



Last week, a man allegedly raped a four-year-old girl. While lawyers say that rape of children that young is rare, there was another case where a man was jailed for sexually assaulting a five-year-old earlier this month. JUDITH TAN (juditht@sph.com.sg) speaks to psychiatrists who deal with these predators

He dates woman to rape her child

She thought he loved her.

But the 36-year-old divorcee was shattered when she found out that all her boyfriend wanted was her six-year-old daughter.

When she first befriended him, the 40-year-old was exceptionally caring towards both her and her child. After a few months of dating, she started to trust him.

She even left the girl in his care. But one day, the child told her that the man had been messing with her.

The daughter said they would play games which involved her stripping.

The woman installed a secret camera in her daughter's room. That was

when she caught her boyfriend red-handed — raping her child.

"This man deliberately took pains to know her and become close as he wanted to target the child. This is the typical behaviour of a predating paedophile. They go to great lengths to groom their victim," Dr Lim Boon Leng, a consultant psychiatrist at the Geneagles Hospital, says.

A paedophile is usually an adult man with a long-term sexual interest in children who are usually under the age of 11.

"Dr Lim has worked with paedophiles for seven years and is involved in diagnosing and treating them.

He and several other psychiatrists The New Paper on Sunday approached described the modus operandi of paedophiles:

■ They find ways to be around children and seek out occupations and volunteer positions that involve kids as much as possible.

Some will even marry or become friends with women who have children to have access to them.

■ They start out offering gifts, favours and friendship over a period of time, ranging from weeks to months or even years, using this time to build the child's trust while playing and being in close contact.

According to police statistics, there is a rise in the number of statutory rape cases involving girls under the age of 14.

There were 40 cases of statutory rape from January to June, compared to 23 cases in the same period last year.

Police said the culprits in the majority of these cases are known to the victims and are youth offenders.

Treatment for paedophilia, which is a psychosexual disorder, is possible.

In order for paedophilia to be diagnosed clinically, these unusual thoughts or behaviours must be present for at least six months and must

Offender registry unlikely here

Chemical castration is one effective way of treating paedophilia.

But while practised in the US, Europe, Australia and Israel — and South Korea became the first Asian country to enact a law allowing the use of chemical castration on convicted paedophiles in 2011 — it is not practised here.

Dr Lim Boon Leng, a consultant psychiatrist at the Geneagles Hospital, says this is because it has yet to be proven if such a measure will reduce anti-social behaviour, and would need the paedophile's consent.

Countries such as Britain, Canada and New Zealand also have a sex offenders registry.

This is a database designed to allow authorities to keep track of the residence and activities of sex offenders. In some places, the registry is made available to the public via a website to warn the community there is a sex offender in their midst.

Others have exclusion zones. This is to ensure the sex of-

fender does not live next to a school, a park or a children's activity area.

But psychiatrists here explain that this may not work here because such measures go against the spirit of the Yellow Ribbon Project, which seeks to get employers to give former offenders a second chance, and as it is, former inmates are already finding it hard to reintegrate into society.

"Such a list can potentially lead to further alienation. The public can figure out who he is and identify him.

"This causes aggravation and prevents him from interacting with adults. It can even further fuel his paedophilic tendencies," psychiatrist GS Devan from Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialist Centre says.

He is in favour of a restricted registry, made known only to the Government and institutions dealing with children, should the offenders try to look for jobs there.

THE PICTURE ILLUSTRATION

cause distress to the affected individual or impair his ability to function socially or occupationally.

In prison, paedophiles who are assessed to be at moderate or high risk of reoffending are put through a treatment programme. The sex offender is given the skills and knowledge necessary to stop their behaviour.

But Dr Lim says it is not so clear-cut for people who have not committed offences.

"They do not come forward because they know that people will judge them.

"Many are afraid of the stigma should others know their secret. They are worried about being persecuted if they went to a doctor," he says.

Only 5 per cent seek treatment, another psychiatrist GS Devan from

Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialist Centre says.

"The majority have to go through the justice system to get diagnosed and treated."

"This is worrying because early treatment is still key in preventing the paedophile from acting out the fantasy," says Dr Lim.

"I have seen a married paedophile, who sought help before sentencing as he didn't want to be tied into his behaviour.

"Immediately after his release from prison, he sought help again.

"He was also honest with his wife and family, as difficult as that was.

"He is one I consider low risk as he wants to be well and is smart enough to know not to ignore therapy or pretend the urges don't exist," says Dr Muniadasa Winslow of Winslow Clinic at the Novena Medical Centre.