



WCSAP
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

RESEARCH & ADVOCACY REVIEW

A balancing act: A family perspective to
sibling sexual abuse

Keane, Guest, & Padbury (2013) explored issues of sibling sexual abuse in their recent article. According to the authors, there must be a balance of concern for victims of sibling sexual abuse, as well as those who offend. They rejected the feminist framework that prioritizes victim rights (specifically in the instance of youth offending) in order to look at it from a developmental framework. "Adult theories of offending are located in research that suggests the likelihood of repetition of established behaviours. In contrast, sexual offending by adolescents replicates juvenile offending which is far from entrenched and tends to diminish with maturation..." (p. 247). That is, we often look at all sexual offenses as being equal, which does a huge disservice to youth whose behaviors are more likely to adapt and change as they grow.

Instead of compulsory removal from the home, Keane et al. suggested a combination of safety planning, legal considerations, and intervention (often in the form of individual, and when possible family therapy). Otherwise, youth who offend may end up in unsafe situations themselves, such as in a group home, and their behavior may not be addressed. The authors also noted that disrupting the family unit could be difficult for parents and other siblings. It could result in resentment and denial and harm all involved, rather than providing a space for therapeutic coping. "Furthermore, working with the whole family minimizes ruptures within the family unit and helps to repair family relationships that are damaged as a result of abuse" (p. 254).

Keane et al.'s reasoning is based on observations made during their work with the Sexual Abuse Counseling and Prevention Program at the Children's Protection Society in Melbourne, Australia. It is not clear what the demographics they are working with are, and they do not provide alternative recommendations if therapy is not feasible due to either time or money. These issues may need to be considered by organizations prior to implementing their recommendations.

Keane, M., Guest, A., Padbury, J. (2013). A balancing act: A family perspective to sibling sexual abuse. *Child Abuse Review* 22, 246-254. doi: 10.1002/car.2284