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Sex Offenders: Who Are They?

For most of the community, the “default setting” seems to be that sex offenders are strangers; sick perverts who physically overpower their victims and violently force them into sexual activity. Society has a problem dealing with any sexual-victimization case in which the offender is not seen as completely “bad” and the victim “good”. The idea that victims of sexual violence behave like human beings and respond to the manipulation and attention by sex offenders is a troubling one. The assailant who is an acquaintance of the victim is one of us. We cannot easily distinguish him from us or identify him by physical traits. These offenders have always existed, but society and the criminal justice system have been reluctant to accept the reality of these cases. This preference for the “stranger-danger” concept has a direct impact on the sexual assault investigation and the suspect interview.

At the conclusions of the session, participants will be able to:

- Identify the stereotypes of “real” rapists
- Recognize how sex offender definitions vary by jurisdiction and discipline
- Define paraphilia as recognized by the DSM IV TR (2000)
- Reevaluate the criminal justice response to what has often been considered a public nuisance, i.e., peeping and indecent exposure
- Discuss the consequences for failing to recognize and appropriately hold sex offenders accountable
- Understand that research must include information about undetected sex offenders
- Recognize how sex offender treatment programs and DNA are now providing communities with our first real view of the sex offender
- Evaluate whether a pretext phone call is appropriate
- Conduct a pre-text phone call
- Evaluate how to best approach the suspect interview