

Halloween sex offender policies questioned

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The rates of non-familial sex crimes against children under the age of 12 are no higher during the Halloween season than at any other times of the year, according to a study published in the September issue of *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* the official journal of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (published by SAGE). The findings raise questions about the wisdom of law enforcement practices aimed at dealing with a problem that does not appear to exist.

Using the National Incident-Base Reporting System, the study looked at more than 67,000 non-family sex offenses reported to law enforcement in 30 states across nine years. Taking into account such variables as time, seasonality and weekday periodicity, the researchers found no increased rate of sexual abuse during the Halloween season. Additionally, the number of reported incidences didn't vary before or after police procedures were implemented to prevent such abuse.

"We do not suggest that there is no risk on Halloween or that parents should abandon caution and supervision of their [children](#)," write the authors in the article. "But there does not appear to be a need for alarm concerning sexual abuse on these particular days. In short, Halloween appears to be just another autumn day where rates of sex crimes against children are concerned."

Research has found that the highest danger for children during the Halloween season was from pedestrian- motor vehicle accidents, not from sexual abuse by strangers.

"It is important for policy makers to consider allocation of resources in light of the actual increased risks that exist in areas besides Halloween sex offender policies," the authors conclude. "Our findings indicated that sex crimes against children by nonfamily members account for 2 out of every 1,000 Halloween crimes, calling into question the justification for diverting [law enforcement](#) resources away from more prevalent public safety concerns."

"How Safe Are Trick-or-Treaters?: An Analysis of Child Sex Crime Rates on Halloween" in [Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment](#) was written by Mark Chaffin, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center; Jill Levenson, Lynn University; Elizabeth Letourneau, Medical University of South Carolina Family Services Research Center; and Paul Stern, Snohomish County Prosecutors Office. It is available free of charge for a limited time at <http://sax.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/21/3/363>.

Source: SAGE Publications

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