

Working through the puzzle: Understanding dyadic and family roles in incest across different relationship types

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Thursday August 28th, 2025 (9AM-9:45PM)

IATSO, Poznań, Poland



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Aversion to Incest



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Prevalence

- Any Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) by family members (Matthews et al., 2023)

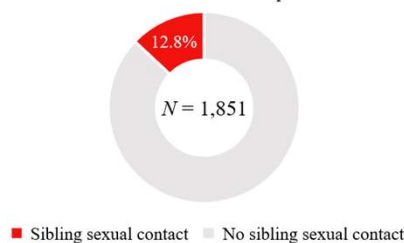


- CSA perpetration committed by family members (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011)

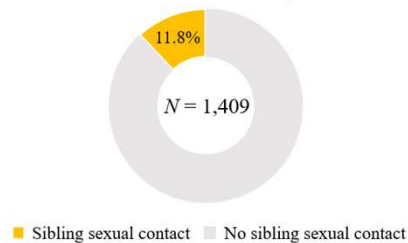


Prevalence Rate of Sibling

Prevalence for full sample



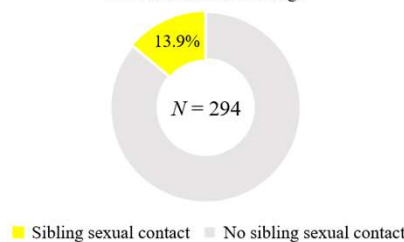
Prevalence for full siblings



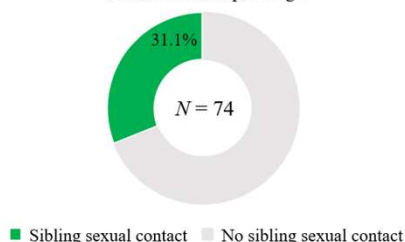
• **Average age of onset:** ~10.5 years

• **Coercive incidents:** ~49%

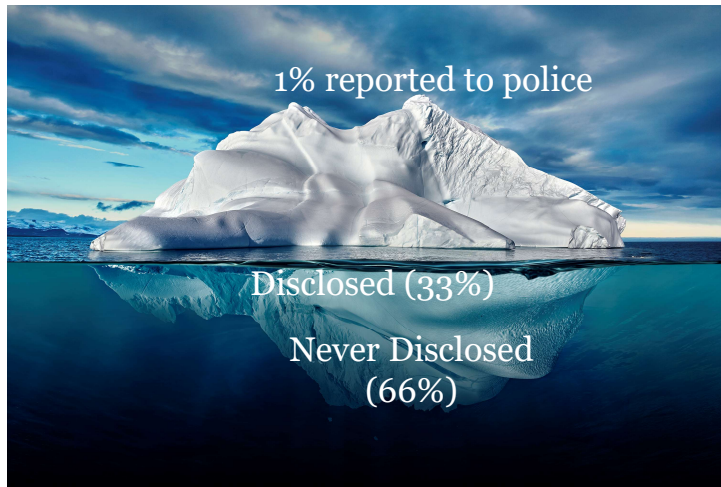
Prevalence for half siblings



Prevalence for step siblings



Reporting to Police: A rare occurrence



Anonymous online of survey of 7,909 adults (18-30 years old) in Germany

(Neutze & Osterheider, 2015)

Low Detection Rates

- Reasons CSA by a sibling stopped:



Legend

- Sibling or participant left home (35%)
- Sibling abused/dated someone else (10%)
- Participant did not know why (18%)
- Other reasons (undefined) (30%)
- Abuse discovered (8%)

Carlson et al. (2005)



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Aversion to Incest



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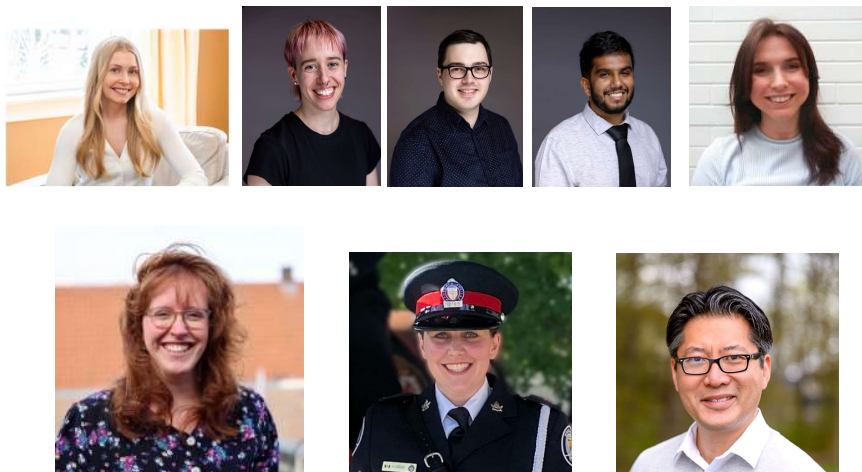
Content of Today's Keynote

- Characteristics and Prevalence
- Explanations (with data)
- Q & A

Point of Today's Keynote

- Synthesize
- Highlight blind spots/
future directions

Acknowledgements



Prevalence and Characteristics

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Sources of Knowledge



News



Movies



Anecdotal

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Case 1: J. Fritzl



Fritzl imprisoned his daughter Elisabeth for 24 years in a concealed basement in Austria, fathering seven children with her, 1 died due to lack of medical care.

Sources of Knowledge



News



Movies



Anecdotal



Research

Sources of bias: Sampling strategies



Research

- Correctional samples (relative to victimization or online surveys) higher prevalence of:
 - Vaginal/anal penetration
 - Use of force/threat
 - Younger age of victims
 - Male perpetrators
- Supplement with non-correctional survey (e.g., online survey of fathers)

Sampling strategies

- Online participants
 - No IP address: can ask about behaviour, but could be biased
 - Representative sample via paid panels: then iffy to ask about incest behaviour (identifiable victim). Can use vignettes
 - Also: \$ and ⌚

Vignettes 101



**Ethical
advantage**



**Reduces
social
desirability
bias**



**Facilitates
openness**



**Contextual
control/
standardization**

Example Incest Vignette

“Márcio is alone with his 10 year old daughter, Carolina, in their home on a Friday evening. They are sitting next to each other on the couch and watching a movie. Márcio has a bowl of popcorn in his lap. **Carolina reaches her arm with the intention of grabbing some popcorn from the bowl. Instead, she touches his genitals and starts caressing them.**”

“If you were in a similar situation, how likely would you be to encourage continued sexual contact with your daughter?”



“How disgusting is this story?”

“How sexually arousing is this story?”

“How morally wrong is this story?”

Vignettes 101



**Ethical
advantage**



**Reduces
social
desirability
bias**



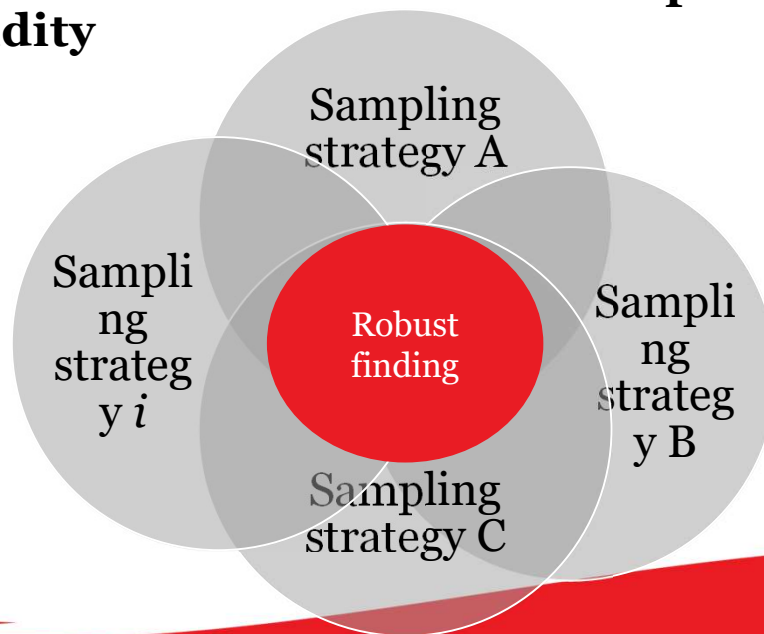
**Facilitates
openness**



**Contextual
control/
standardization**

- Correlated with actual behaviour
- Similar sets of predictors (generally, effect sizes are reduced)

Replication across diverse samples strengthens validity



Thank you to our funders!

- Seto & Babchishin (SSHRC  CRSH)
- Babchishin et al. (UMRF)
- Seto et al. (UMRF)
- Babchishin (Carleton University)



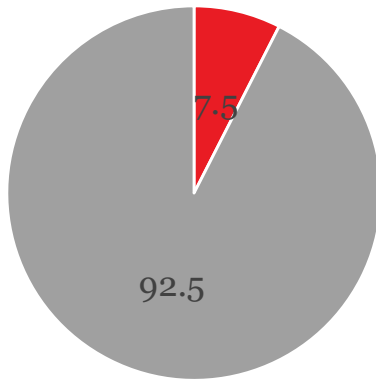
Samples

- Correctional samples of fathers ($N = 110$)
- Online surveys of fathers
 - Paid panels of represented samples of fathers
 - IPSOS Brazil ($N = 1,073$)
 - IPSOS India ($N = 1,269$)
 - Qualtrics US and Canada ($N = 807$)
 - Convenience online survey with behaviour (Germany and North America)
 - ($N = 1,673$)
- Online surveys of siblings
 - Canada and Germany ($N = 1,863$)
 - Canada and US ($N = 1,164$)



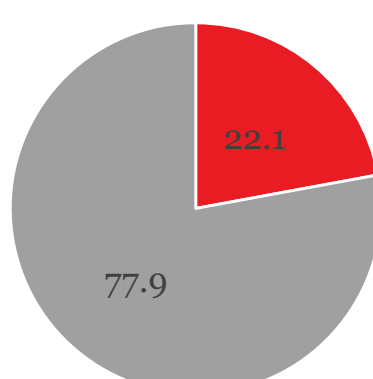
Incest Propensity (Paid Panels of Fathers)

Brazil ($n = 1073$)



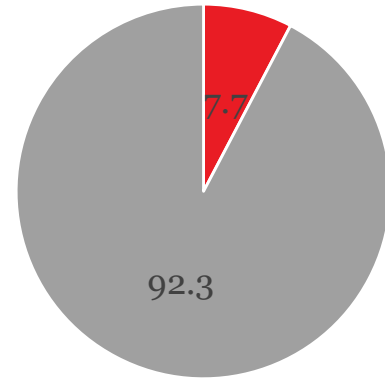
■ Any likelihood

India ($n = 1269$)



■ Any likelihood

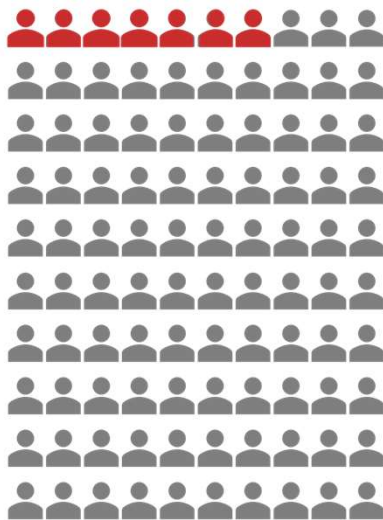
Canada/US ($n = 807$)



■ Any likelihood

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Prevalence Rate (convenience sample)

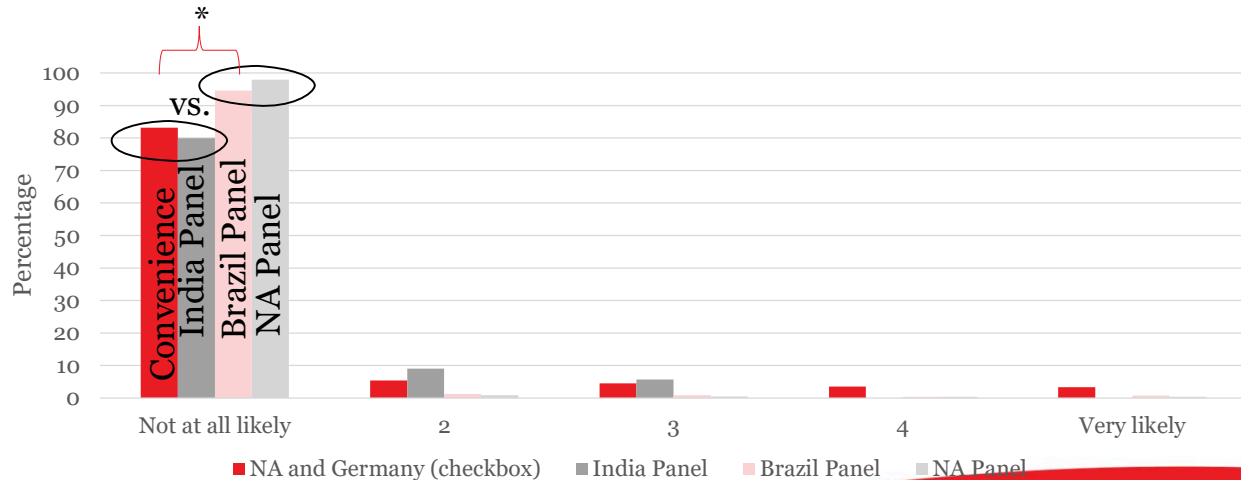


Behaviour = 7.3%

($N = 1,673$)

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What is the likelihood you would have sexual contact with a child under 12 years old if you could be assured you would not being caught and punished?



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Summarizing Prevalence

- It occurs
 - Propensity/prevalence may not be consistent across cultures
- Rarely reported
 - CJS cases may be more extreme
- Online survey provides an imperfect alternative
 - Important to get representative samples, but then issues with mandatory reporting (known victim if asking about incest)
- Replication is key



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Why?



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A critical gap

Early Research (1990s)

“Low recidivism” findings (e.g., Hanson et al., 1993) led to reduced urgency in understanding incest



Shift in Focus

Attention turned to tertiary prevention (high-risk, repeat offending)

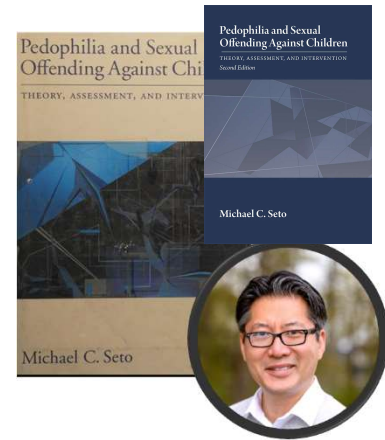
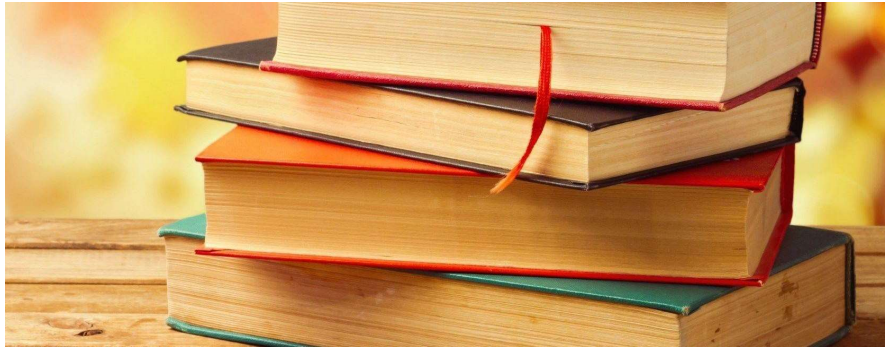


Consequence

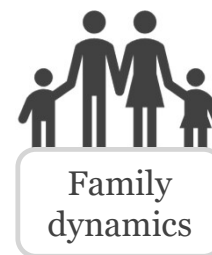
Empirical stagnation despite ongoing prevalence and harm

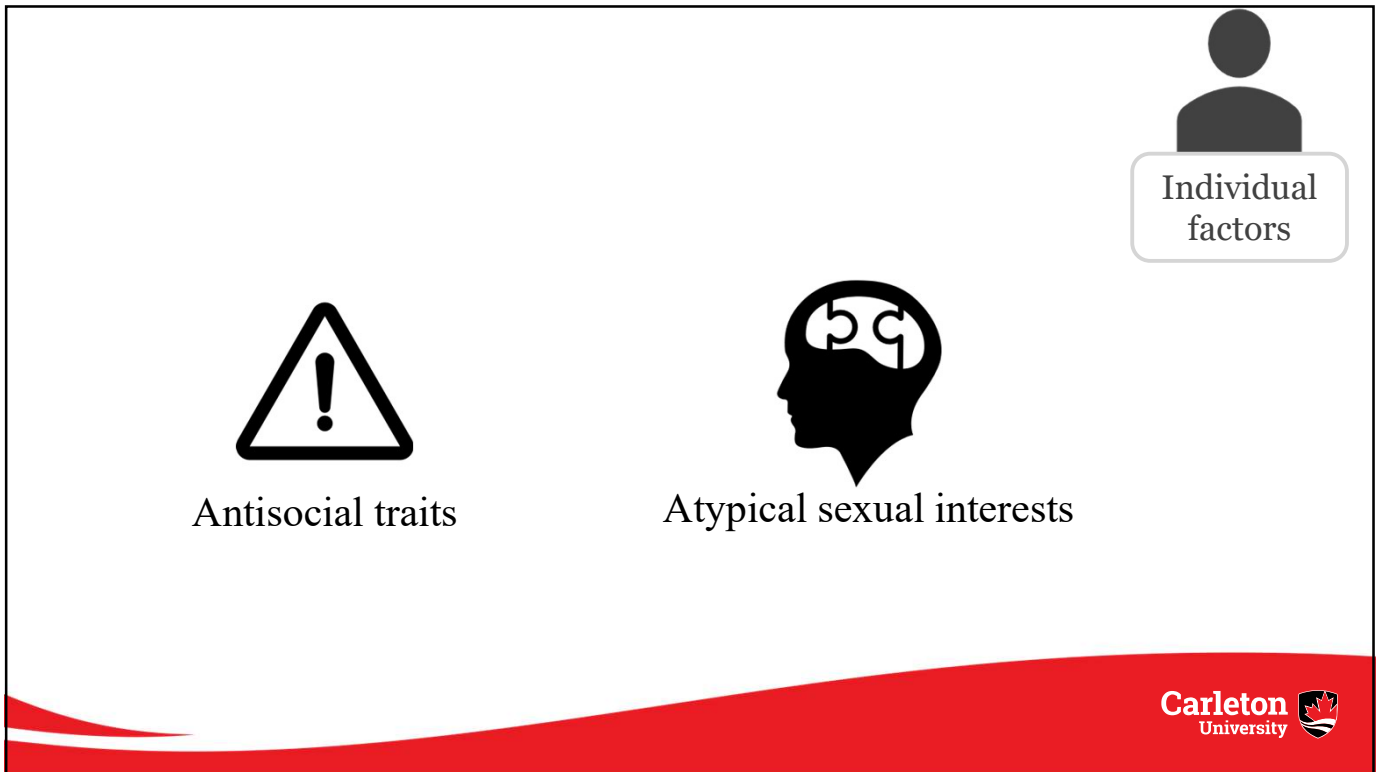
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Clinical and theoretical perspectives



Potential risk factors (super simplified)





Individual factors

Antisocial traits

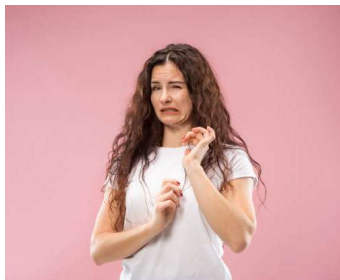
Atypical sexual interests

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Incest Aversion 101

- Biologically driven indifference or aversion to sex with close relatives
- Demonstrated in humans, primates, and other mammalian species
- Predicated on recognizing kin as persons to be avoided sexually



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Paternity/Sibling Confidence



Paternity/
Sibling
confidence

Kinship cues

Kinship
confidence

Incest aversion

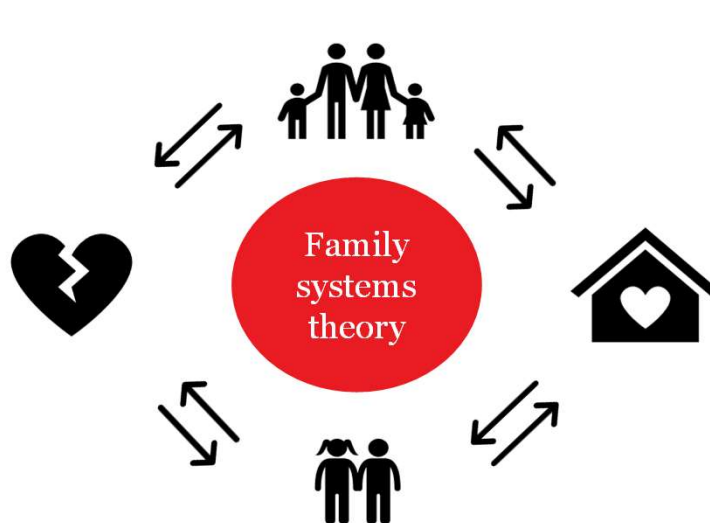
**Proclivity/liability to
commit incest**

Kinship cues

- Cohabitation (Westermarck)
- Perceived resemblance
- Mother's behaviour
- Parental involvement

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Family
dynamics

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Family dynamics



Family
dynamics



Father-child
/Sibling-sibling
conflict/relationship



Spousal/familial
conflict



Cycle of
abuse



Norms around
sexuality

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Fathers

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Fathers- Findings



Antisocial
traits



Atypical
sexual interests



Paternity
confidence



Family
dynamics

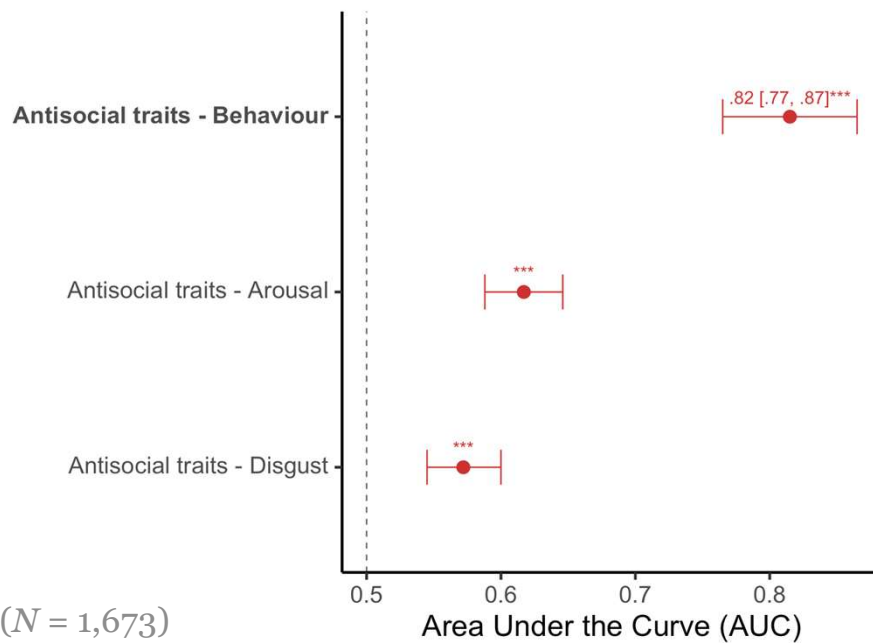


Data Analysis

- A series of AUC analyses
- Fathers
 - With incest proclivity/behaviour vs. without incest proclivity/behaviour
 - Convenience followed by paid panel data
 - Crossed dashed line = not statistically significant ($p < .05$)



Antisocial traits- Convenience

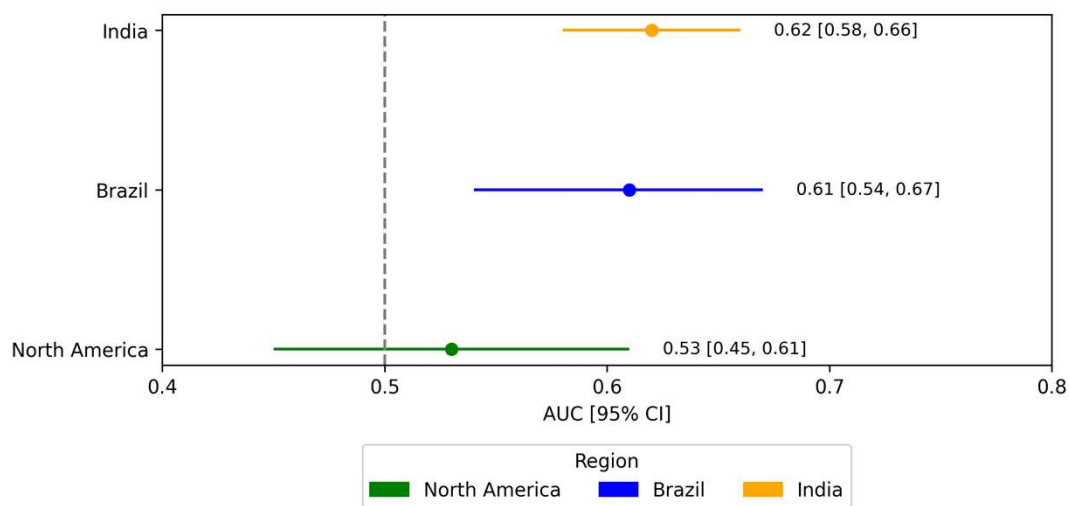


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* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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Antisocial traits- Panels



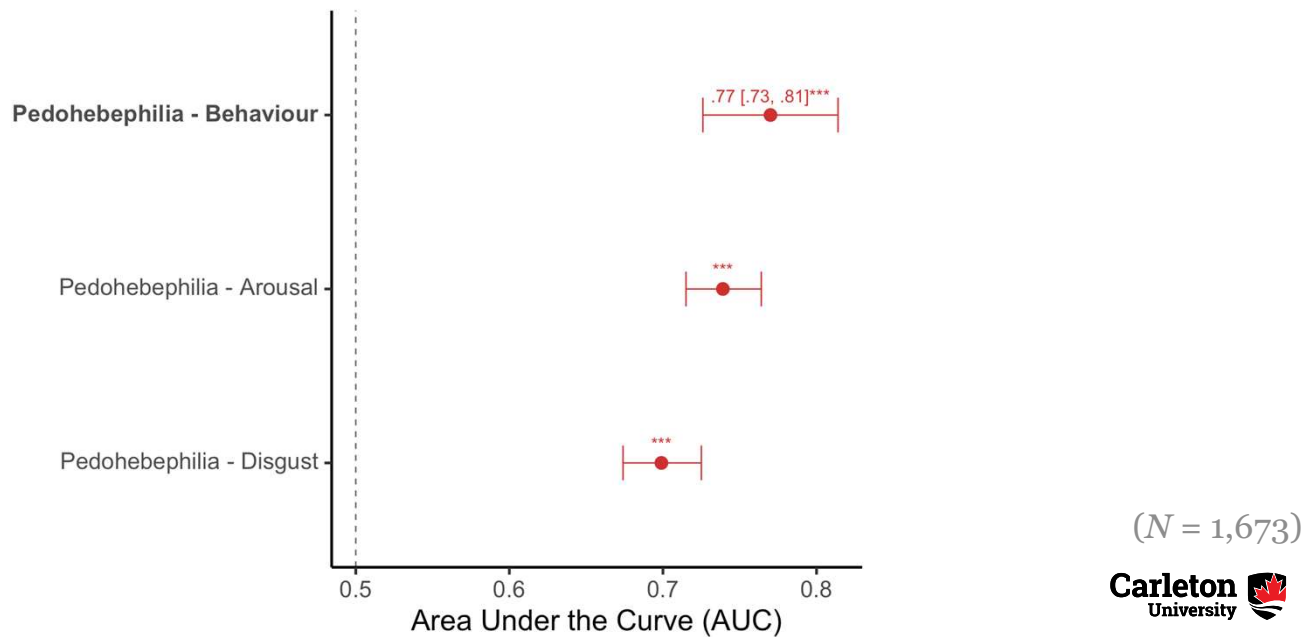
($N_{\text{Brazil}} = 1,073$)

($N_{\text{India}} = 1,269$)

($N_{\text{NA}} = 807$)

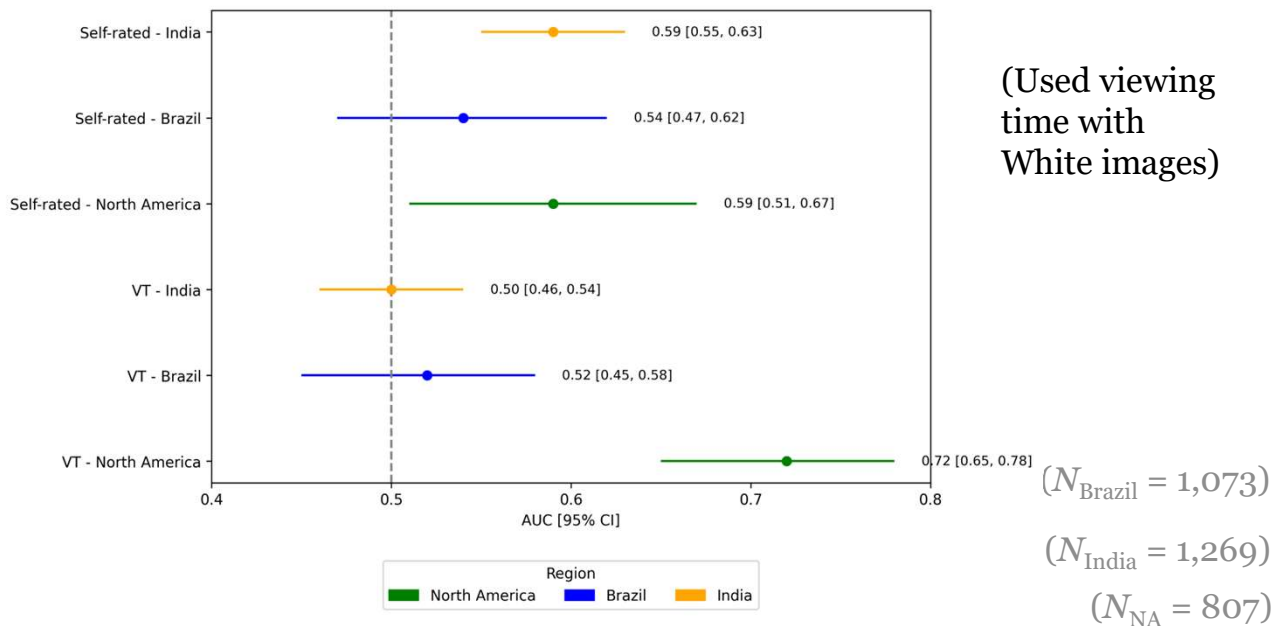
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Pedohebephilia (Convenience)



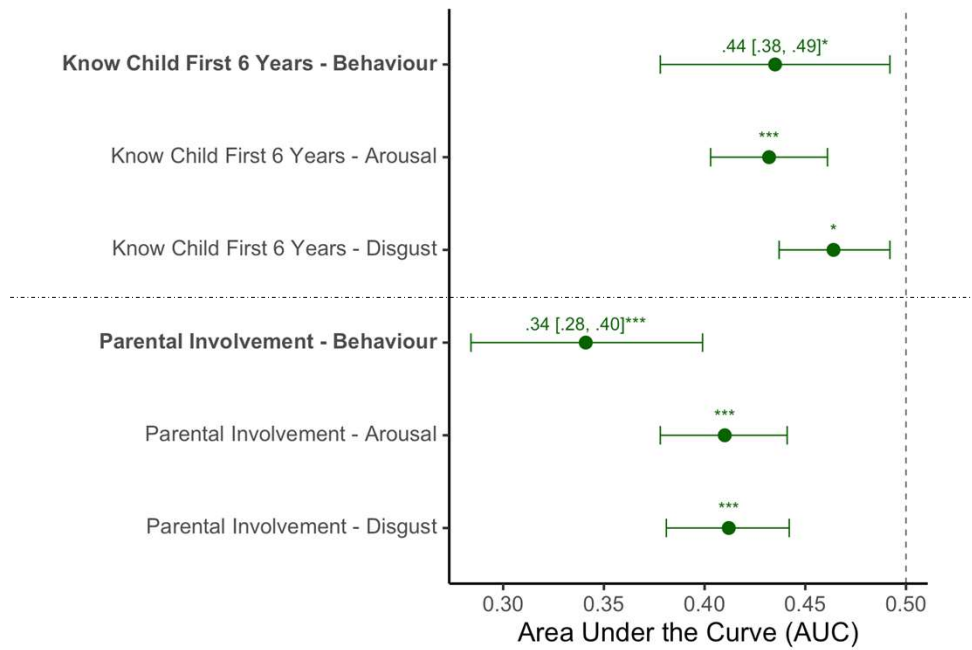
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Pedohebephilia (Panels)



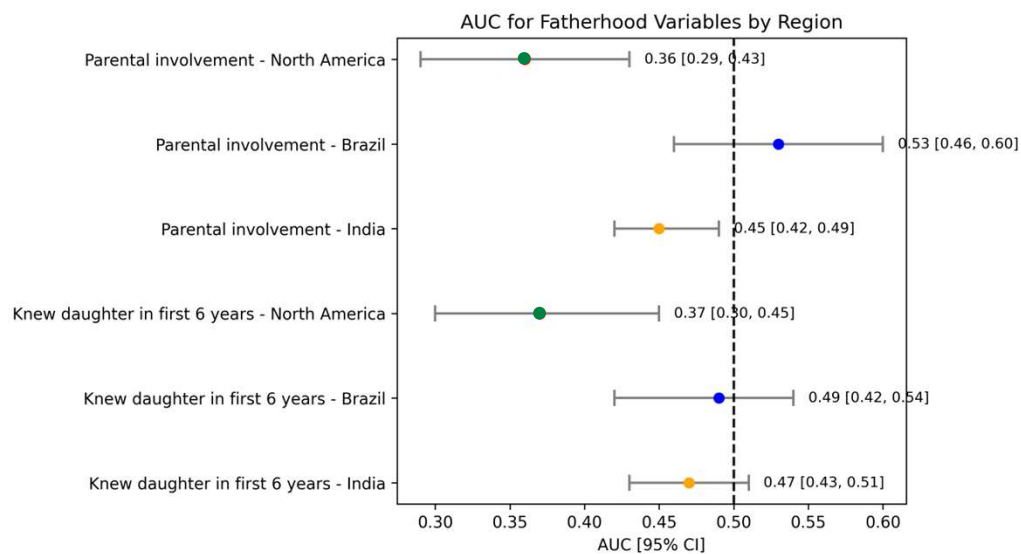
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Westermarck (Convenience)



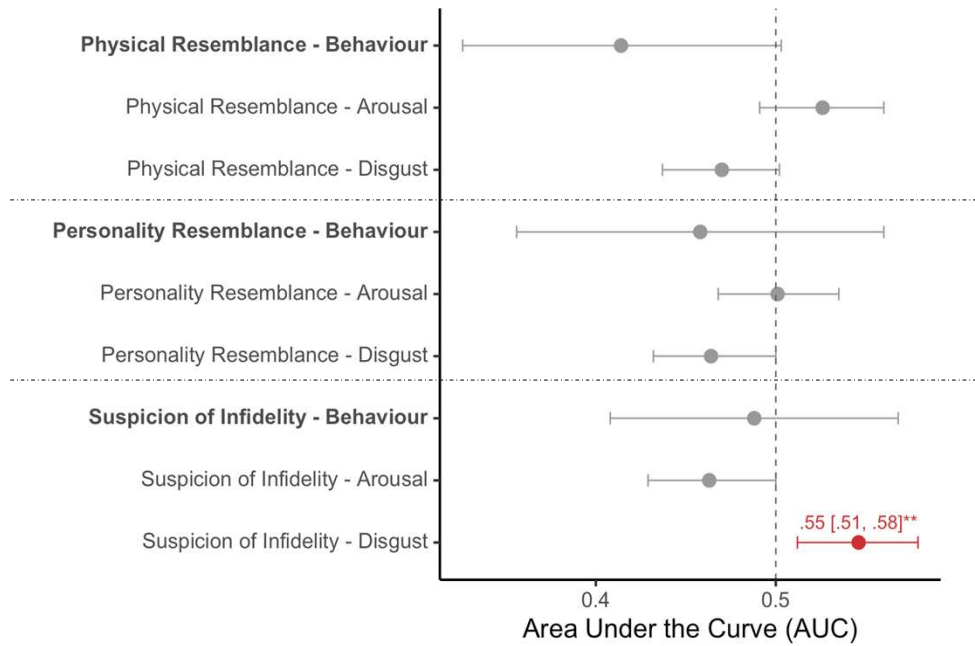
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Westermarck (Panels)



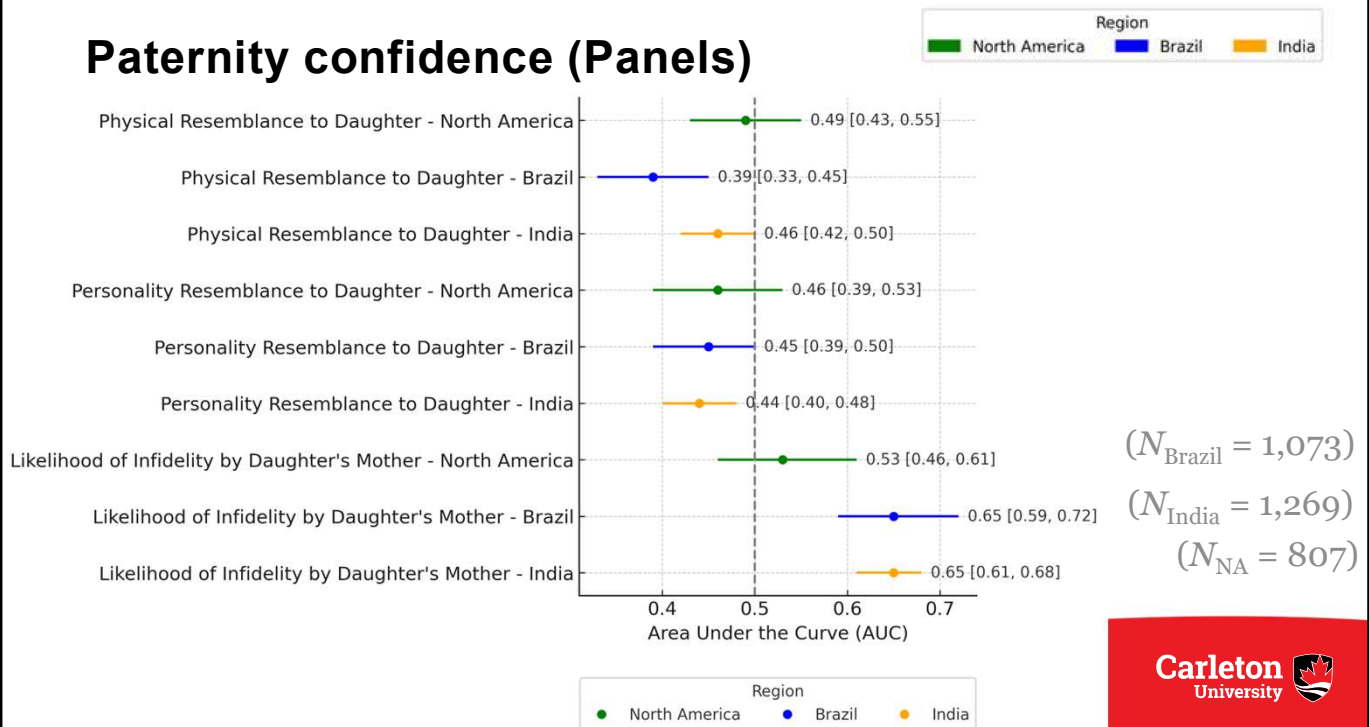
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Paternity confidence (Convenience)



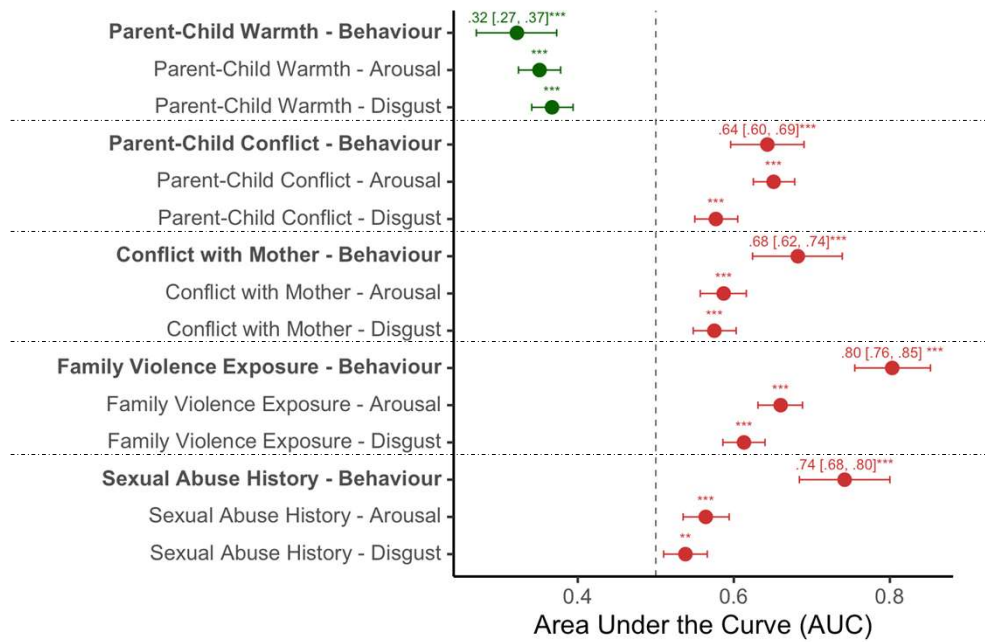
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Paternity confidence (Panels)



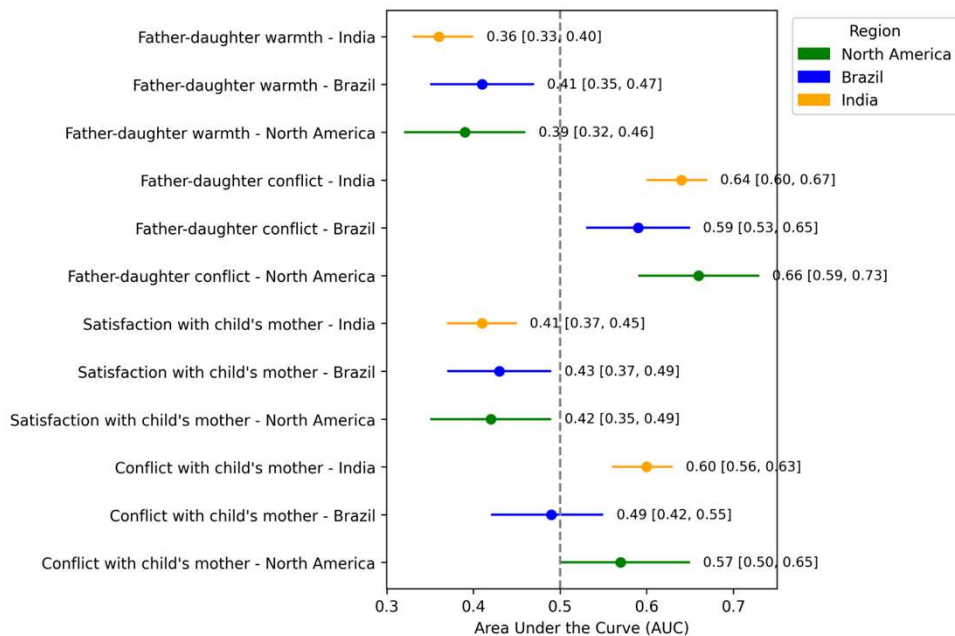
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Family dynamics (Convenience)



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Family dynamics (Panels)

 $(N_{NA} = 807)$ $(N_{Brazil} = 1,073)$ $(N_{India} = 1,269)$

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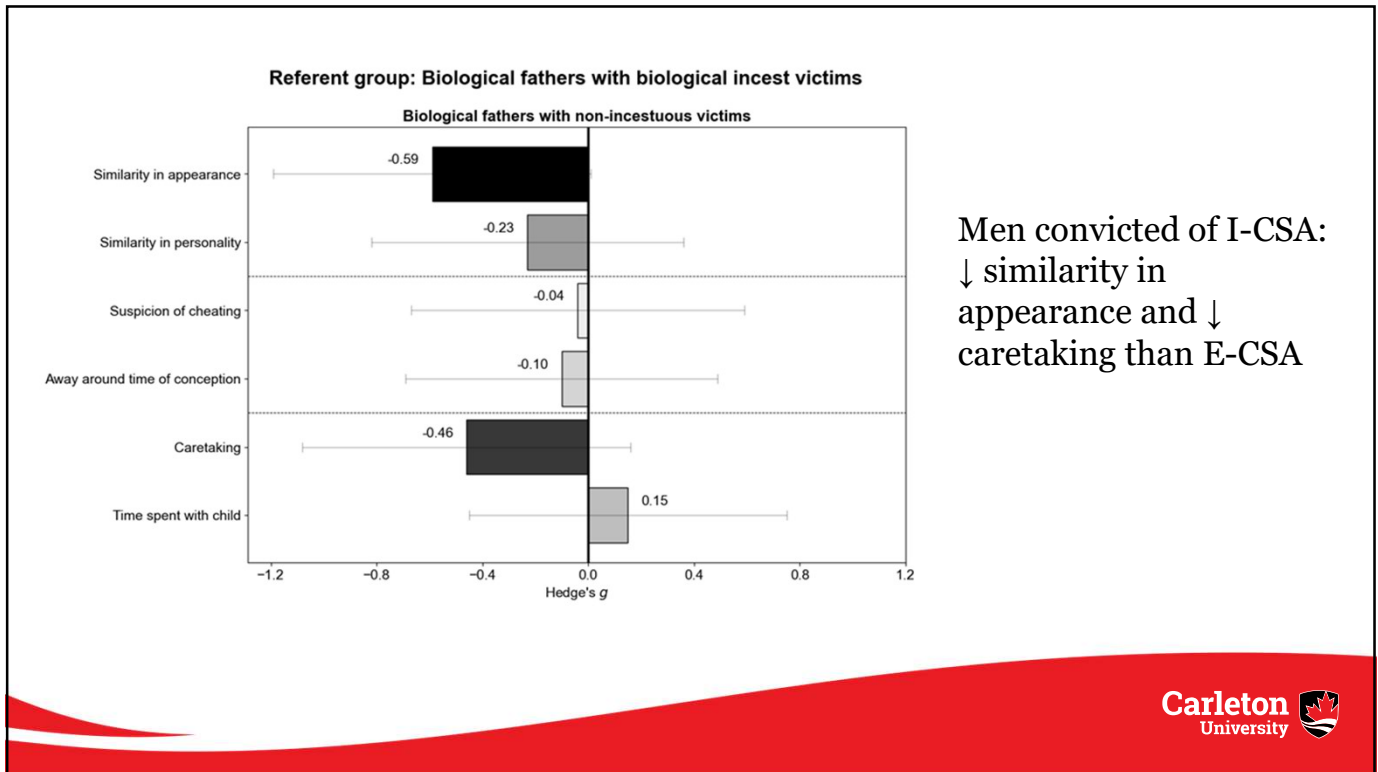
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A note on consistency across cultures

- Different base rate between India vs. Brazil/North American panels
- Yet risk factors had similar associations with incest propensity across these two countries
 - ...Via a series of DeLong tests (difference between predictor strength NS)

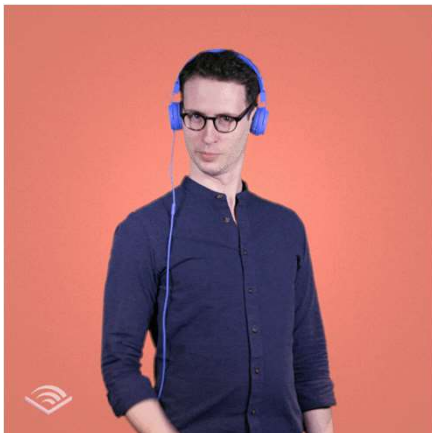
Data Analysis- Correctional Sample

- Hedge g (like Cohen's d)
- 110 justice-involved fathers
 - With incest offences vs. without incest offences but other types of offences
 - BUT: small N per comparisons presented here, ex:
 - 16 biological fathers with biological incest victims
 - 18 sociolegal fathers with sociolegal incest victims
 - 33 biological fathers with extrafamilial child sexual victims



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Who is going to meta this?



Seto et al. (2015): insufficient samples to meta family dynamic and evolutionary informed variables (all studies pre-2015)

Now: + 4 studies



Correctional



NA Panel



Brazil and
India Panel



Convenience

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Siblings

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Siblings



Antisocial
traits



Atypical
sexual interests



Sibling
confidence



Family
dynamics



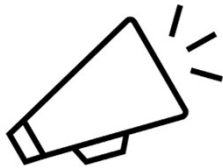
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Sibling Analysis

- No time ☹️
- Trust me, or read:
 - [Characteristics and risk factors for sibling incest | PLOS One](#)
 - [Gender/sex preferences may moderate the relationship between cohabitation and sibling incest](#)



Come to our symposium at 1:30PM Today



- Also, see E. Holmes' poster



Gender/sex of siblings?

- Evolutionary arguments may only apply to **opposite-sex intercourse** (pregnancy risk) — but this has rarely been tested systematically.
- Evidence is **inconsistent**
 - Test by varying the vignettes or asking about types of behaviour



Looking Forward: Prevention and Intervention Strategies



Summary of Putative Risk Factors

Siblings

- ✓ Low parental affection/attention
- ✓ Other types of abuse
- ✓ Parental conflict and family dysfunction
- ✓ Less proximity
- ✓ Less warmth, more conflict in sibling relationship

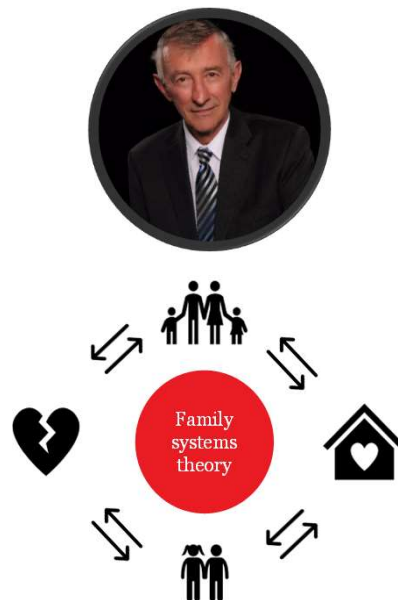
Fathers

- ✓ Less warmth with child
- ✓ More conflict with child and mother of the child
- ✓ More atypical interests and antisocial indicators
- ✓ Less self-report physical resemblance
- ✓ Less child-rearing involvement
- ✓ More conflict in home
- ✓ History of CSA

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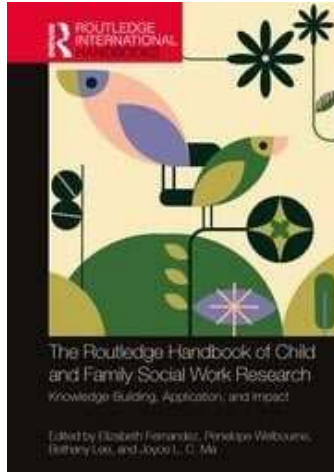
Treatment 101

- Risk-Need-Responsivity
 - Consider risk level
- +
- Include the family



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Resource- Treatment



For harm caused by **parents**: Integrated, Victim-Centred Family Therapy Following Parental Sexual Assault

By [Lesley Laing](#), [Dale Tolliday](#), [Joanne Spangaro](#)

Book: [The Routledge Handbook of Child and Family Social Work Research](#)

For harmed caused by **siblings**/adolescents: Multisystemic Therapy

[Meta of RCT of MST for adolescents](#)



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Another resource

(treatment for individuals who experienced incest)

- McMaugh, K., Roufeil, L., Salter, M., & Middleton, W. (2024). "Holding the badness": Therapists' experiences of treating incestuous abuse continuing into adulthood. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*.
- Summary: it is hard, little resources, and progress is slow



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Fathers

- Antisociality, atypical interests; may explain *who* offends (e.g., which fathers), not *victim choice*
 - Caretaking as protective? Generally, simply 'being' is insufficient
- Family context, including CSA history → shapes norms

Siblings

- Sibling incest: not rare, higher risk in blended families
- Prevention: education in blended households; assess clinical cases of child sexual behaviour problems and parental abuse; norms around sexuality
- Kinship
 - kinship cues vs. opportunity to offend intertwined



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Thank you

Questions?



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<https://carleton.ca/sexuallyharmfulbehaviourslab/>



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