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Child sexual abuse has gained major public attention in the past few decades. Various factors in the recent years have generated a public reaction regarding child sexual abuse, which has become one of the most high-profile crimes.

“At Sifers’ jury trial, 14-year-old S.T. testified about Sifers having raped her five years earlier. S.T. described Sifers’ disposition the night of the alleged rape as “upset . . . like he’d been drinking.” RP Vol. I at 24. She recalled Sifers following her into her bedroom, closing the door, and pushing her down on the bed. Sifers then pulled down her pajamas and pushed his penis inside her vagina. Afterwards, he said if she told anybody, he would hurt her, her younger siblings, and her mother.” (*State of Washington v. Charles Wayne Sifers*)

Child sexual abuse --- an unwanted, yet common, catch-22 issue that is worldwide and has been for centuries. Each year, well over 300,000 children become victims of this heinous crime against humanity. Child sexual abuse is described as any sexual activity between an adult, adolescent or older child, with a child including such things as fondling of genitals, masturbation, and oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse. It is not solely restricted to physical contact though; such abuse could include non-contact abuse, such as exposure, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, prostitution, and child pornography. The offender can range from a parent, stepparent, sibling, other relative, friend, neighbor, childcare person, teacher, to a stranger. This form of exploitation occurs with children of all ages, in rural, urban and suburban areas and among all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups. Since the 1970s, the sexual abuse of children and child molestation has increasingly been recognized as deeply damaging to children and thus unacceptable for society as a whole. While sexual interaction between children and adults has been present throughout history, it has only become the object of significant public

attention in recent times. Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, but the number of unreported instances is far greater, because the children are afraid to tell anyone what has happened, and the legal procedure for validating an episode is difficult. The long-term emotional and psychological damage of sexual abuse can be devastating to the child. The problem should be identified, and the abuse stopped. That is where child sexual abuse prevention programs come into play. Most child sexual abuse prevention programs focus on teaching children how to lower their risk for becoming a victim of sexual abuse, and increasing their knowledge of potential sexual abuse approaches and encounters. These prevention programs also encourage efficient skills, which can be used in any uncomfortable situation that could lead to sexual abuse. Although child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention programs promote and teach effective skills to use when confronted by an abuser, they do not successfully reduce sexual violence because of the inconsistencies among programs, the lack of knowledge about abusers, and the vulnerability of the victims.

CSA prevention programs do not effectively reduce the prevalence of child sexual abuse because there is not a stable foundation of knowledge about the paths that lead to abuse and the abusers themselves. According to Jeffrey J. Haugaard, Ph.D., Department of Human Development New York State College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, “Federal and state agencies, and private foundations, have funded little basic research in this area - and thus we have no foundation of knowledge on which to support effective sexual abuse prevention,” (Haugaard). In order to design effective prevention efforts for any problem, an understanding of the development of that problem is crucial. We are better at preventing physical abuse of children rather than the sexual abuse of children, because we have a clearer understanding of how physical abuse develops; this is

because of the mass research efforts taken to grasp the subject. If state governments expend more money to fund research regarding abusers and their developmental pathways, then there would be a greater chance of gaining the knowledge necessary to make the programs attest their purpose. Haugaard also stated “We tend to know more about what does not work in the area of preventing child sexual abuse than we know about what does work” (Haugaard). This ties in with the factor of not having a legitimate amount of research to base prevention programs off from, and, therefore, the programs not achieving deterrence and lessening sexual violence. Our current awareness and perception of the problems involving sexual violence is not enough to effectively interfere and bring it to a stop, or at least attempt to. Moreover, “Although sexual abuse prevention training programs are well-intentioned efforts to protect children against a loathsome crime, there is no evidence that they work, or even on the margin that these efforts produce more good than harm,” (Neil Gilbert, Chernin Professor of Social Welfare and co-chairman of the Berkeley Child Welfare Research Center). This meaning that without a secure basis of the basic knowledge of abusers, there is no way of telling if these prevention programs are even working. Our present incompetent education will lead us to false accusations and assumptions until we are able to further investigate and study the mind-set of abusers.

Some may argue that child sexual abuse prevention programs are effective in preventing child sexual abuse. One of the more positive characteristics and purposes of CSA prevention programs is that they achieve the idea of educating and publicizing effective skills for children to use when dealing with the confrontation of a possible sexual abuser. These components include abuse-specific information, skill-practice activities, parent involvement, and multiple sessions in which children learn skills and

have concepts reinforced. The most important skill learned is knowing how to say “NO!” David Finkelhor, a renowned Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, organized and performed many studies in relation to child sexual abuse. As stated by Joseph Dake, James Price, and Judy Murnan, in their evaluation of a child abuse prevention curriculum “Finkelhor conducted a national survey of 2,000 youth aged 10 to 16. They found that children receiving more extensive school-based prevention programs were more knowledgeable about abuse, more likely to report self-protective strategies when threatened, more likely to tell someone after an attempted victimization, and less likely to blame themselves for the abuse.” This means that the prevention programs that children partake in allow them to gain more confidence and feel more conversant when faced with sexual abuse. There is enough data to support the idea that these programs do provide many students with a more confidence and skills to use in a dangerous situation. However, abusers are still out in society, and while education is worthwhile and important, we need to make it physically safer for everyone by providing longer prison terms and more austere consequences for offenders. We want our children safe and hoping they will learn the skills to deal with dangerous criminals is not enough, we need to make it safer for them. An unfortunate example of this can be made with Larry Don McQuay, a habitual and lifelong sexual predator from Texas. In 1995, he confessed to getting away with molesting over 240 children before he was caught for molesting just one boy.

“The case of Larry Don McQuay seems to epitomize society's continuing inability to deal with those who have incorrigible and unspeakable appetites for children. One obvious permanent solution--capital punishment--is strictly reserved for murder and is likely to remain so. The public remains divided over the merits of the death penalty, child sexual abuse cases are difficult to prove beyond all question of doubt, and most sex offenders are members of or known to the victim's family, making the latter unlikely to call for a death sentence.

As a result, there is a push to sentence child molesters to life in prison without parole or place them in secure mental institutions until they are judged not to be a danger to society. In the meantime, however, many offenders receive probation or short prison sentences, and thousands are released from jail and back into society each year.”(Wetzstein)

Releasing predators back into society can increase a child’s susceptibility of being abused and scarred for the rest of their life. If the penalties for child sexual violence become more severe, many offenders will be kept away from society for a longer period of time, or even eternity. This is important, because it would create a safer environment for the children and the general public to live in as a whole. Sexual violence encounters and happenings would reduce in number with fewer perpetrators out to cause harm. Education programs, however, are incapable of keeping predators out of society and children out of harms way.

With the many forms of unwanted lascivious gestures and exploitation, and the unremitting chance of a child being assaulted, prevention programs are incapable of thwarting, or even minimizing the amount of sexual violence that is imposed on kids. Without a steady understanding of the offenders and their acts of maltreatment, we will not be able to help rid the world of these psychopaths and make the world more protected and secure for our children. “The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is one of the most vicious crimes conceivable, a violation of mankind's most basic duty to protect the innocent” (James T. Walsh). Society, therefore, must put forth an effort to delve into studying all aspects of the subject, and help protect children from the perpetrators of these vile crimes by strengthening notification requirements for sex offenders and increasing criminal penalties.