



Understanding Cross-over Offending – Beneath the Surface – Above the Low Hanging Fruit

The criminal justice system is responsible for investigating and prosecuting a wide variety of crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, rape, human trafficking, robbery, kidnapping, fraud, drug offenses, etc.

Researchers, since the 1970s into the contemporary, have studied the motivations and actions of offenders in many categories, including a great deal focused specifically on sex offenders. As a result, early understanding and application of the research brought about the categorizing of a variety of offenders – basically putting offenders in boxes such as “situational”, “preferential”, “intra” and “extra familial offenders”. This is problematic because criminal justice professionals have sometimes used these categories not only to “screen in” offenders to one or two of these categories but have also inadvertently “screened out” or limited the investigation and prosecution to the most obvious and limited understanding of a particular offender- missing out on many more opportunities towards accountability.

We have created specialties within criminal justice organizations including police departments, prosecuting attorney offices and even the courts to better deal with and understand the differing complexities and realities of these crimes. We have special victims’ units, domestic violence units, fraud units, child abuse units, drug task forces, computer crimes units, human trafficking task forces, child pornography units, domestic violence courts, drug courts, veterans’ courts, and in some jurisdictions – human trafficking courts.

It often seems like offenders “specialize” we assume that what we see is all that there is. For example, a man is caught raping a child, we assume he is a pedophile without expanding the investigation to explore the possible of other victim types. We are locked into traditional investigation and prosecution techniques where we are “incident focused”. We are trained to primarily focus on the specific reported offense(s) and we attempt to hold the offender accountable only for that offense(s).

Research dating back to the 1980’s has also help us better understand motivations and behaviors of offenders beyond the incident. Crossover studies have clearly demonstrated that many, if not most offenders commit a wide variety of crimes and offenses. In fact, based on what we now know about offenders, we need to take a different approach to the investigation and prosecution of offenders to include utilizing a wider lens and expanding beyond the reported incident.

This presentation will focus on the historical view of offending and practices surrounding this view within the criminal justice system. The presenter will provide research that demonstrates the need to change some of our thinking, policies and responses to a variety of crimes. One primary recommendation will be to create policies and practices that focus on the possibility that there may be additional offenses and additional victims. This presentation will seek to “lift the veil” on the true nature of offenders.

Objectives:

- Understand the overall criminal justice approach and response to crime and crime specialties
- Identify the core needs and motivations of offenders
- Identify offender behavior and Theory of the Third Persona
- Review the tactics offenders groom and maintain control over their victims
- Identify ways in which offenders use modern technologies to further their criminal pursuits
- Recommend changes to our criminal justice system to more effectively hold offenders accountable
- Discuss how we can aim higher than the low hanging fruit