sexual abuse prevention program that:

- Teaches children age-appropriate techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult;
- Teaches school personnel about child sexual abuse; and
- Teaches parents and guardians the warning signs.

Currently, 26 of the 50 states have adopted Erin's Law. Participation is expected to increase due to recent federal funding now made available to schools to implement the program.

Treatment programs are also shown to greatly reduce the risk of re-offense. Persons who have completed a Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) are up to 67%⁴ less likely to reoffend and up to 77% less likely with a specific program called *Circles of Support and Accountability* (CoSA).⁵

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 92% of sexual abuse is committed by those not known to law enforcement⁶, and RAINN reports that 93% of juveniles are abused by someone who is a family member or someone close to the victim⁷. These facts necessitate alternative methods of addressing the problem of sexual abuse, methods that focus on identifying and addressing the problem as early as possible.

Research has also shown that various sorts of prevention programs have a positive impact on sexual abuse. **Stop It Now** is one such program. It is a site that provides resources online to help families protect their children from becoming victims. "The beginning of the school year is a great time for adults to review their understanding of the Four R's of preventing child sexual abuse—Rules, Read, Respect, and Responsibility—and to get back to the basics of nurturing kids. Prevention promotes healthy behaviors, rather than waiting to punish violations, before there's any need for a cure."⁸ Stop It Now offers additional prevention tools⁹, such as:

- Creating a safety plan
- Everyday actions to keep children safe
- Talking to children and teens
- Online safety
- Warning signs of possible/potential abuse
- Behavior signs of adults to watch for

Stop It Now not only wants to help children avoid being abused, but they also want to help adults and other juveniles who are at risk to offend. They receive inquiries from people who are worried about their own thoughts and feelings. They offer prevention tools online to help those who want it¹⁰, and they also have resources for treatment for those who want to prevent abuse as well as resources for those who fear they are at risk to abuse, allowing people to remain anonymous in an effort to stop and prevent abuse before it occurs.¹¹

The program from time to time shares testimonials on the website from those who have benefited from the program:

“Thank you for your reply. I’m sure you get many e-mails and I was afraid that because we are on ‘the other side’ we might not hear back from you. Unfortunately, society tends to forget that often times offenders were victims first. Thank you for all you do to help break the cycle of abuse.”¹⁰

Research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs. The National Sexual Violence Research Center (NSVRC) published a study in 2011 on the effectiveness of prevention programs since they have been implemented in the United States for decades. In this research¹², they found that education and prevention programs:

- Increase knowledge about child sexual abuse
- Increase self-protection knowledge and skills
- Increase use of the self-protection skills
- Encourage earlier disclosure, preventing further abuse and providing for shorter duration of abuse
- Increase positive and decrease negative feelings of self-worth

The authors of the research study encourage age tailored curriculum to teach school-age children about sexual abuse, just as Erin’s Law and Stop It Now do.

B4UAct¹³ is an organization that works with people who are minor attracted, offering the help they desire to manage their inappropriate feelings without ever acting on them. They:

- Offer a collaborative group of mental health professionals that work with minor attracted individuals who seek help and resources;
- Educate mental health providers regarding approaches to treat such individuals;
- Develop a pool of providers to serve these individuals; and
- Educate the public regarding the issues faced by these individuals

The more research-based education available to the public about the complex issue of sexual offenses, the greater the chances of making significant decreases in the rate of sexual abuse. Evidence based policies affecting those who have already offended; education-based programs to teach children, caretakers, and the public essential

strategies and facts; and evidence-based prevention programs that assist people who are at risk of offending are key to a decline in sexual abuse.

Researched and written by “Jean Harlow”

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