

Is Childhood Sexual Victimization Associated with Sexual Interest in Children and Beliefs About Child Molestation?

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October 1, 2009 Dallas, Texas, USA 1

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CSA Victimization is Associated with Sex Offending

- Child molesters are much more likely to have been sexually abused as children compared to non-molesters (e.g., Jespersen et al., 2009; Seto, 2008)
- Causal?
- If so, why does CSA lead some men to molest children?

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Victimization and Attraction to Children

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graph LR
    CSA[CSA] --> Pedophilia[Pedophilia]
    Pedophilia --> Offending[Offending]
            
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- Both theory and research suggest that CSA is associated with greater sexual attraction to children (at least among child molesters)
 - e.g., Burton (2003); Freund et al. (1990); Lee et al. (2002); Lussier et al. (2005); Seto (2008)

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What about Beliefs Supportive of Child Molestation?

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graph LR
    CSA[CSA] --> Beliefs[Beliefs]
    Beliefs --> Offending[Offending]
            
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- Although a link between CSA and cognitions about child molestation has suggested in theory, it has not been examined in published research
 - e.g., Burton (2003); Ward & Siegert (2002)

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Purpose of Current Study

- Compare rate of CSA among child molesters and non-molesters
- Examine association of CSA with sexual interest in children, beliefs supportive of child molestation, and estimated risk of sexual recidivism

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Participants

- 39 child molesters
 - Current or prior conviction for sex offence against victim under 14
 - 35 had a victim under 12
- 26 non-molesters
 - No current or prior sex offences (charges, convictions, or self-reported) ($n = 20$) or
 - A current or prior sex offence conviction against a victim 18+, but no sex offence victims under 18 (charges, convictions, or self-reported) ($n = 6$)

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7

Measures

- Viewing time (VT)
- Sexual Interests Profiling System (SIPS; Laws, 1986)
- Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI; Seto & Lalumière, 2001)
- Sex with Children Scale (SWCH; Mann et al., 2007)
 - Factor 1: Harmless sex with children
 - Factor 2: Provocative sexual children
- Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 1999, 2000)

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8

Procedure

- Offenders in 5 federal prisons in Canada completed measures and we reviewed their files
- SWCH, SIPS, and VT were completed by offenders
- CSA and SSPI were coded from files
- CSA = sexual contact prior to age 16 with someone at least 4 years older
- Static-99 scores were transcribed from files

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9

CSA Rate was Higher for Child Molesters than Non-Molesters

- 53.8% (21/39) of child molesters vs. 11.5% (3/26) of non-molesters had been sexually victimized in childhood
 - $\phi = .43, p < .05$

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10

CSA Characteristics

- Youngest age of victim at CSA
 - Child molesters: $M = 8.00$ years ($SD = 3.19$)
 - Non-molesters: $M = 6.67$ ($SD = 1.53$)
- Gender of abuser
 - Child molesters: 81.0% male, 4.8% female, 9.5% both male and female abusers, and 4.8% unknown
 - Non-molesters: 100% male

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11

CSA vs. No CSA among Child Molesters

Measure	Mean		<i>d</i>	95% CI	
	CSA	No CSA		Lower	Upper
VT	-0.01	-0.09	0.32	-0.33	0.96
SIPS	-3.17	-3.59	0.18	-0.46	0.83
SSPI	4.19	3.19	0.74*	0.07	1.42
SWCH F1	1.00	5.67	-0.97*	-1.63	-0.30
SWCH F2	1.43	3.50	-0.66*	-1.30	-0.01
Static 99	5.89	3.41	1.05*	0.35	1.74

* $p < .05$.

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12

Discussion

- Beliefs supportive of child molestation were **lower** for abused than non-abused child molesters
 - Medium to large effect sizes
- Novel and surprising
- If CSA is associated with higher estimated risk on Satic-99 why does CSA not predict sexual recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004)?

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13

Limitations

- CSA coding
 - Accuracy and completeness of file information about CSA is unknown
- Observational retrospective design
 - Source and direction of influence cannot be determined
- Small sample size
 - Low statistical power
 - Generalizability?
 - Could not compare abused and non-abused non-molesters

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14

Conclusion

- The current and past findings are consistent with the suggestion that CSA may lead to pedophilic interests for some men, which in turn may lead to offending (e.g., Seto, 2008)
- However, beliefs supportive of child sexual abuse may be **decreased** rather than increased by CSA among child molesters

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15

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16