

I. Introduction

Little empirical research exists confirming that child sex offenders (CSO)¹ are at higher risk for suicide (Byrne, Lurigio, & Pimentel, 2009; Hoffer, Shelton, Behnke, & Erdberg, 2010). Nevertheless, law enforcement agencies around the country anecdotally report cases in which an investigation of a child sex crime abruptly ended due to the suicide of the offender.² Many CSOs experience high levels of fear, anxiety, shame, and helplessness during the course of an investigation and are often concerned about their future as it relates to their family, work, and reputation (Hoffer et al., 2010; Lanning, 2010). Feeling stigmatized, they might see themselves as a burden to society, having nothing to contribute (Hoffer et al.). They may also believe that disclosure of this information will humiliate and thus burden their family. Motivations for suicide among CSOs are diverse but often include regaining control of a situation that they perceive as helpless and uncertain (e.g., escaping prison time or preventing the disclosure of additional victims) (Hoffer et al.).

Although law enforcement personnel are neither trained nor required to assess an offender's suicidality, awareness of suicide among this population of offenders may mitigate the risk of suicide and enhance operational strategies, including officer safety (Hoffer et al., 2010). Additionally, analyses of these cases may give law enforcement empirically based data to support seizing the offenders' weapons for safety purposes or to argue for the detention of an offender after arrest in order to evaluate his vulnerability to suicide.

¹The term child sex offender (CSO) used here indicates an adult who was being investigated for a sex crime against a child(ren) at the time of his death. The pronouns, he/him/his, are used throughout this document since the BAU sample of CSOs was composed of all males. The child sex crime(s) included the receiving, possessing, distributing, or producing of child pornography, traveling to have sex with a minor, or sexually molesting a child(ren). Due to the suicides of the CSOs occurring early in the investigations, the majority of the sample was never convicted.

²For many of the CSOs referenced, there was probable cause to seize evidence in a search or arrest warrant. In some cases, a "knock and talk" was conducted when there was insufficient probable cause for a search or arrest warrant at a specific location or on the offender. A knock and talk involves law enforcement knocking on the offender's residence and asking for consent to interview him and/or review his computer for any evidence of illegal activity.