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## Sex Abuse In Cop-Scout Program?

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(AP) At least a dozen teenagers assigned to work with police departments as part of the Boy Scouts' Law Enforcement Explorers program have allegedly been sexually abused by officers during the past year. In the past five years, such molestations number at least 25, according to criminologists' research being released Wednesday.

Sponsors have promised reforms to the program, which attracts tens of thousands of teens annually.

Among recent cases:

- The East Ridge, Tenn., police department suspended its Explorer program after Officer Keith Maynard, 31, was charged with two counts of statutory rape and two counts of aggravated child molestation, accused of having sex with a 15-year-old girl in the program. He is awaiting trial.
- In Haltom City, Texas, former police officer John Ross Ewing, 28, was indicted by a grand jury in March on charges that he sexually assaulted two male Explorer scouts, ages 15 and 16, at his apartment.
- In San Bernardino, Calif., Freddie Lee Johnson, 34, pleaded guilty in April to having sex with a 16-year-old girl on a scout-related camping trip. According to court records, the girl woke up in her tent and found the officer on top of her. He was sentenced to 60 weekends in jail.

"I was scared that if I said anything, I would get into trouble and I would have to leave the sheriff's department," the victim said in a statement at the sentencing hearing.

Her mother added: "We trusted him. How could we not? He was a law-enforcement officer. He was our daughter's (Explorer) adviser. He was invited to our daughter's graduation dinner at our home. ... He shook our hands, gave me hugs, and all of the time, he was betraying our trust."

Law Enforcement Explorers is a co-ed program affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America. The broader scouts Exploring program also places 14- to 20-year-olds with firefighters, medical providers, lawyers and others to learn about those careers.

In 2002, about 43,000 Explorers were assigned to police and sheriff's departments around the United States.

Boy Scouts of America officials said they were surprised and concerned to learn of the incidents.

"One child, 12 children, it's always one too many," said Boy Scouts of America national spokesman Gregg Shields.

"I really don't understand why this is happening," said John Anthony, executive director of the Learning For Life program, which oversees Explorers.

Anthony's office is reinforcing youth protection guidelines with all law enforcement Explorer programs and requiring supervisors to go through training about how to protect participants from abuse.

The extent of the abuse is detailed in research by the University of Nebraska criminal justice professor Samuel Walker and his colleague Dawn Irlbeck, who study police sexual abuse of women.

Almost half of the reported teenage victims of police sexual abuse in the past decade were enrolled in police Explorer programs, they found, with the rest abused during arrests, traffic stops and in other situations.

"When you have repeated incidents across the country, a new one every month, that's a real problem," Walker said.

Even where abuse is not alleged, critics have faulted some programs for endangering teens.

Explorers have been used on undercover pornography stings in which they enter adult bookstores and purchase materials banned for their age group. In other cases, scouting officials said, they have been allowed to drive marked patrol cars, which could expose them to harm from gang members and drug dealers.

"Stings are prohibited and always have been prohibited," said Shields, the Boy Scouts spokesman. "These are juveniles and it's just not proper."

The Explorer program's own written guidelines discourage the practice of allowing teens to drive patrol cars, noting, "This is potentially putting inexperienced (immature) youth in harm's way."

Under those guidelines, unsupervised, one-on-one contact between Explorers and officers is banned, with one exception — during certified law enforcement ride-alongs. But this is when many of the reported cases of abuse have taken place, the research found.

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