Is the Link Between Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Offending in Men Mediated by Sexual Development?

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Prominent theories about the etiology of sexual offending posit that being sexually abused as a child (CSA) can increase an individual's likelihood of committing a sexual offense. However, only a minority of male victims of CSA go on to commit sexual offenses (8% in Forsman et al., 2015; 12% in Salter et al., 2003), which suggests that there are factors influencing the relationship between CSA and later sexual offending. We hypothesize the relationship between CSA and sexual offending is mediated by sexual development. The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationships between CSA, sexual interests, and sexually coercive behavior in a non-forensic sample of 173 heterosexual men. Twenty-two percent of participants reported a history of CSA and 52% reported engaging in sexually coercive behavior as assessed by a modified version of the Sexual Experience Survey (Koss et al., 2007). Measures of sexual development included indicators of paraphilic interest (Paraphilias Scale; Seto, Lalumière, Harris, & Chivers, 2012), sexual history (Sexual History Questionnaire; Lalumière, Chalmers, Quinsey, & Seto, 1996), preference for partner novelty and casual sex (Partner Novelty and Casual Sex Scale; Lalumière et al., 1996), and perceived mating success (Self-perceived Mating Success Scale; Landolt, Lalumière, & Quinsey, 1995).

Results revealed that CSA was associated with more self-reported paraphilic experiences ($d = 0.40$), greater interest in paraphilias including transvestism ($d = 0.52$), voyeurism ($d = 0.51$), and exhibitionism ($d = 0.60$), younger age at first sexual intercourse ($d = -0.53$), and greater number of sexual relationships (e.g., number of partners since puberty, $d = 0.39$). Controlling for impression management and childhood physical abuse did not make a marked difference in the findings, with the exception that paraphilic experiences no longer reached statistical significance ($p > .05$). Through a Principal Component Analysis, we create a standardized measure of sexual outcomes, which included measures assessing paraphilic interests (i.e., exhibitionism, frotteurism, masochism, transvestism, and voyeurism), age at first sexual intercourse, number of female partners since puberty, number of different female partners in the past year, frequency of sexual intercourse in the past month, and number of one night stands. We found that a greater endorsement of the sexual outcomes examined was moderately associated with sexually coercive behavior ($r_{polychoric} = .30$), and this relationship remained after controlling for impression management and childhood physical abuse. These findings suggest that CSA
is associated with paraphilic interests and a more extensive sexual history, and that these sexual outcomes, in turn, may be related to engaging in sexually coercive behavior.

References


Chloe Pedneault is completing her Ph.D. in experimental psychology at Carleton University, where she is an active member of the Aggressive Cognitions and Behavior Research lab. Her primary research interests involve examining the role cognitions play in the initiation and maintenance of sexually coercive and aggressive behavior.