

# Child Sexual Abuse: Using Research to Prevent and Protect

David Finkelhor

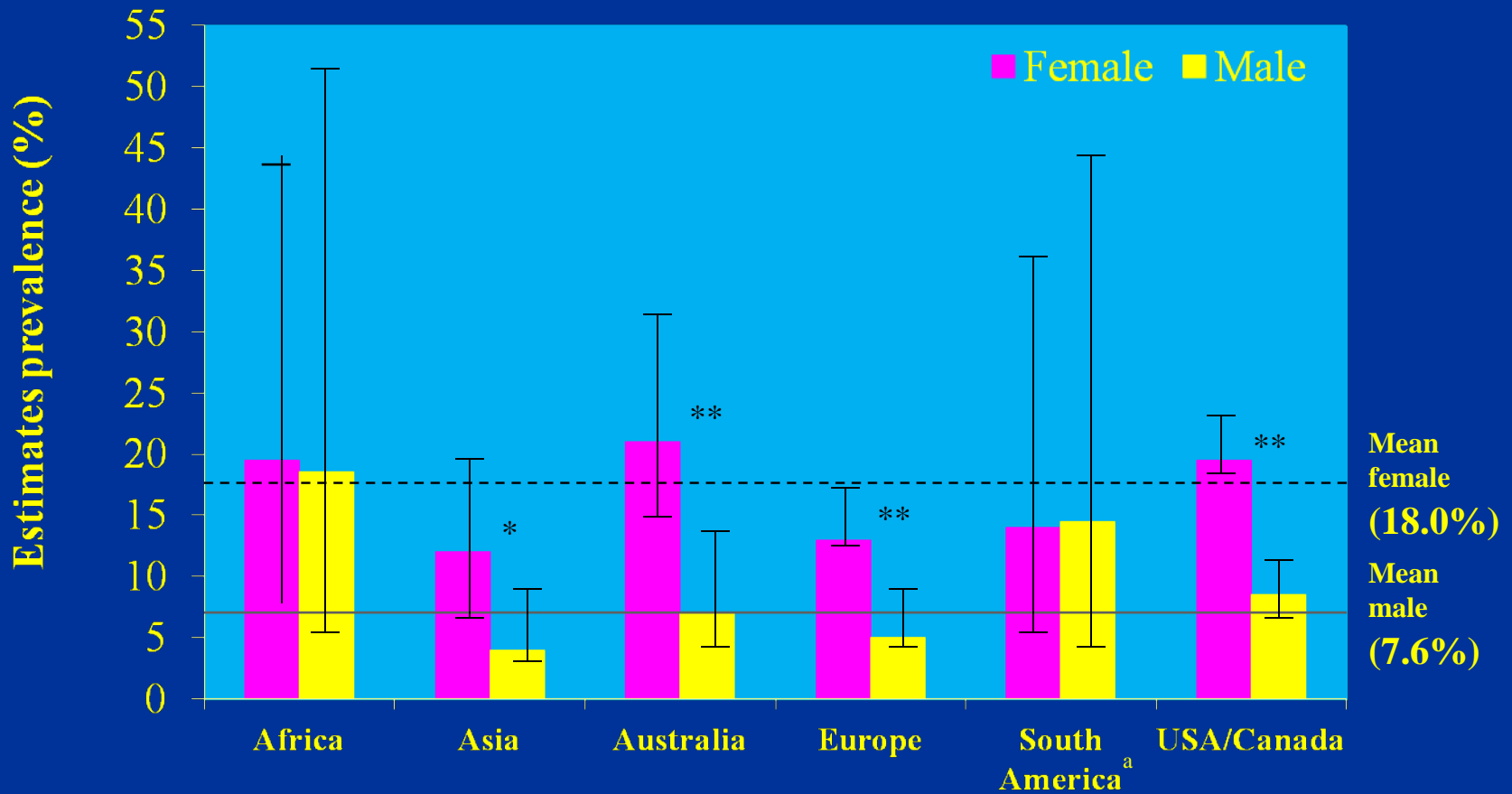
*Crimes against Children Research Center*

*University of New Hampshire*

Expert Meeting on Prevalence of Sexual Abuse  
Berlin

10 December 2014

# International Prevalence CSA from 331 Self-Report Studies



# International Prevalence

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- ✓ Sexual abuse occurs world wide
- ✓ Rates do vary
- ✓ But it affects many children in every context where it has been studied

# Coach Jerry Sandusky



# Diversity of Dynamics

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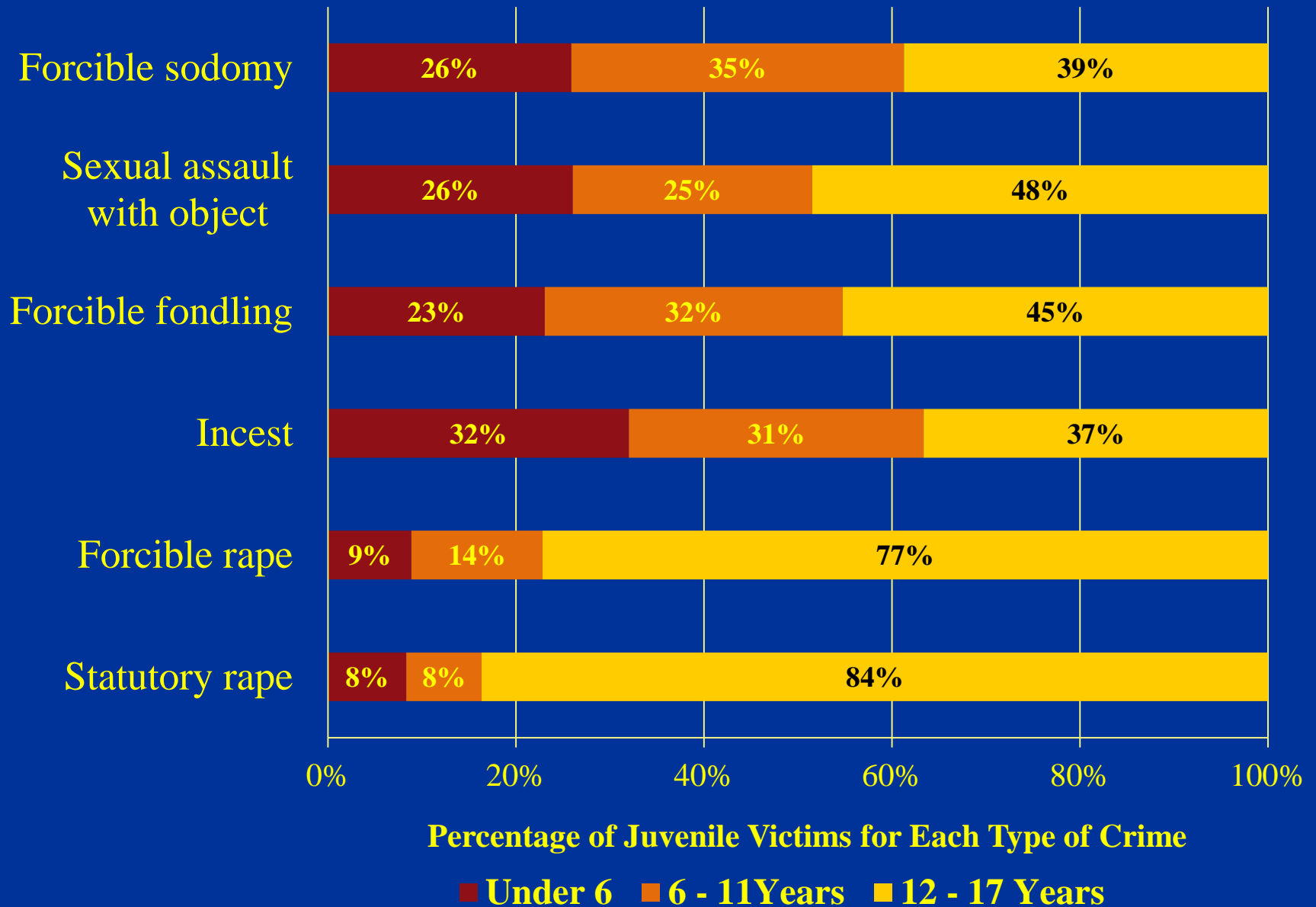
- ✓ Intra-family sexual abuse
- ✓ Neighborhood, social network
- ✓ Adult leader/teacher/mentor/authority
- ✓ Older youth victimizing younger child
- ✓ Peers
- ✓ Commercial sexual exploitation
- ✓ Statutory victim/compliant victim
- ✓ ??? Internet perpetrator ???

# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ Intra-family sexual abuse (25% of cases, but 60-80% of child protection cases)
  - ✓ Includes fathers, step-fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers
  - ✓ Step-fathers, step-families higher risk
  - ✓ Earlier onset, longer duration
  - ✓ Can involve multiple victims
  - ✓ Lower disclosure rate
  - ✓ Lower re-offense rate
  - ✓ Family violence, poor supervision, neglect risks

## Police data – Juvenile victims of sex offenses



# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ Acquaintances (60% of cases)
- ✓ Neighborhood, social network
  - ✓ Friends of family
  - ✓ Fathers, brothers of neighbors

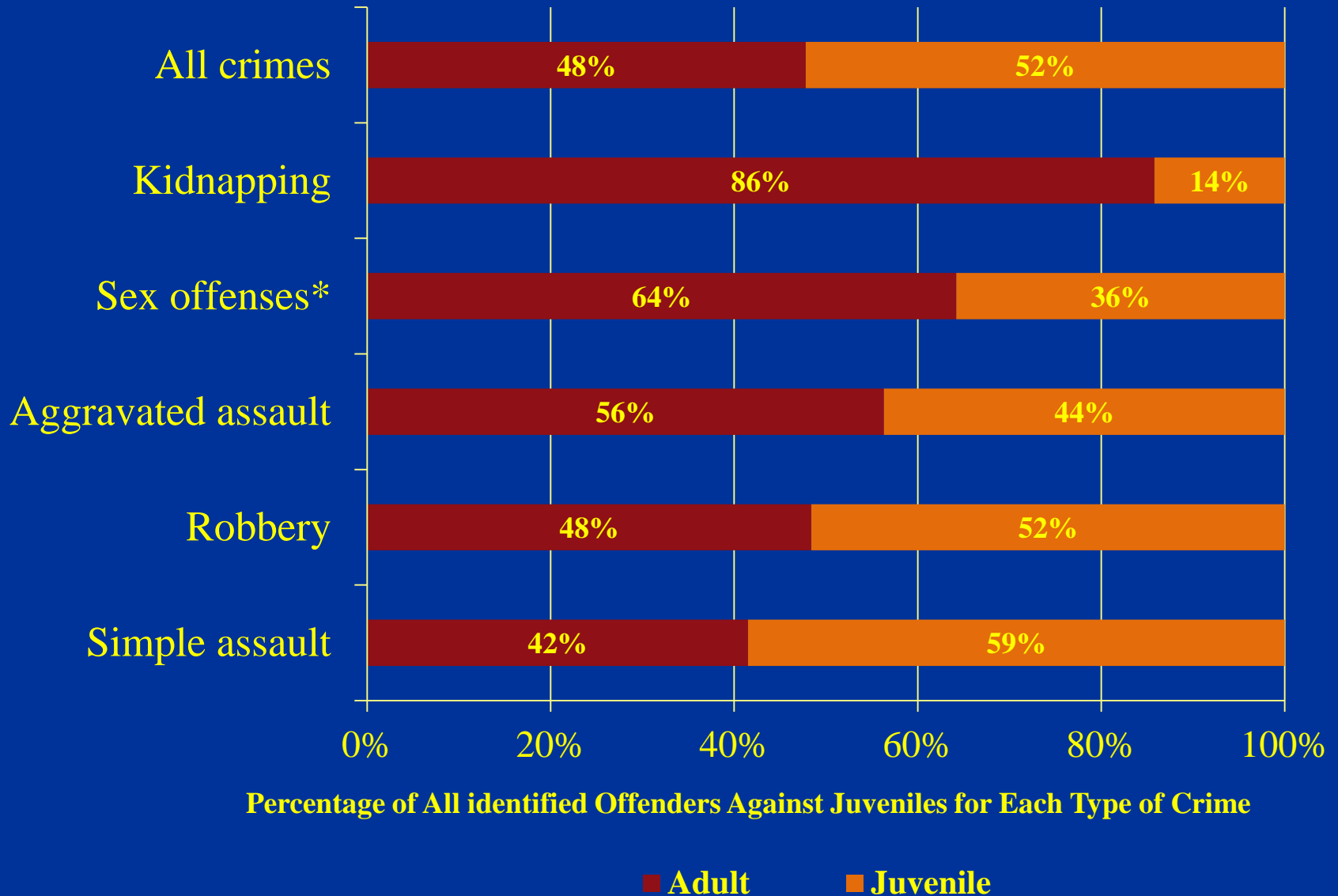


# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ Adult leader/teacher/mentor/authority
  - ✓ School personnel probably most frequent
  - ✓ Religious, youth organization, sports
  - ✓ Unique grooming resources
  - ✓ Divisive disclosures
  - ✓ Role of institution

# Police Data – Juvenile Victim, Adult v Juvenile Offender



\*Sex offenses against juveniles include forcible (86 percent) and nonforcible (14 percent) offenses.

# Diversity of Dynamics

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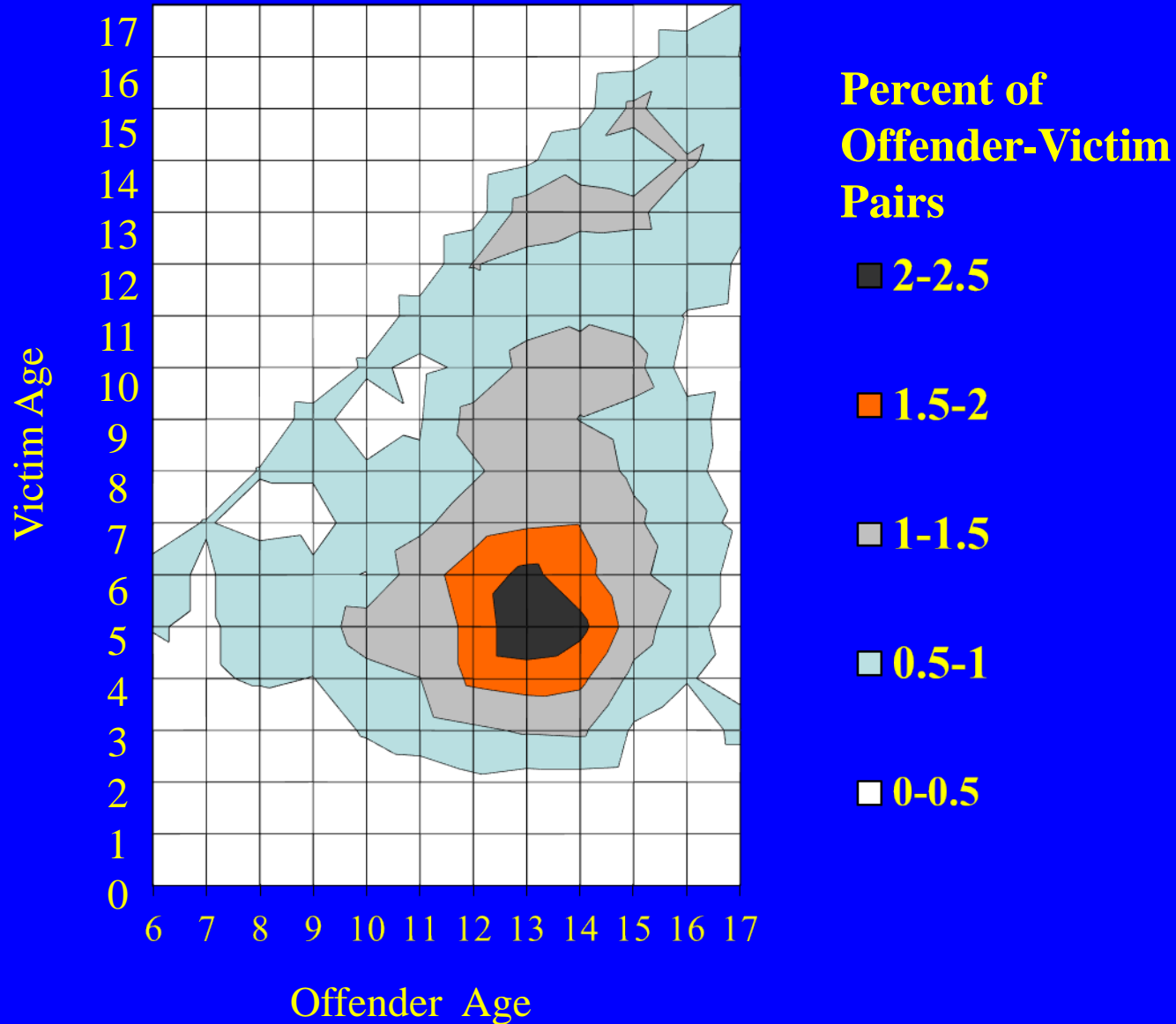
- ✓ Other youth (36% of cases)
- ✓ Older youth victimizing younger child
  - ✓ Baby sitter, older sibling/cousin, neighbor
  - ✓ Spike at puberty
  - ✓ Female abusers
  - ✓ Media influence?

# Diversity of Dynamics

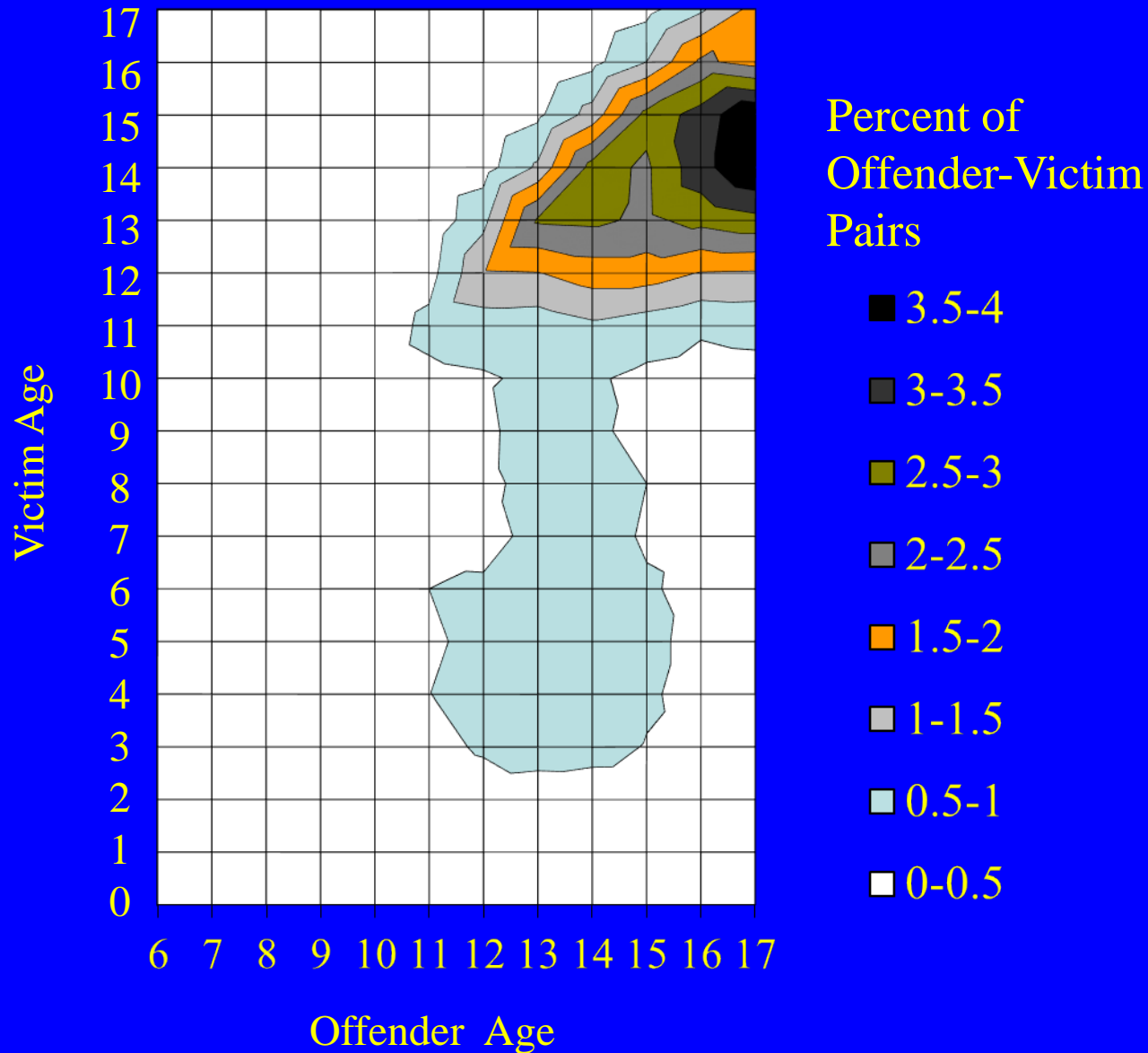
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- ✓ Peers
  - ✓ Bullying
  - ✓ Group assaults
  - ✓ Harassment
  - ✓ Humiliation motive
  - ✓ Peer pressure
  - ✓ Dating partners

# Juvenile Sex Offenders Vs. Male Juvenile Victims



# Juvenile Sex Offenders Vs. Female Juvenile Victims



# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ Commercial sexual exploitation
  - ✓ Pimp facilitated prostitution
  - ✓ Self-prostitution
  - ✓ Some involvement of young victims, family facilitated
  - ✓ image production, including internet solicitation
  - ✓ “trafficked”, sex tourism

# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ Statutory victim/compliant victim (15%)
  - ✓ Teens
  - ✓ Female offenders
  - ✓ LGBT vulnerable
  - ✓ Allure of older partners
  - ✓ Offenders 18 – 25 vs 25+



# Diversity of Dynamics

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- ✓ ??? Internet perpetrator ???
- ✓ Not clear that Internet perpetrator is distinct from other perpetrators
- ✓ Majority of internet facilitated CSA involves known not unknown perpetrators
- ✓ All CSA forms are migrating to electronic communications media because all relationships are
- ✓ “automobile rapist” “telephone molester”
- ✓ Non-molesting child porn possessor may be special category

# Risk Factors

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- ✓ Girls
- ✓ Conditions of family conflict and disruption
- ✓ Conditions of neglect
  - ✓ Inadequate supervision and emotional neediness
- ✓ Other victimization

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Not all offenders are pedophiles
- ✓ Not all offenders are “predatory”
- ✓ Enormous diversity of sexual behaviors
- ✓ Cannot profile offenders
- ✓ Most CSA is not violent
- ✓ Victims sometimes protect offenders
- ✓ Disclosure does not always bring benefits for victims

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Not all offenders are pedophiles
  - ✓ half victims are post-pubescent
  - ✓ one-third of adult offenders who abuse children < 13 are not pedophiles
  - ✓ one-third of offenders are other youth ≠ pedophile
- ✓ Not all offenders are predatory
- ✓ Implication: cannot easily identify on basis of interests, sexual orientation, polygraphy, motives, or screening

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Most offenders do NOT have offense history
  - ✓ Only 10% of newly identified offenders have prior record of abuse

Implication: Even perfect background screening and total offender management success will prevent a small quantity of abuse

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Cannot profile offenders
- ✓ Higher educated and better social skills than typical criminal population
- ✓ Enormous diversity of sexual behaviors
- ✓
- ✓ Implication: common sense instincts about who is “risky”, and what is “benign” are often misleading. Better to be alert to behaviors rather than personal characteristics

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Most offenders do NOT reoffend
  - ✓ 14% adults reoffend within 5 years
  - ✓ 24% after 15 years
  - ✓ Juvenile re-offense rates are <5%
- ✓ Implications: Draconian punishment and expensive management are not needed for all offenders. Relatively good risk assessment tools are available.

# Important Misconceptions

- ✓ Youth offenders generally more benign than adult offenders
  - ✓ Generally not a sign of incipient pedophilia
  - ✓ Recidivism rates are considerably lower
  - ✓ Some youth appear to offend due to peer pressure or transient impulses or influences
  - ✓ General delinquency more a problem than sexual deviation

Implication: Youth offending may be easier to prevent and treat. Long-term sanctions and supervision often not necessary.



# Important Misconceptions

- ✓ Most CSA is not violent
  - ✓ In a relationship of trust
  - ✓ Grooming, manipulation
  - ✓ Attention , affection, incentives, normalization

Implication: to extent that victims, parents and investigators think “real” CSA is violent and coercive, victims will be blamed and feel guilty

# Important Misconceptions

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- ✓ Children and youth do not always find the contact unpleasant and sometimes participate voluntarily
- ✓ Victims sometimes protect offenders
- ✓ Implications: “feel yucky” instruction incomplete. Youth feel guilty and blame themselves. Youth lie about what happened. Youth sometimes devastated by revelation

# Important Misconceptions

- ✓ Disclosure does not always bring benefits for victims
  - ✓ Negative response from family and friends
  - ✓ Exposure
  - ✓ Secondary harm from investigation
  - ✓ Studies show: no difference in impact between those that disclosed and those that did not
- ✓ Implications: need to improve response. Respect child and family ambivalence about disclosure.

# Possible Misconceptions

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- ✓ CSA is risk factor for later MH problems, but
- ✓ Not all victims experience long-term distress
  - ✓ Only 20% with current disorder
  - ✓ Disorder rates may be falling
  - ✓ Not all the disorder can be attributed to CSA

# Promising Strategies

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- ✓ School based education

# Logic Model

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## ✓ Education

- Knowledge about rules and norms
- Resistance and avoidance training
- Disclosure promotion
- Secondary harm prevention
- Stigma reduction
- Deterrence
- Improved guardianship

# School based Education Programs

## ✓ Virtues

- Proven prevention paradigm
- Considerable research
- Relatively low cost

## ✓ Limitations

- No evidence as yet that it prevents sexual abuse
- Burden on schools and teachers

# Considerable Research

- ✓ Children learn concepts
- ✓ Children acquire skills
- ✓ Some sustained learning



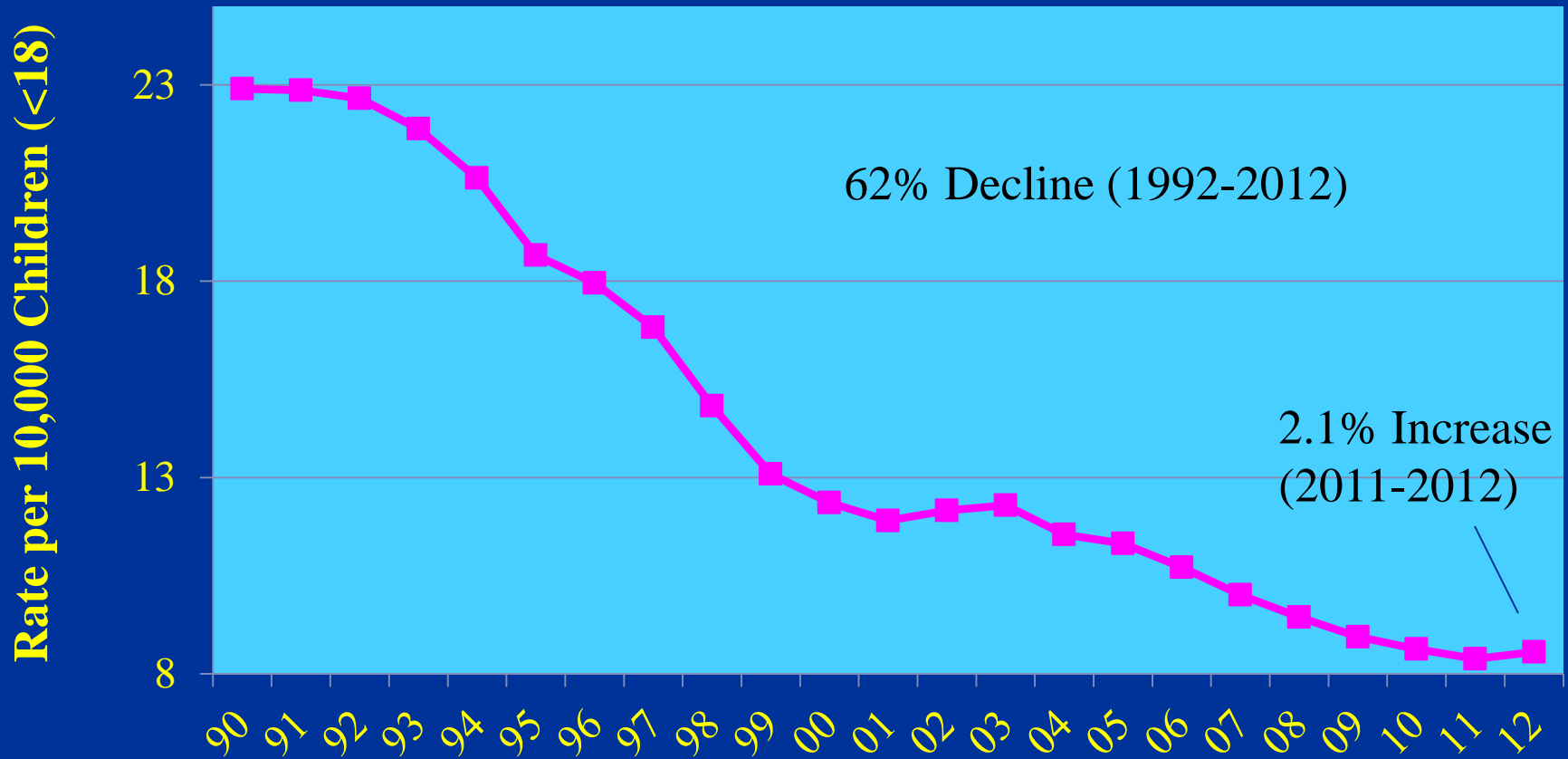
# Possible New Directions

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- ✓ Integration of sex abuse prevention education into comprehensive prevention and life skills curricula

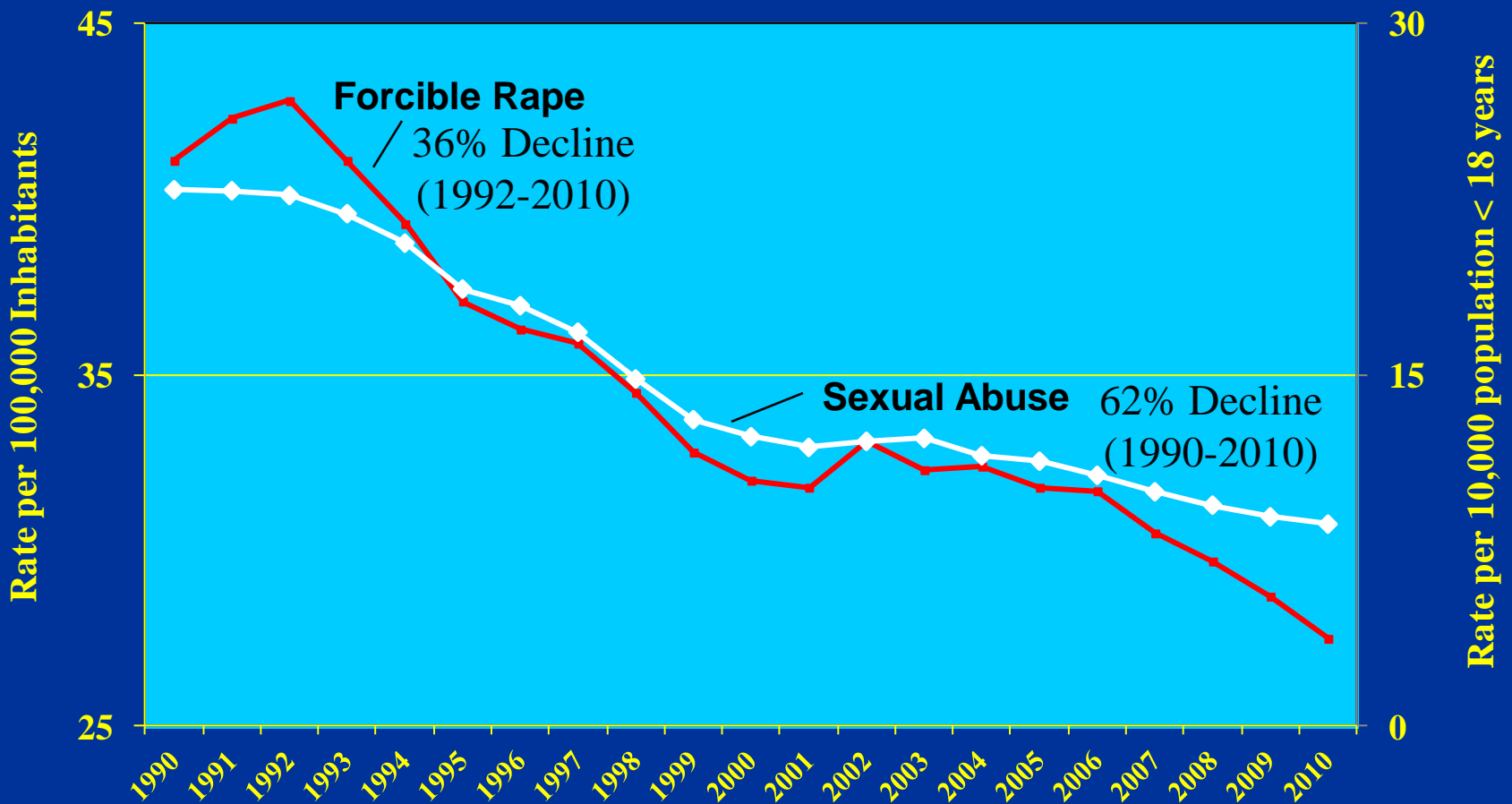
# CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

## *Sexual Abuse Substantiations 1990-2012*



Source: National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System

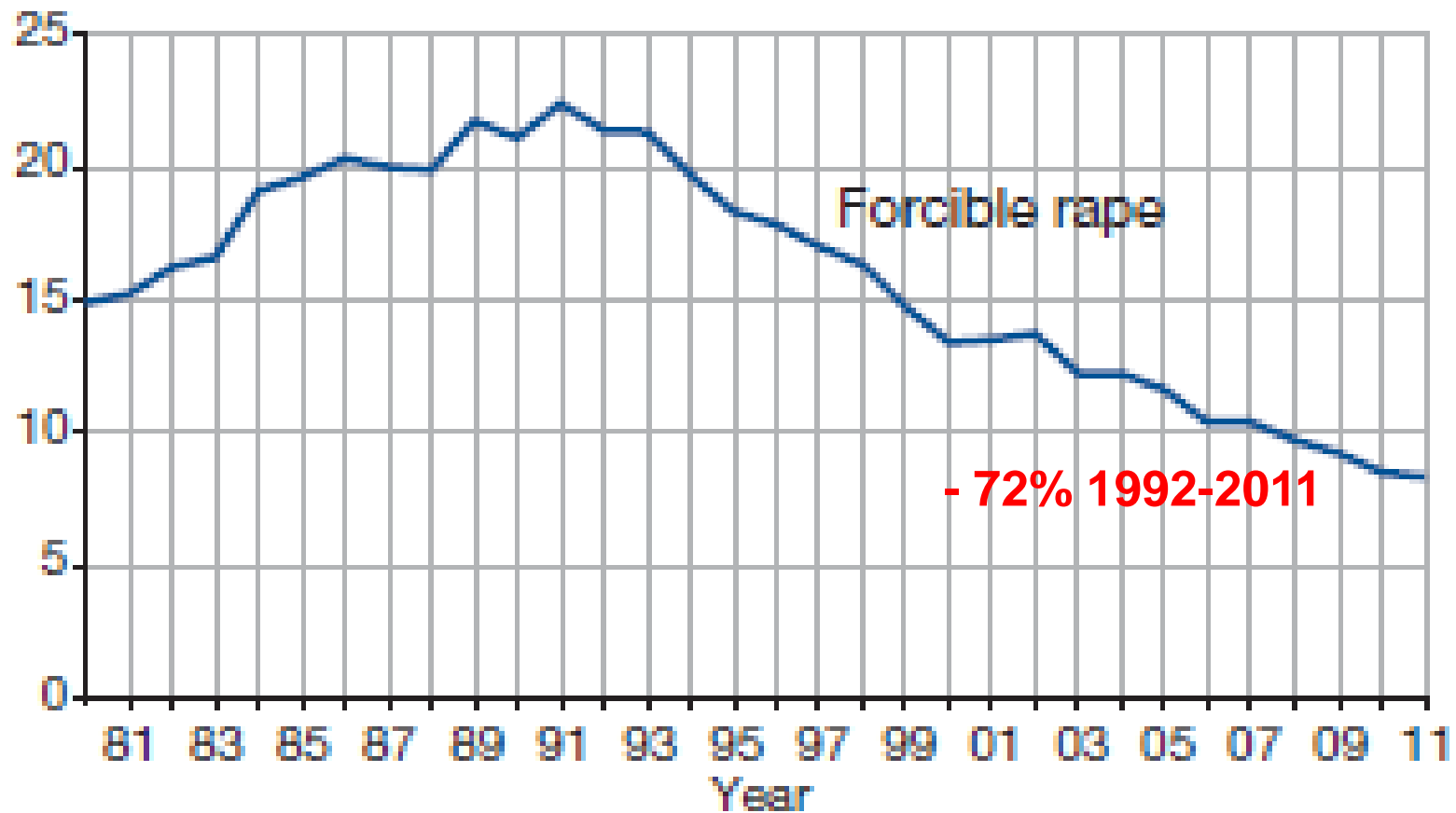
# FBI Forcible Rape Known to Police & NCANDS Sexual Abuse Known to CPS



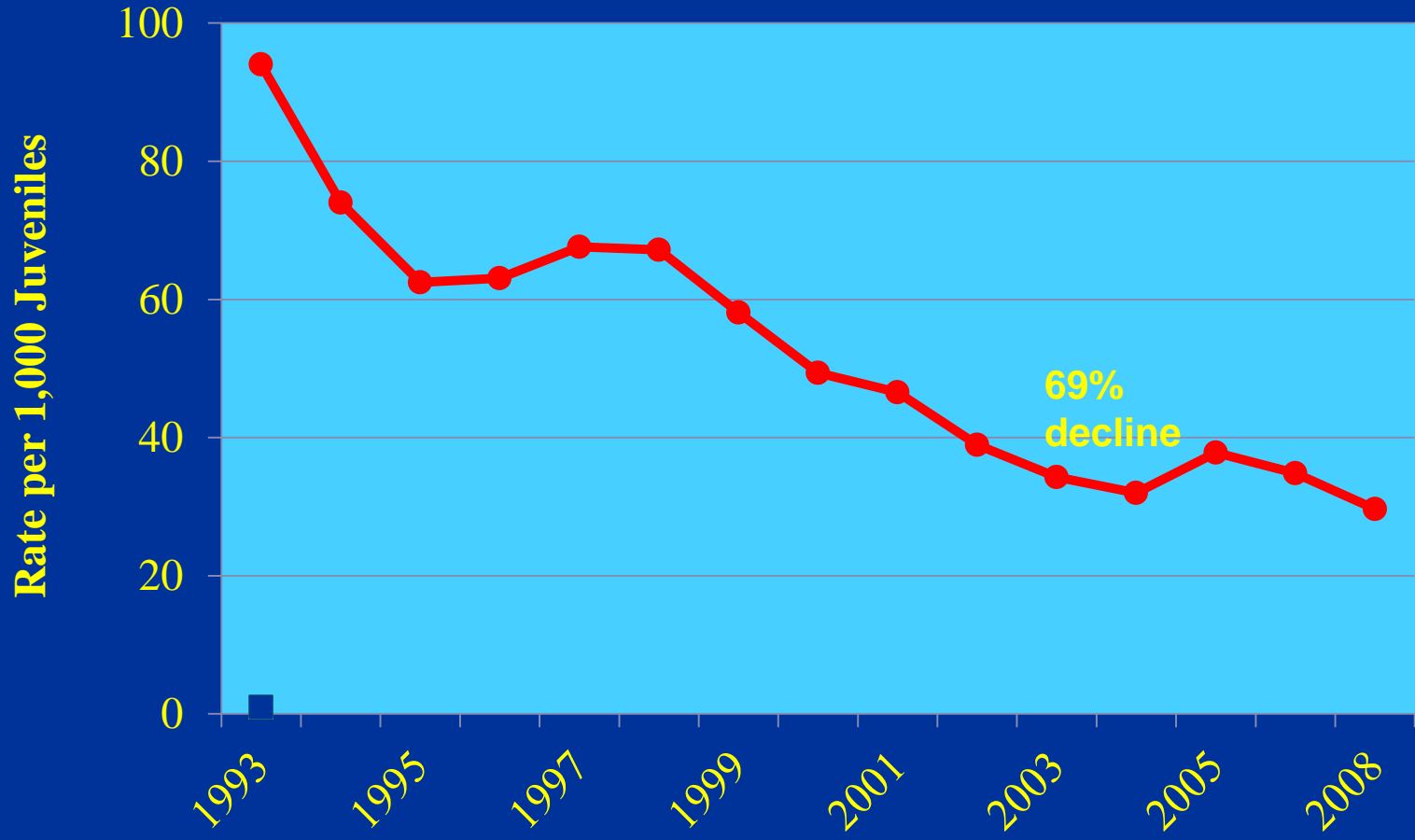
\*Source: FBI, Crime in the United States Reports and NCANDS

# Rape by Juveniles Known to Police

Arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10–17



# Sexual Assault Victimization, Self-Report, NCVS

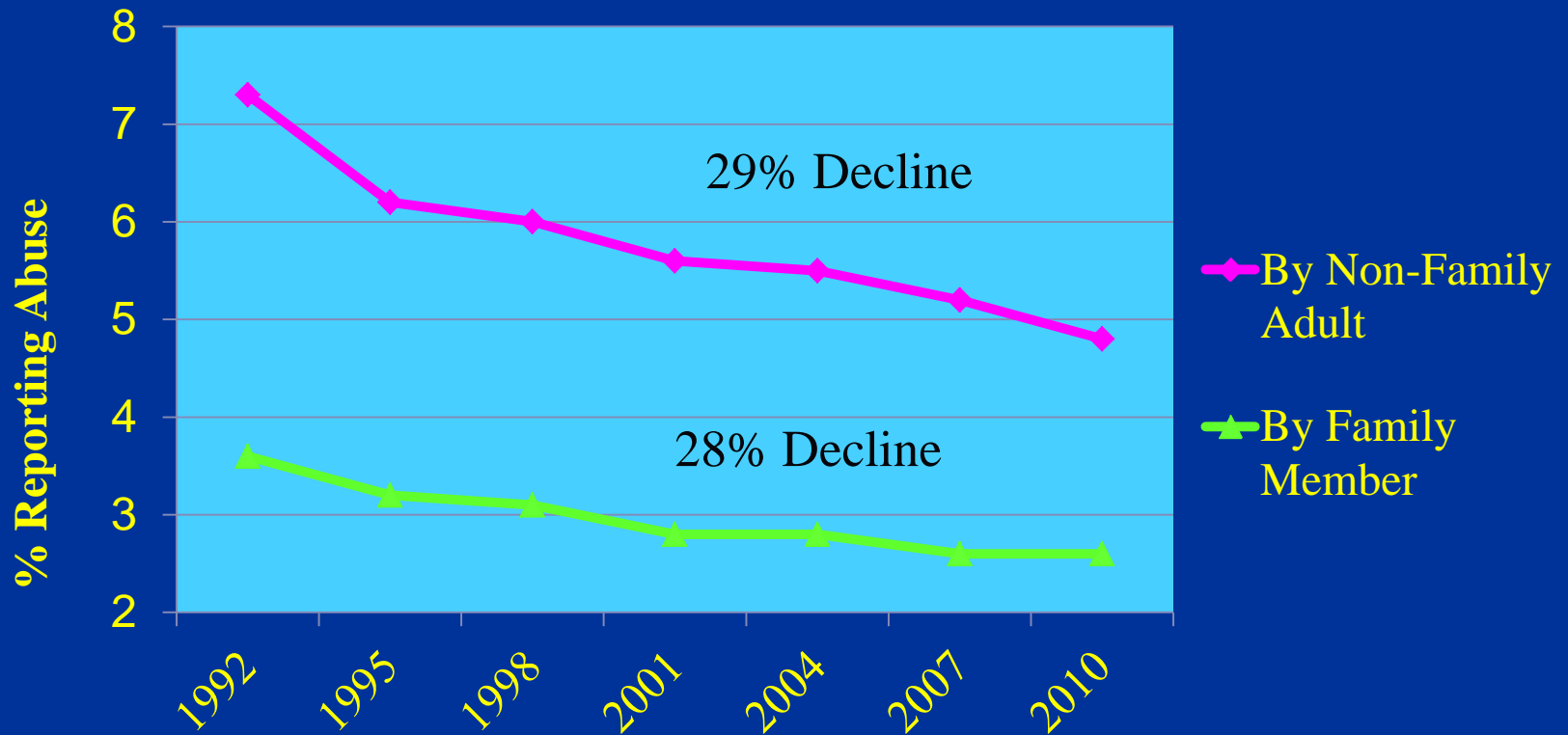


Note: Age 12 – 17 years; 3 year averages except 2008 which is a 2 year average. 2006 data excluded.

Source; National Crime Victimization Survey

# SEXUAL ABUSE

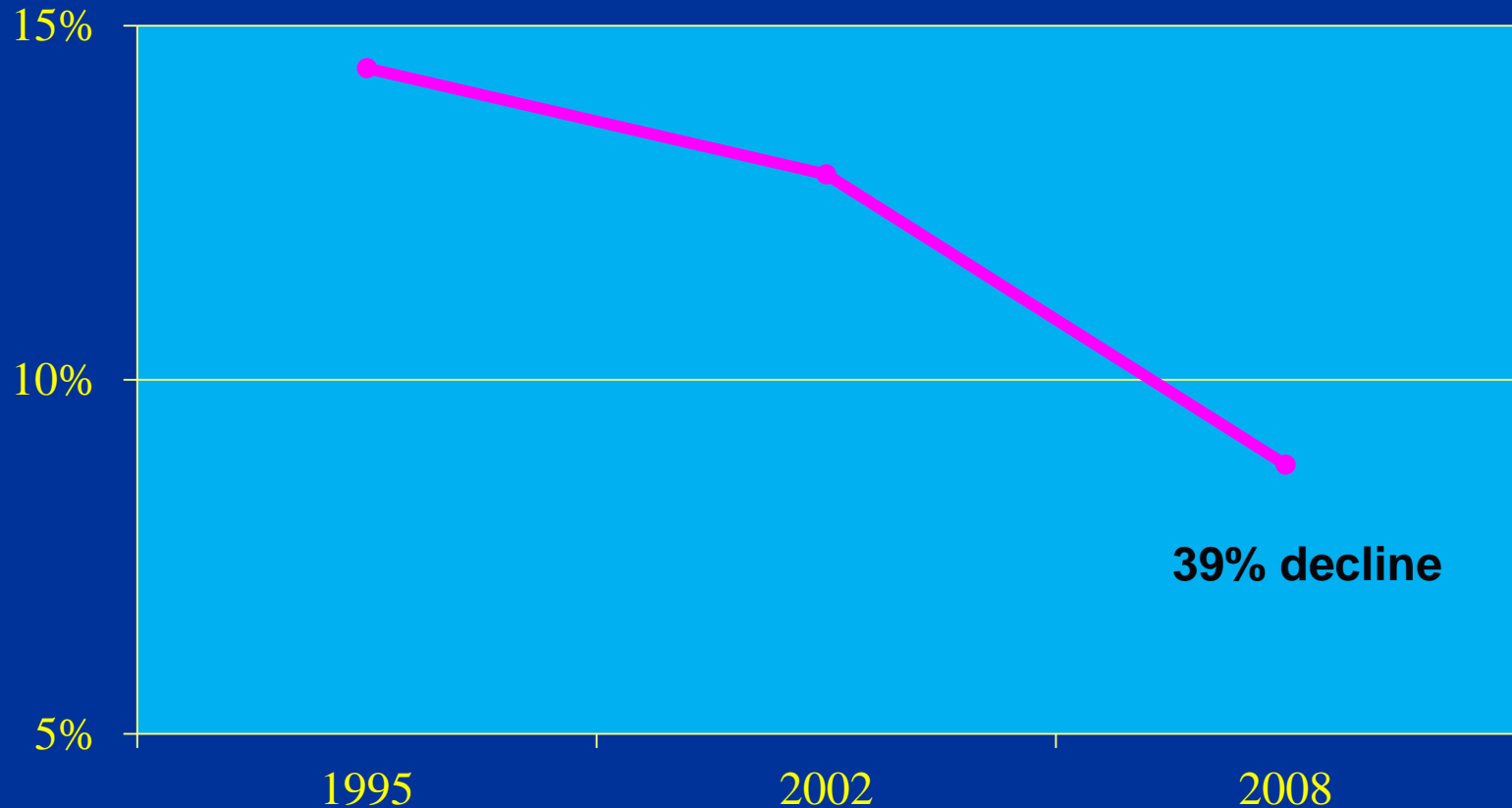
## Minnesota Study Survey



Note: respondents are 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in public schools in selected Minnesota school districts.  
Source: Minnesota Student Survey, 1992-2010

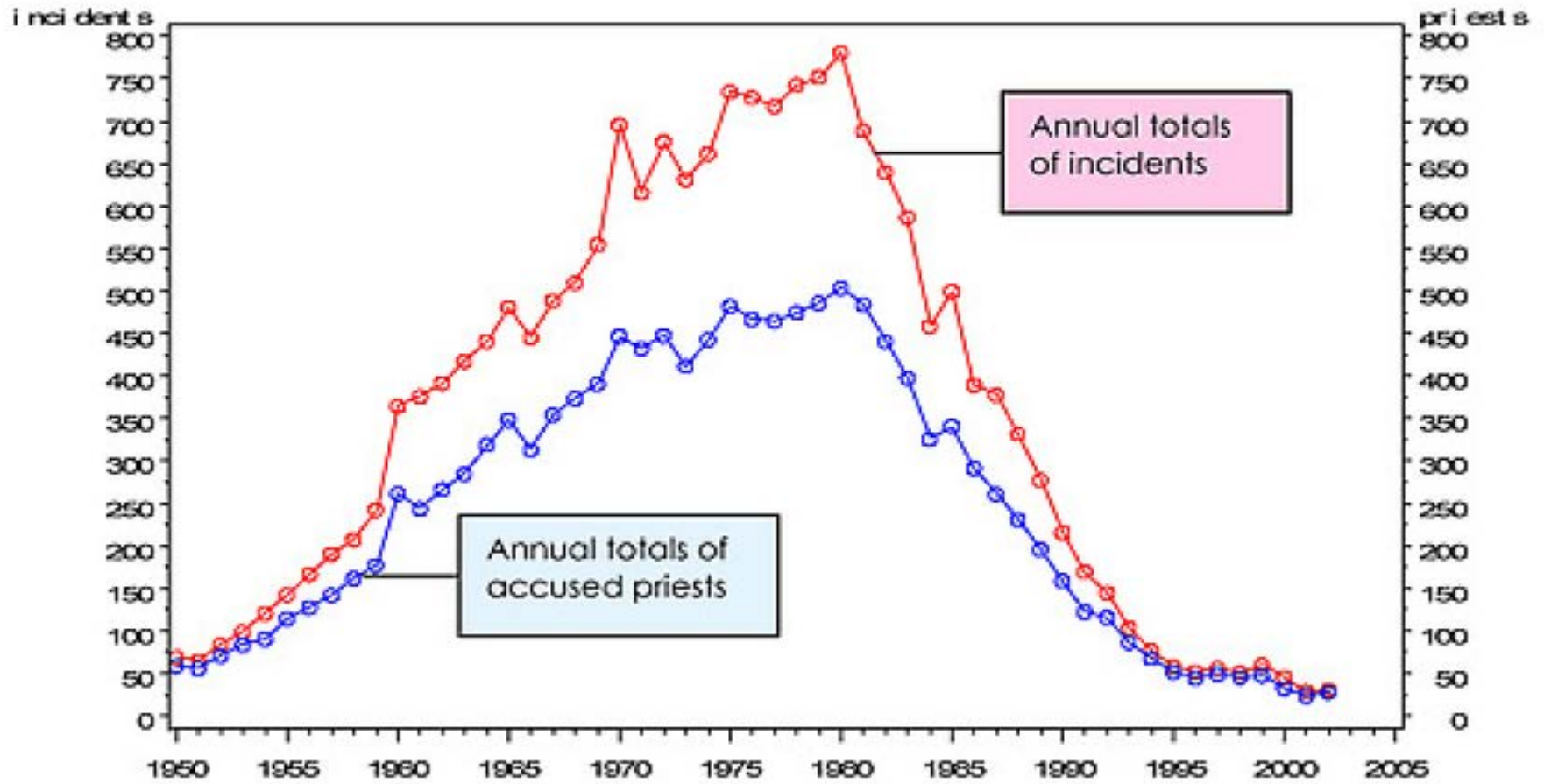
# STATUTORY RAPE

Percentage of Females, Ages 15-24, Whose First Sexual Intercourse Occurred at Age 15 or Younger with an Individual 3+ Years Older



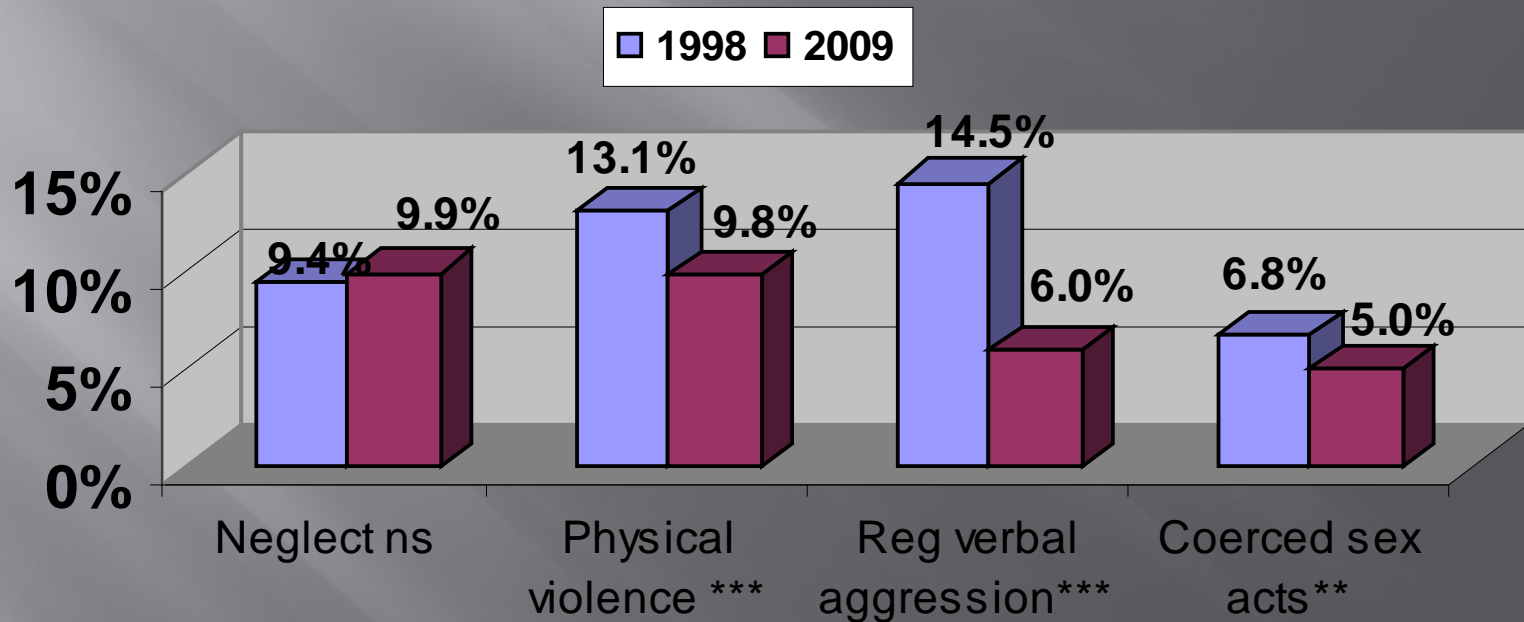
Sources: National Survey of Family Growth, analyzed by Child Trends

## Annual Count of Incidents Reported and Priests Accused, by Year



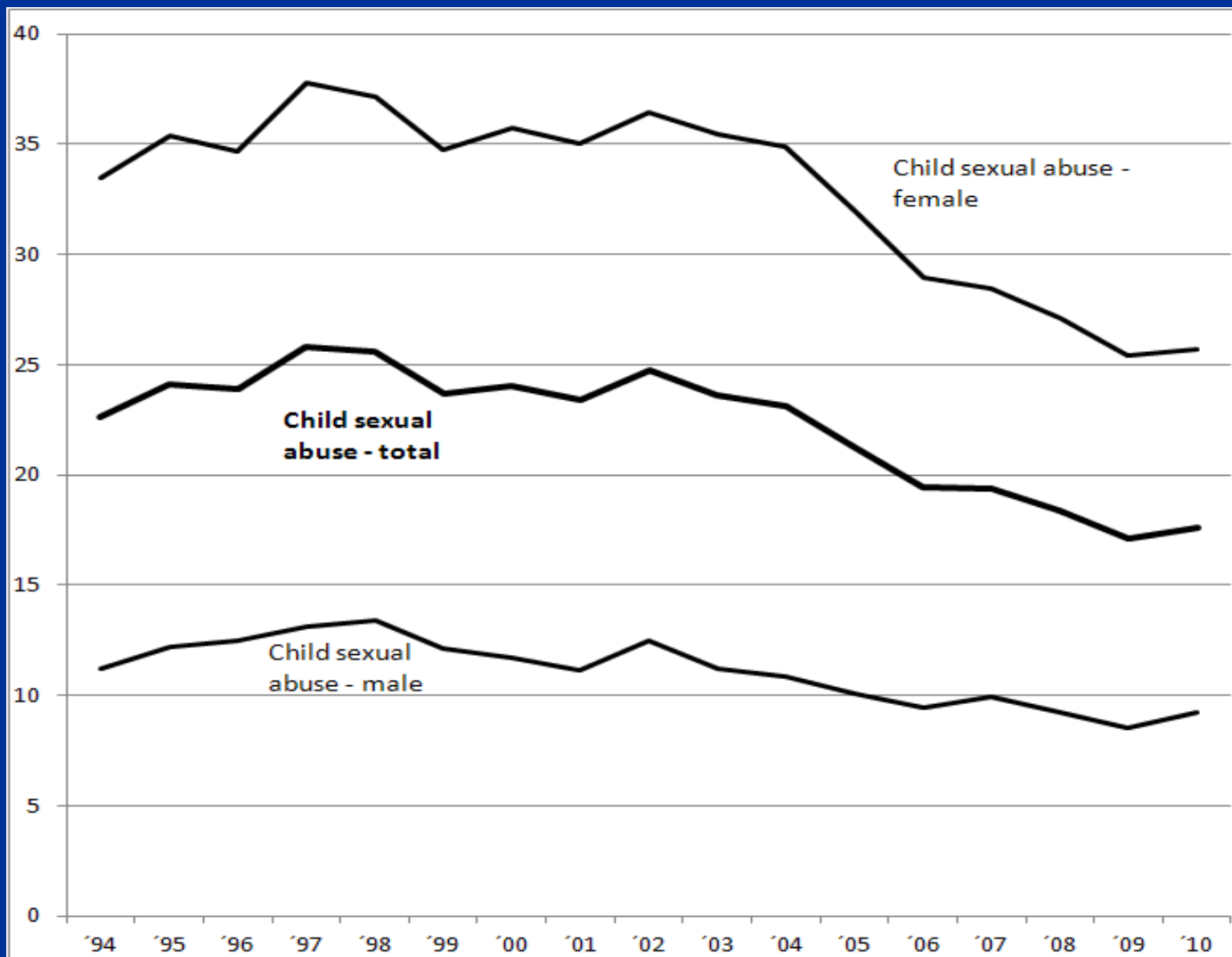


# UK National Household Surveys 1998-9 and 2009



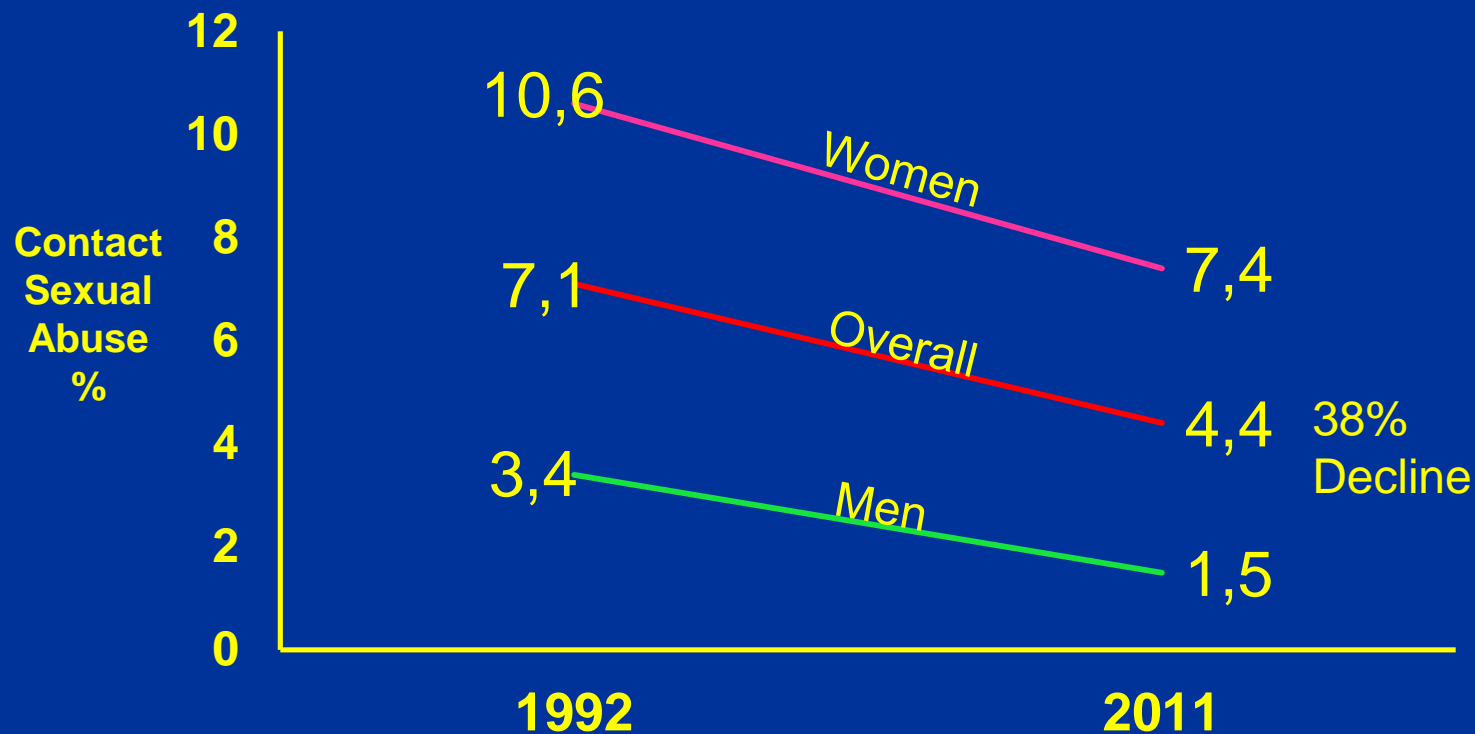
Radford, L Corral , S. Bradley, C. Fisher, H. & Collishaw, S (2011) *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* [www.nspcc.org.uk/childstudy](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/childstudy)

# Germany: Trend in Child Sexual Abuse in the Police Crime Statistics, 1994 to 2010



Sources: Stadler, L. & Bieneck, S. (2012)

## Germany: Trend in Lifetime Sexual Abuse National Survey of 16-40 Year Olds

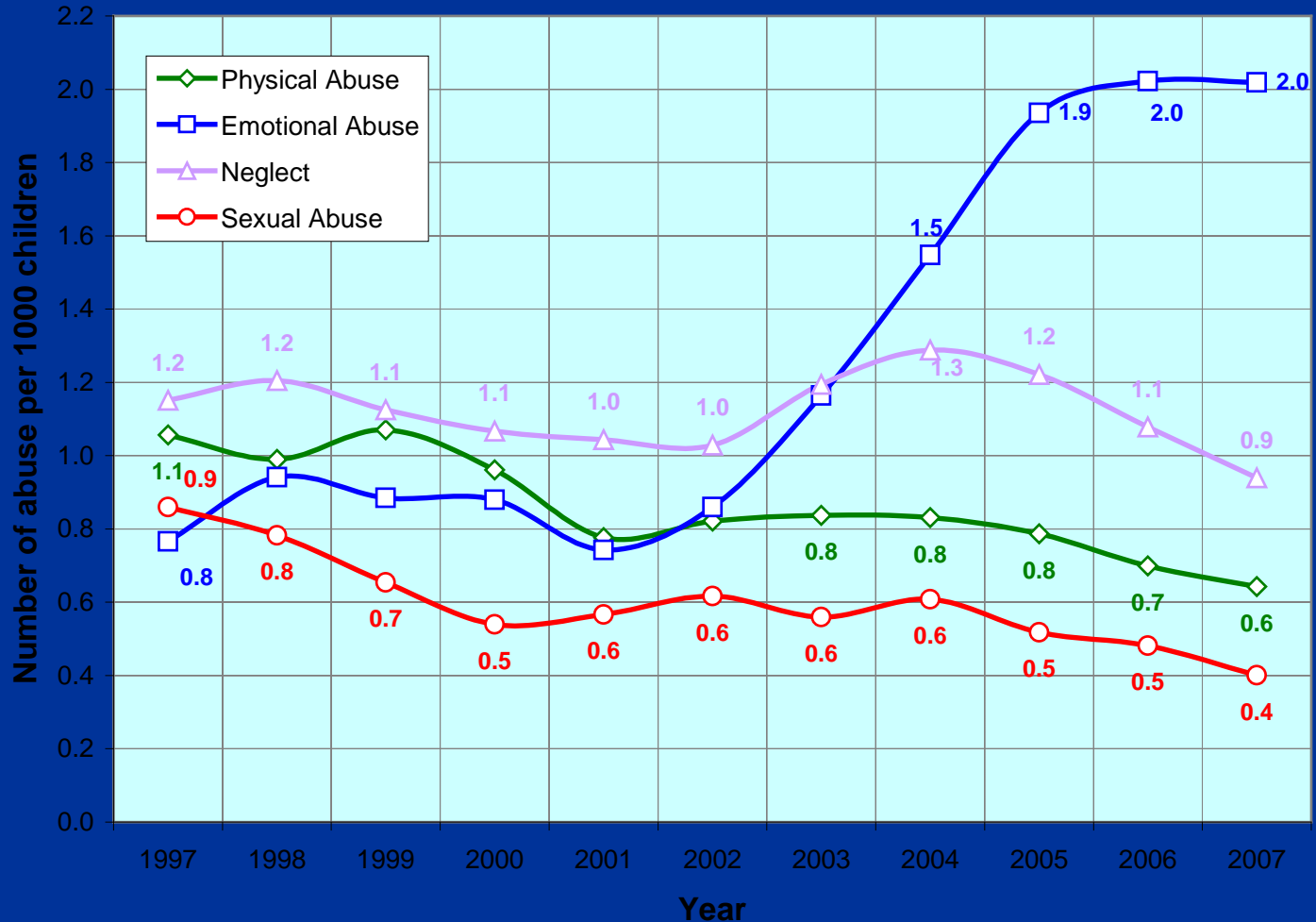


# Germany: Generational Trend in Sexual Abuse National Survey of 16-40 Year Olds



# Child Maltreatment in New Zealand

**OBSERVED NEW ZEALAND ABUSE RATES: New arrivals**  
Abuse findings per year per 1000 children



Difference from 1997 (ten years)

+164%

-18%

-39%

-53%

**Note:** Unadjusted rates may reflect increased screening rather than changes to the true underlying rate of abuse in NZ

# Explanations in need of study

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- ✓ More effective programs
- ✓ Troop surge
- ✓ Changing norms and awareness
- ✓ Aggressive policing
- ✓ Technology and surveillance
- ✓ MH treatment and psychopharmacology

# Possible Lessons

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- ✓ Big improvements possible and quickly
- ✓ Be encouraged by what we have done
- ✓ Importance of epidemiology (e.g., counting)
- ✓ Be careful what we abandon

Has the  
Internet  
AMPLIFIED  
danger to  
children?





# Resources

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Finkelhor, D.(2009). The Prevention of Childhood Sexual Abuse. *The Future of Children, 19*(2): 169-194.

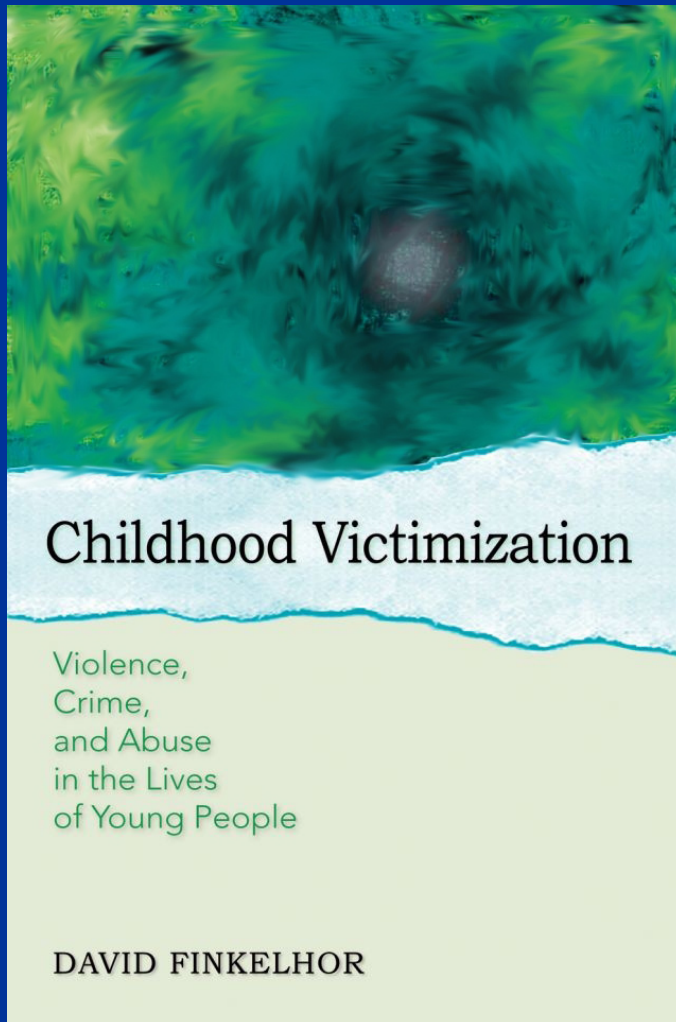
Finkelhor, D. & Jones, L.M. (2006). Why have child maltreatment and child victimization declined? *Journal of Social Issues, 62*(4): 685-716.

Finkelhor, D. & Jones, L.M. (2004). Explanations for the decline in child sexual abuse cases. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin-NCJ199298* (pgs. 1-12). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

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[www.unh.edu/ccrc](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc)

**Finkelhor, D. (2008). *Childhood victimization: Violence, Crime, and Abuse in the Lives of Young People*. New York: Oxford University Press.**



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**Daniel Schneider Child Welfare Book of the Year Award**