Exploring the Link between Childhood Victimization and Sexual Offending

Symposium Chair: Sacha Maimone, M.A.
Carleton University

Adverse childhood experiences have been linked to a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood. For example, research has demonstrated a link between childhood sexual victimization and later sexual offending against children (Jespersen, Lalumiere, & Seto, 2009; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). Understanding the link between childhood victimization and later sexual offending may help inform research and treatment aimed at reducing such behavior. This symposium consists of four papers addressing the link between adverse childhood experiences and later sexual offending behaviors. The first paper explores the prevalence of different types of childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction among sexual offenders, as well as the relationship between these adverse childhood experiences and outcomes such as adult health, mental health, and arrest. The second paper examines the relationship between childhood sexual victimization and indicators of pedophilic interests and antisocial orientation among sexual offenders against children. The third paper examines the relationship between childhood sexual victimization and various cognitions that may be relevant for sexual offending against children. The fourth and final paper presents an attachment theory model to explain how adverse childhood experiences are associated with sexual offending. Together these papers (a) examine the prevalence of various adverse childhood experiences among sexual offenders; (b) examine factors and theories that may help explain the link between childhood victimization and sexual offending; and (c) discuss the implications of these findings for research, theory, and treatment of sexual offenders.

Prevalence and Correlates of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Jill S. Levenson, Ph.D., LCSW
Barry University

This presentation will review recent research exploring the prevalence of different types of childhood maltreatments and family dysfunction in the lives of sexual offenders. Comparisons with samples of other criminals and non-offenders will be discussed. As well, the relationship between such adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and adult health, mental health, and arrest outcomes will be reviewed. Finally, implications for treatment will be introduced, including the need to integrate trauma-informed practices into sex offender treatment programs.
Goals for the Paper:
1. Describe the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences for sex offenders compared to other criminals and the general population.
2. Present research regarding the link between early trauma and adult criminal behavior.
3. Outline the principles of trauma-informed practices.

**Childhood Sexual Victimization, Pedophilic Interest, and Antisocial Orientation**

Anna T. Pham, B.A. Honours
Carleton University

Sacha Maimone, M.A.
Kevin L. Nunes, Ph.D.
Carolyn Blank, B.A. Honours
Chantal A. Hermann, M.A.
Ian V. McPhail, M.A.
Sandy Jung, Ph.D., R.D.Psych.
Nicole Kostiuik, Ph.D.
Rikki Sewell, M.A.
Kelly M. Babchishin, Ph.D.
J. Renee Malcom, M.A.

Meta-analyses have demonstrated a clear link between childhood sexual victimization (CSV) and sexual offending against children (Jespersen, Lalumiere, & Seto, 2009; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). There is also some evidence that, among sexual offenders, CSV is associated with pedophilic interests (e.g., Nunes, Hermann, Malcom, & Lavoie, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, with indicators of antisocial orientation (Farrington & Hawkins, 1991; Jung & Carlson, 2011; Koivisto & Haapasalo, 1996). In the current paper, we examined the relationship between CSV and indicators of pedophilic interest and antisocial orientation in four datasets. Generally, sex offenders against children who had experienced childhood sexual victimization had younger victims and more pedophilic interests as measured by the Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI), in comparison to sex offenders against children who had not been sexually victimized. CSV was also associated with some indicators of antisocial orientation. For example, compared to sex offenders against children who had not experienced childhood sexual victimization, those who had been sexually victimized generally had more prior nonsexual violent offences and more offences overall, were more psychopathic, and were at higher risk for general and violent recidivism. These results are generally consistent with past theory suggesting that CSV is linked to the development of pedophilic interests that may lead to sexual offending against children (Freund & Kuban, 1994; Freund, Watson, & Dickey, 1990; Seto, 2008). These findings also suggest that there
is a relationship between CSV and general antisocial orientation among sexual offenders against children.

Goals for this Paper:
1. Review literature on the relationship between childhood sexual victimization, pedophilic interests, and antisocial orientation.
2. Report and interpret findings that can be drawn from our study on the relationship between these variables.
3. Make suggestions for future research.

Childhood Sexual Victimization and Cognitions about Self, Children, and Sexual Offending

Carolyn Blank, B.A. Honours Carleton University
Sacha Maimone, M.A.
Kevin L. Nunes, Ph.D.
Anna Pham, B.A. Honours
Chantal A. Hermann, M.A.
Ian V. McPhail, M.A.
Sandy Jung, Ph.D., R.D.Psych.
Nicole Kostiuk, Ph.D.
Rikki Sewell, M.A.

According to the abused-abuser model of sexual offending, childhood sexual victimization (CSV) increases the likelihood of the victims sexually offending against children while in their adulthood or adolescence. Although the majority of survivors of CSV do not go on to commit sexual offenses, and not all sexual offenders against children have experienced CSV, this model has attained some empirical support. For example, researchers have found a higher prevalence of CSV among sexual offenders against children compared to non-sex offenders and sexual offenders against adults (Cale, Leclerc, & Smallbone, 2014; Jespersen, Lalumiere, & Seto, 2009). Assuming for a moment that the observed association between CSV and sexual offending against children reflects a causal relationship, how might CSV lead to offending? A first step towards answering this question is examining the association between CSV and factors thought to be relevant for sexual offending. Although several studies have examined the relationship between CSV and pedophilic interest, less attention has been directed to the cognitions often considered important in theory and treatment. In the current study, we explored the relationship between CSV and cognitions about one’s self (e.g., self-esteem), children (e.g., emotional congruence with children), and sexual offending (e.g., evaluation of sexually offending against children) in multiple datasets of sexual
offenders against children. CSV was moderately associated with some of the variables, though negligible associations were found with other variables. For example, CSV was moderately associated with more positive evaluations of sexual offending against children, but CSV was not associated with self-esteem. Overall our findings suggest that CSV is associated with some cognitions that may be relevant for sexual offending. Future research should examine the extent to which these cognitions explain the relationship between CSV and sexual offending against children.

Goals for the Paper:
1. Summarize theoretical and empirical literature relevant to explaining the relationships between childhood sexual victimization, sexual offending against children, and cognitions that may be relevant for sexual offending against children.
2. Test the relationship between childhood sexual victimization and these various cognitions.
3. Consider the implications of these findings for theory, research, assessment, and treatment of sexual offenders against children.

Attachment Theory: Explaining the Relationship between Childhood Victimization and Sexual Offending

Tess Bolder, M.S.W.
National Catholic School of Social Service

Melissa D. Grady, Ph.D., M.S.W., LICSW
National Catholic School of Social Service

Jill S. Levenson, Ph.D., LCSW
Barry University

This paper proposes a new model of etiology for sexually abusive behavior using attachment theory as an explanatory theory for understanding why adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are associated with such negative outcomes for those who experience them. Attachment theory has been widely used to explain a number of psychological, social, and behavioral outcomes, including difficulties with emotional, behavioral and cognitive regulation, and with intimacy deficits later in life (Bogaerts, Vanheule, & Declercq, 2005; Hudson & Ward, 2000; Lyn & Burton, 2005; Vondra et al., 2001). Many of these negative outcomes underpin the criminogenic needs (CNs), or risk factors, that have been associated with sexual aggression, including deviant arousal, poor emotional regulation, and compromised social skills, among others (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

This paper proposes that the connection between ACE and CNs, and subsequent sexual abuse, can be explained using attachment theory as the link. ACE lead to higher rates of insecure
attachments, which lead to psychological and social deficits that are consistent with CNs; these CNs are the risk factors associated with sexual aggression. Attachment theory therefore offers an explanation as to why ACEs are so damaging and ultimately lead to the development of CNs that are associated with sexually violent behaviors.

This new theoretical model has important implications for researchers, treatment providers, and policy makers, and recommendations for treatment, future research, and social policy will be discussed.

Goals for the Paper:
1. To demonstrate how attachment theory and the ACE framework are each used as constructs for understanding offending behaviors.
2. To present a new theoretical model of the etiology of sexual offending using attachment theory as the link between childhood adversity and offending behaviors.
3. To identify the implications of the model for different levels of practice.