This report gives an overview of what is known from the scientific literature about juvenile group sex offenders. In addition, secondary analyses will be performed on two existing datasets on juvenile group sex offenders and juvenile group sex offences. Both the existing literature as well as the datasets contain information mainly on group rape.

Group sex offences are of all times. Historical research reveals that group sex offending was also prevalent during the renaissance, and that prevalence, characteristics of the offences and (juvenile) as described then are not very different from what is known today. Group sex offences, committed by juveniles or adults, are not specific to one culture or era.

Nevertheless, very little research has been done on (juvenile) perpetrators of this type of offence, their victims, the circumstances in which the offences take place and offenders’ criminal careers. This is the more remarkable as a sizeable proportion of juvenile sex offending – just like other kinds of offending by juveniles – is committed with a group. Also, offences are relatively damaging for victims.

Juvenile group sex offenders have a fairly average personality profile; psychiatric disturbances or developmental disorders are seldom diagnosed. In the Netherlands, most offenders are ethnic minority although indigenous Dutch offenders are also regularly involved. A large percentage live in the larger cities, and is socially disadvantaged. Group sex offenders differ in very few respects from solo peer abusers.

Group sex offences are generally committed by informal groups, and hardly ever by organized gangs. The victim is generally an acquaintance of at least one of the group members, and of approximately the same age. In two thirds of cases the victim is threatened, and in a quarter of cases she is humiliated. Offenders tend to excuse their own behaviour, for instance by stressing the victim’s promiscuous reputation. Group pressure appears a normalizing factor that facilitates the norm transgression.

Group sex offenders are generalists rather than specialists. Their recidivism to a sex offence is comparable to that of solo peer abusers. The rate of general recidivism, and particularly violent recidivism, is however much higher.

The impact of media exposure (videoclips, internet) on group sex offending has so far not been the object of investigation/research. In none of the studies on group sex offenders, or the databases we analyzed, did we find any indication that internet and sexually explicit media content affect offenders or the nature of these offences. While this is often assumed, such an effect has no empirical basis.

Preventive measures should be geared towards juveniles at ‘VMBO’-schools (lower level of secondary education), that are attended by most offenders and victims. Within existing sex and/or health education it should be underlined (to boys) that certain stereotypical views of women increase the risk of transgression of sexual norms. For girls, educational content should discuss potentially risky situations and coping mechanisms.
Ambulatory or residential treatment, specifically for the sex offence, is seldom imposed for juvenile group sex offenders. Given the seriousness of offences, the relatively grave consequences for victims and risk for general and violent recidivism, treatment should more often be the intervention of choice for these offenders. On the basis of what is known about treatment effectiveness for solo sex offenders, positive effects may be expected for group sex offenders as well. Treatment should focus on diminishing sensitivity for group pressure and reducing recidivism risk, as well as on other antisocial behavioural tendencies. Treatment should preferably be part of a compulsory measure or sanction.