



### 131 A Case Study Illustrating Sexual Grooming as Part of the Child Molester's *Modus Operandi*

Marina Genis, MA\*, Unit 149, 21 Sunset Avenue, Pineslopes, Lonehill, Ext 71, SOUTH AFRICA; and Elmarie A. Myburgh, South African Police Services, 255 Schoeman Street, Pretoria, SOUTH AFRICA

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand what constitutes sexual grooming, how this forms part of the pedophile's modus operandi in order to successfully offend against the victim as well as the application of grooming laws in South Africa and how this correlates with grooming as a legal concept in other countries.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing law enforcement officers with a better understanding of grooming as part of the modus operandi of child molesters, enabling them as well as the community in general, to be able to identify these behaviors and prevent children from being abused, and to understand these behaviors from a cross national perspective.

Many pedophiles court children like an adult will court a partner with attention, affection, and gifts. In sex offenders, this behavior is referred to as grooming. The grooming process takes time until the child's inhibitions have been lowered and the offender progresses to sexual behavior. In South Africa, grooming is a crime under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No. 32 of 2007.

Grooming behavior includes identifying with vulnerable victims, having access to children through, for example, baby sitting, seducing the child with attention, affection, and gifts. In general child molesters do not use force to engage children in sexual activities but rather count on different forms of psychological manipulation, grooming, and desensitization. Physical grooming entails the gradual sexualization of the relationship between offender and victim. The offender builds the child's trust, makes him or her feel good, and then starts to violate boundaries (e.g., progression from innocent touching to inappropriate touching or showing pornography to children). The victims' repeated acceptance of non-sexual touch early in the grooming process could lead them to believe that they have given consent to more invasive sexual contact. In this way, the desensitization process seems to promote cooperation and reduces potential for disclosure. When confronted about engaging in such activities, pedophiles commonly justify and minimize their actions or make excuses while others use cognitive distortions or redefine their action as love and support.

The following case study will be presented to illustrate typical grooming behavior and cognitive distortions or excuses of a sentenced child molester in the South African context.

A 62-year-old male groomed his step granddaughter from the age of seven by gaining her and her parents' trust. He sexually molested her from the age of eight and sexually penetrated her from about the age of nine until eleven. He took photos of her vaginal area and was in possession of other child abuse images. He pleaded guilty on five charges of rape and manufacturing of pornographic material. He was sentenced to life for the rape charge, and five years for the charge of manufacturing of pornographic material.

**Sexual Grooming, Child Molester, Sexual Abuse**