

Testing Explanations for Father-Daughter Incest in Brazil



Michael C. Seto, Madison McAskill, & Kelly M. Babchishin



Background

- **Sexual abuse of daughters** represents a **large proportion of child sexual abuse**
- Current sexual offending theories proposing **pedophilia** and **antisociality** as risk factors do not adequately explain incest
- **Biological** and **anthropological** theories have suggested other risk factors

Method

- **1,077 fathers** from **Brazil** completed an **online survey** (IPSOS panel)
- Average of **2.1 children**, with an average of **1.4 daughters**
 - **90.5%** had **only biological daughters**
 - **4.5%** had **only stepdaughters**
 - **4.3%** had **both** daughter types
- Average age of **43.4 years old** (range 18 to 70)
- **Survey** assessed putative **risk** and **protective factors** and **propensity toward incest** using **vignettes**
 - How arousing?
 - Would you continue?

11.4% of fathers had **at least some propensity toward father-daughter incest**



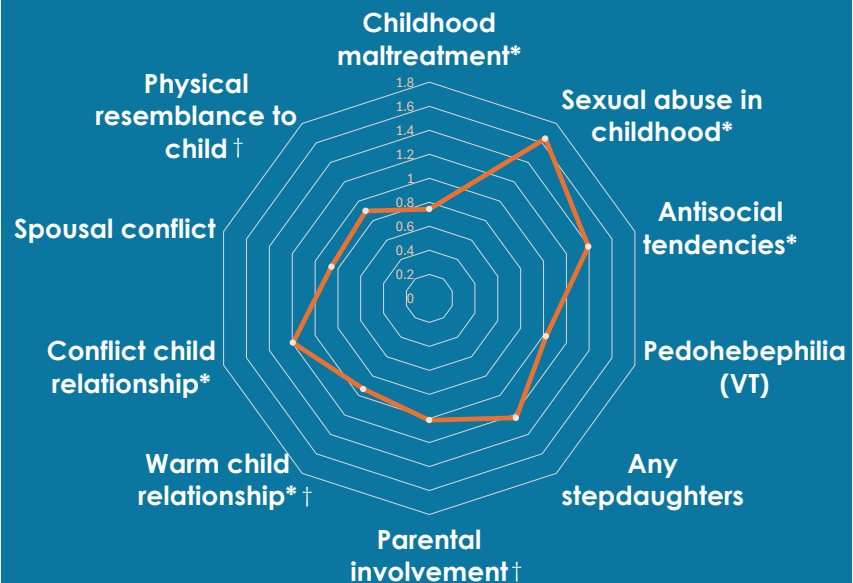
Scan here for more information.

✉ Michael.Seto@theroyal.ca

Propensity toward **father-daughter incest** can be explained by:

- **Childhood maltreatment** of the father
 - Experiences of **physical abuse, neglect, witnessing family violence, and sexual abuse** during childhood
- The **relationship between the father and child**
 - Father-child **conflict**
 - Father-child **warmth**

Prevention programs **targeting child maltreatment and bolstering the father-child relationship** could help reduce father-daughter incest.



Note. Propensity was dichotomized (any interest or interest in continuing vs. none). Figure displays Adjusted Odds Ratios, controlling for the other variables in the model.

*Correlate reached statistical significance ($p < .05$).

† Protective factor

Seto, M. C., McAskill, M., & Babchishin, K. M. (2024, July 22-25). *Testing explanations for father-daughter incest in Brazil*. Poster presented at the International Academy of Sexual Research (IASR) 50th Annual Meeting, Berlin, Germany.

Accepted Abstract

Seto, M. C., McAskill, M., & Babchishin, K. M. (2024, July 22-25). *Testing explanations for father-daughter incest in Brazil* [Poster presentation]. International Academy of Sexual Research (IASR) 50th Annual Meeting, Berlin, Germany.

A sample of 1,146 fathers (average age = 42, range 18 to 86) from Brazil completed an online survey that collected information about their parenting involvement and other factors identified in the clinical or theoretical literature as explanations for father daughter incest (e.g., spousal relationship conflict, marital satisfaction, antisocial tendencies, sexual interest in children). Participants had an average of two children and all had at least one daughter (ranging from 1 to 7 daughters; 69% exclusively had one daughter). Participants were asked to rate a vignette about a hypothetical case of father-daughter incest as an indirect measure of incest propensity. Most (94.8%, 1086/1146) fathers reported disgust at the vignette, with variation in the level of disgust and 2.9% (33/1146) reporting no disgust. One in 10 fathers (9.9%; 113/1146) reported that the vignette was at least slightly arousing. One in 12 fathers (7.9%, 90/1146) reported they would continue this behavior if they were in a similar situation. In this study, we examined factors that are associated with less disgust towards father-daughter incest, more arousal towards father-daughter incest, and likelihood of father-daughter incest behavior (propensity). A better understanding of the factors that are associated with father-daughter incest will contribute to theory and could lead to a reduction of this behavior through improved assessment and prevention.

Updated Abstract

Seto, M. C., McAskill, M., & Babchishin, K. M. (2024, July 22-25). Testing explanations for father-daughter incest in Brazil [Poster presentation]. International Academy of Sexual Research (IASR) 50th Annual Meeting, Berlin, Germany.

A sample of 1,077 fathers (average age = 43, range 18 to 70) from Brazil completed an online survey that collected information about their parenting involvement and other factors identified in the clinical or theoretical literature as explanations for father daughter incest (e.g., spousal relationship conflict, marital satisfaction, antisocial tendencies, sexual interest in children). Participants had an average of two children and all had at least one daughter (ranging from 1 to 7 daughters; 69% exclusively had one daughter). Participants were asked to rate a vignette about a hypothetical case of father-daughter incest as an indirect measure of incest propensity. Most (95.9%, 1033/1077) fathers reported disgust at the vignette, with variation in the level of disgust and 3.4% (37/1077) reporting no disgust. Less than one in 10 fathers (8.9%; 96/1077) reported that the vignette was at least slightly arousing. One in 13 fathers (7.5%, 81/1077) reported they would continue this behavior if they were in a similar situation. In this study, we examined factors that are associated with less disgust towards father-daughter incest, more arousal towards father-daughter incest, and likelihood of father-daughter incest behavior (propensity). A better understanding of the factors that are associated with father-daughter incest will contribute to theory and could lead to a reduction of this behavior through improved assessment and prevention.

Presented Factors

Incest Propensity

Participants were presented with one of two vignettes depicting sexual behaviour between a father and his daughter (either biological or stepdaughter, depending on the type of daughter the participant has). Participants were then asked follow up questions regarding the vignette. The following items were used in the creation of the incest propensity variable:

“If you were in a similar situation, how likely would you be to encourage continued sexual contact with your daughter?” Responses ranged from 1 (Not at all likely) to 10 (Extremely likely).

“How arousing do you find this story?” Responses ranged from 1 (Not at all arousing) to 10 (Extremely arousing).

These two items were summed to create a total score for incest propensity. Due to the degree of skewness, this variable was **dichotomized** so that 0 represented no propensity and 1 represented any propensity.

Child maltreatment

Participants were asked the following questions about the treatment they received from a parent or caregiver as a child:

“Did your parent (or caregiver) ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?” Responses included 0 (No), 1 (Yes, my mother/female caregiver), 2 (Yes, my father/male caregiver), or 3 (Yes, both parents/caregivers). This was recoded so that physical abuse by any parent/caregiver was scored as 1 (Yes).

“When someone is neglected, it means that the grown-ups in their life didn’t take care of them the way they should. They might not get them enough food, take them to the doctor when they are sick, or make sure they have a safe place to stay. Did your parents/caregivers ever neglect you as a child?” Responses included 0 (No), 1 (Yes, my mother/female caregiver), 2 (Yes, my father/male caregiver), or 3 (Yes, both parents/caregivers). This was recoded so that neglect by any parent/caregiver was scored as 1 (Yes).

“Did you ever witness violence in your home between family members (for example, parents hitting each other or hitting your siblings)?” Responses for this item included 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

These 3 items were summed to create a total child maltreatment variable, with higher scores indicating higher levels of maltreatment during childhood.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Participants were asked about any sexual contact they may have had with an older person while they were a child.

“Before you were 12 years old, did you ever have sexual contact with a boy or man at least 5 years older than you at the time?” Response options included 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

“Before you were 12 years old, did you ever have sexual contact with a girl or woman at least 5 years older than you at the time?” Response options included 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

The Any CSA variable was created by taking the maximum score of these two items, where CSA by a male or female adult (or both) was scored as 1 (Yes).

Childhood Antisociality

Childhood antisociality was measured by asking participants to indicate whether (0=No, 1=Yes) they engaged in the following behaviours before they were 15 years old:

Initiating physical fights (often)

Lying often (other than to avoid physical and/or sexual abuse)

Running away from home overnight (at least twice, or once without returning)

Stealing (including forgery)

Fire-setting (deliberately)

Skipping school (often)

Breaking into a car, house, or building

Vandalism (other than fire-setting)

Cruel to animals

Forcing sexual activity on someone

Using a weapon in more than one fight


Physically cruel to people

Items were summed to create a total score for childhood antisocial behaviours, with higher scores indicating more antisocial behaviours during childhood.

Pedohebephilia

Participants were shown images of both male and female stimuli of each of the five Tanner stages of development using the Not Real People (cite) dataset. Each sex and Tanner stage category had four images in total, resulting in participants viewing 40 images. Participants viewed each image and were asked to rate the degree to which they found the individual in the image to be sexually attractive on a scale from 1 (very unattractive) to 7 (very attractive). Viewing time (VT) data was collected for each of the 40 images.

How sexually attractive do you find this person?



1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very unattractive Neutral Very attractive

Pedohebephilia was assessed by calculating the **maximum VT difference scores** for either male or female stimuli between Tanner stages 1 and 2 (prepubescent and pubescent) and Tanner stage 5 (adult). Higher difference scores indicated higher levels of pedohebephilia.

Any Step Daughter

Participants were asked to provide details about the number of children they have, as well as the number of biological, step- or common-law, and/or adopted daughters and sons they have. The “Any Step Daughters” variable was calculated by asking participants:

“How many step-daughters/common-law daughters do you have? Include all CURRENT and PAST step-daughters/common-law daughters, even if you no longer have contact with them. *A common-law daughter is the daughter of your romantic partner that you had been living with for at least 1 year.” Participants were asked to enter a numeric value.

Participants who indicated at least one step- or common-law daughter were scored as 1 (Yes).

Father Involvement

To measure the level of parental involvement among fathers, participants were asked to answer the following about their (oldest, if relevant) daughter:

“The following questions ask about activities you may have done with this child. For each activity below, indicate how often you did the activity during the first 6 years of this child’s life, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "At least once a day" (6).”

Give child a bath

Help child get dressed

Help change child's diaper or help with toilet

Prepare meals or bottles for the child

Assist child with eating or give child a bottle

Play with the child

Discipline the child

Supervise or monitor the child

Scores for each item were summed to create a total score for Father Involvement, with higher scores indicating higher involvement by the father.

Parent Child Relationship

Similarly, the nature of the parent child relationship (parent child warmth and parent child conflict) was measured by asking fathers to answer the following about their (oldest, if relevant) biological daughter (or step-daughter if no biological daughters):

“The following questions ask about your relationship with this child, to the best of your memory. Answer these questions about your relationship with this child before he/she turned 16.” Responses ranged from 1 (Definitely does not apply) to 5 (Definitely applies).

I share an affectionate, warm relationship with my child.

My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other. (R)

If upset, my child will seek comfort from me.

My child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me. (R)

My child values his/her relationship with me.

When I praise my child, he/she beams with pride.

When my child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day. (R)

My child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.

My child easily becomes angry at me. (R)

Dealing with my child drains my energy. (R)

Reverse scored items (R) were summed to create a total score for parent child conflict. The remaining positive items were summed to create a total score for parent child warmth.

Marital Conflict

Marital conflict was assessed by asking participants:

“How much conflict (example: fights, disagreements) did you experience during your relationship with the mother of this child?” Response options ranged from 1 (No conflict at all) to 7 (A significant amount of conflict).

Physical Resemblance to Child

Physical resemblance was measured by asking participants to indicate, on a scale from 1 (Not very much) to 7 (very much):

“How closely does this child resemble you in appearance?”

Additional Factors

Child Separation

Participants were asked a number of questions about their proximity to their child during their child's early life.

“Have you ever lived in the same residence with this child?” Response options for this item were 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

“How old was this child when you started living with them?” Participants were asked to indicate a numeric response.

“In the first 16 years of this child's life, were you ever separated from the child for a month or more?” Response options for this item were 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). If yes, participants were then asked to indicate the length of the separation, the child's age when the separation occurred, and the reason for the separation.

“Did you know this child in the first 6 years of their life? If this is your biological child, by know your child we mean know that they existed. If this is a step/common-law/adopted child, we mean know them in the context of being a parental figure to this child.” Response options for this item were 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

Importance of Fatherhood

In addition to items about the nature of the father-child relationship, we asked participants to indicate their perceived importance of their role as a father

“How important do you view your role as a father?” Response options ranged from 1 (Not very important) to 5 (Very important).

Marital Relationship

In addition to an item assessing the amount of conflict between fathers and the mother of their child, participants were asked:

“How satisfied were you with your relationship with the mother of this child?”
Responses ranged from 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (Extremely satisfied).

“How likely do you think it is that the mother of this child ever cheated on you?”
Responses ranged from 1 (Extremely unlikely) to 7 (Extremely likely).

Vignette Ratings

Participants were presented with one of two vignettes depicting sexual behaviour between a father and his daughter (either biological or stepdaughter, depending on the type of daughter the participant has). Participants were then asked follow up questions regarding the vignette.

Disgust:

“How disgusting do you find this story?” Response options ranged from 1 (Not at all disgusting) to 10 (Extremely disgusting).

Moral wrongness:

“How morally wrong do you find the man’s behaviour in this story?” Response options ranged from 1 (Not at all morally wrong) to 10 (Extremely morally wrong).

Criminal History

Participants’ criminal history was assessed using the following items, with the response options of 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). Participants who indicated ‘Yes’ to any of the following items were then asked to indicate whether this offence occurred before, after, or both before and after having children.

“Were you ever arrested before age 16?” “Have you ever been arrested, charged or convicted for a non-sexual violent offence? For example: assaulting someone, robbing a bank.”

“Have you ever been arrested, charged or convicted for a non-sexual non-violent offence? For example: break and enter, theft.”

“Have you ever been arrested, charged, or convicted of viewing child pornography?”

“Have you ever been arrested, charged, or convicted of a sex offence that didn’t involve contact, like watching an unsuspecting person undress (i.e., peeping), or exposing your genitals (i.e., flashing) to a non-consenting person (but not including child pornography offences)?”

“Have you ever been arrested, charged, or convicted of forcing someone to engage in sexual activity against his or her will? This includes engaging in sexual activity with someone who cannot legally consent. For example, because they are too young to consent, or because they are intoxicated.”

Participants who indicated ‘Yes’ to a contact sexual offence were asked to indicate the degree of relation to the victim (i.e., unrelated, related, or completed stranger) and the victim’s age (i.e., older than 16 years of age, younger than 16 years of age).

Rape Propensity

The following items explored participants propensity toward sexual assault of adults and children, respectively.

“What is the likelihood that you would rape an adult if you could be assured of not being caught and punished?” Response options ranged from 1 (Not at all likely) to 5 (Very likely).

“What is the likelihood that you would have sexual contact with a child under 12 years old if you could be assured of not being caught and punished?” 1 (Not at all likely) to 5 (Very likely).

References

- Gentry, J. M. (2016). *Intrafamilial and extrafamilial child sexual abuse perpetrators: Differences in personality profiles and level of risk* (Publication No. 10169003). [Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Loinaz, I., Bigas, N., & Ma de Sousa, A. (2019). Comparing intra and extra-familial child sexual abuse in a forensic context. *Psicothema, 31*(3), 271-276. doi: 10.7334/psicothema2018.35.
- Lukianowicz, N. (1972). Incest I: Paternal Incest. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 120*(556), 301-313. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bpj.120.556.301>.
- Nilsson, T., Carlestedt, A., Baudin, C., Jakobsson, C., Forsman, A., & Anckarsäter, H. (2014). Intra- and extra-familial child sexual abusers and recidivism in Sweden: a 10- to 15-year follow up study. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 25*(3), 341-361. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2014.911945>.
- Pullman, L. E., Babchishin, K., & Seto, M. C. (2019). An examination of the Westermarck Hypothesis and the role of disgust in incest avoidance among fathers. *Evolutionary Psychology, 17*(2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474704919849924>.
- Pullman, L. E., Sawatsky, M. L., Babchishin, K. M., McPhail, I. V., & Seto, M. C. (2017). Differences between biological and sociolegal incest offenders: A meta-analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour, 34*, 228-237. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.01.003>.
- Seto, M. C., Babchishin, K. M., Pullman, L. E., & McPhail, I. V. (2015). The puzzle of intrafamilial child sexual abuse: A meta-analysis comparing intrafamilial and extrafamilial offenders with child victims. *Clinical Psychology Review, 39*, 42-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.04.001>.