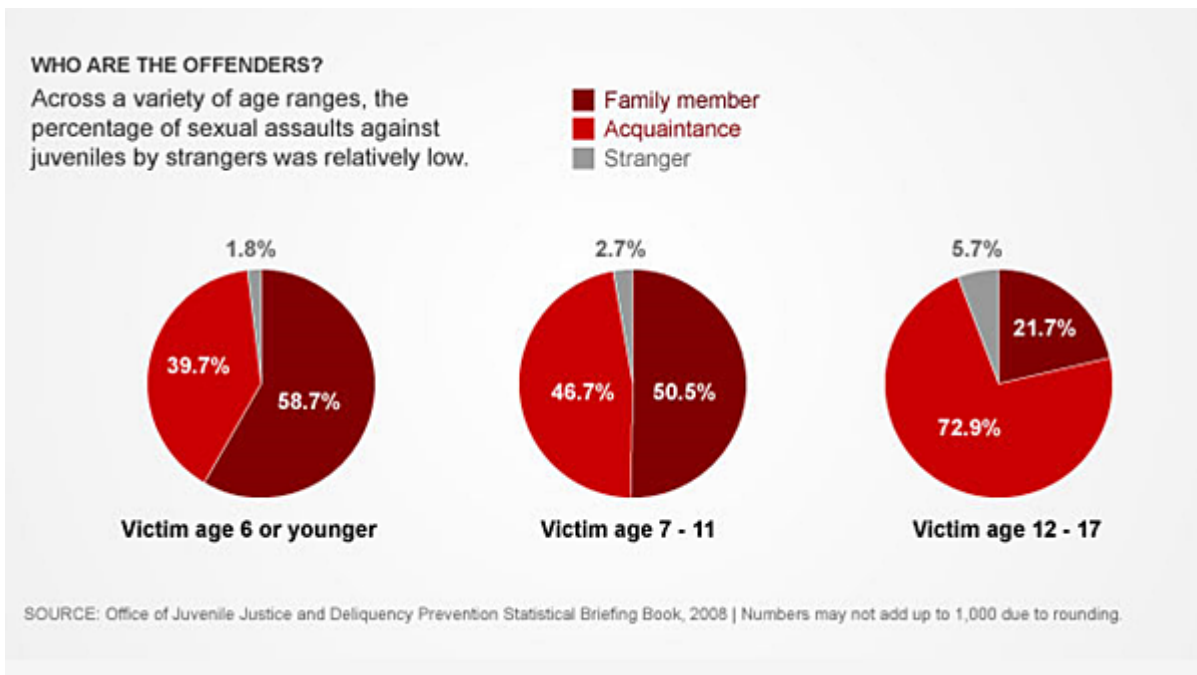


To OK legislators: Don't remove valuable sex offender therapy option

written by Sandy | July 31, 2017



By Sandy . . . A woman in Oklahoma has gotten the attention of state legislators after creating a Facebook page protesting that the uncle who was convicted for abusing her as a child was allowed to live next door to her. After his recent release from prison, Harold English of Bristow, Oklahoma, moved into his mother's home. The mother of English and grandmother of Danyelle Dyer has said that her son had nowhere else to live.

The exclusionary zones in Bristow make English finding another residence very problematic; however, he is now under a temporary order forcing him to leave the home. Lawmakers have rushed to close this "loophole" in the law, and [House Bill 1124](#) will be making its way through the Oklahoma legislature in the next session.

It is expected to pass with little to no opposition, and if it does so, it will forbid any convicted sex offender from living

or being within 1,000 feet of the home of his or her victim. Residency restrictions are shown by research to be without merit in any circumstances, but this particular one has even less to recommend it.

Its implementation would prove disastrous for one type of sex offender therapy.

While no one should be forced to be close to his or her former abuser if that is not his or her choice, legislation prohibiting former offenders from living near or with their former victims is not wise. Virtually all child sexual abuse is committed by a relative or someone else close to the family, as happened in this case. For children age six and under, the perpetrator is found to be a close family member [in 50% or more of the cases](#) .

[Family reunification therapy](#) is one tool available to treatment providers, and one that in the right circumstances is very valuable. It is a program designed for offenders who recognize and take responsibility for their own behavior and are willing and able to live within the limits placed upon them by the treatment program, the judicial system, and society.

[It is a survivor-led process](#), in partnership with non-offending caregivers, with the priority concern being the safety of the child. If at any point the child who was sexually abused does not wish to move forward with reunification, the process is stopped immediately.

When desired by all relevant persons, this therapy model offers hope for recovery for both victims and perpetrators. It has been found especially [valuable with juveniles](#) when the offending situation was that of an older sibling against a younger or more vulnerable one.

Lowered re-offense rates and successful rehabilitation are closely linked with an offender's ability to gain and maintain

stable living conditions as well as family support. Family reunification therapy provides one path to achieving these goals. Legislation such as HB 1124 in Oklahoma would remove that option from those who want it.

For many, this type of therapy, with its emphasis on accepting responsibility, forgiveness, and accountability in equal parts, has been a lifesaver for both former victims and former perpetrators. It is not for all, but it should remain as an option for those who choose it.