

## ***BETTER TOGETHER***

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

**F-13**

### **Understanding Adolescents Who Have Committed Sibling Incest**

Symposium Co-Chair: Kelly M. Babchishin, PhD  
The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research  
Symposium Co-Chair: Michael C. Seto, PhD  
The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research

Despite evidence that sibling incest is more common than parental incest, most of our understanding of incest is based on fathers or stepfathers who victimize their children. The current symposium will provide a detailed examination of sexual behavior between siblings using an in depth qualitative methodology sampling two groups of adolescents who have sexually offended, and their parents. For the purposes of this symposium, the sibling incest group is made up of adolescents who have sexually offended against a biologically related (e.g., sister) or sociolegal (e.g., step-sister) sibling. The extrafamilial group is made up of adolescents who have sexually offended against an unrelated victim.

The first presentation will provide a description of how adolescents with sibling incest offences conceptualize their offending. Using the same in depth qualitative interviews as the first presentation, the second presentation will identify factors that distinguish the adolescent sibling incest group from the extrafamilial group, with specific focus on the family environment. The main objectives of the first two presentations in this symposium are to examine factors in the family environment that may facilitate sibling incest and that might be targeted in primary prevention programs. The third presentation will summarize post-offence stress and coping strategies utilized by adolescents and parents, and identify differences between incest and extrafamilial family dyads on these factors. The main objective of the third presentation is to summarize what occurs to families after the offense, as reported by the adolescents and parents, to better understand the particular needs of families after a youth has been charged with a sexual offence. We will end the current symposium by summarizing the implications of our findings for the etiology of adolescent sexual offending, and support programs for adolescents who have committed a sexual offence and their families.

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

### **Adolescents Who Commit Sibling Incest: A Qualitative Study of How They Conceptualize Their Offending**

Jennifer Gould, BA (Hons)  
Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH)  
Kelly M. Babchishin, PhD  
The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research  
Elisabeth J. Leroux, MA  
Carleton University  
Michael C. Seto, PhD  
The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research

The aim of the current study was to examine how adolescents who committed a sibling incest offence conceptualize their offending. Adolescents were recruited from two large mental health centres in Canada, as part of a larger ongoing study examining the experiences of justice-involved youth. To be eligible for the current study, adolescents had to be charged with a sexual offence against a biological or sociolegal sibling (e.g., step-sister). Participants completed an in-depth interview that typically lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. Interviews were conducted at the pre-sentencing stage of the court process and the average length of time since disclosure of the sibling incest offence was about a year. Interviews were divided into the following, theoretically-informed domains: family background, family norms regarding sexuality, sexual education, sibling relationship, and conceptualization of the offence.

Recruitment is ongoing, but we currently have 5 adolescent offenders with sibling victims (expected  $N = 10$ ). A preliminary thematic analysis was conducted, and three main patterns emerged. First, there is significant heterogeneity as it relates to understanding the offence as coercive rather than consensual in nature. Although most adolescents acknowledged the offence was coercive and expected to be reported, a number of adolescents described their behaviour as fully consensual. For example, one adolescent described how he was not upset at his sister for telling their parents because, *"I knew my sister would tell right after it happened."*, whereas another reported *"I felt like it was consensual all the way. And I even asked her at a certain point later on to confirm that everything we've done, brief as it was, was consensual."*

Cognitive distancing on the part of the adolescents from their idea of "sex offenders" was another pattern observed across interviews. For example, *"I used to think that sex offenders were creepy guys, personally, I'd like to believe I don't belong in that camp, I'm not a pedophile"*. Finally, many adolescents conceptualized their offence as "bad" or "wrong" because they had offended against a child. For example, when discussing the details of his offence one adolescent reported, *"Anyone can attack another person. It takes a truly disgusting human being to sexually assault someone...especially a child"*. Similarly, another

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

adolescent described his immediate thought process after his offence, “*Once I had realized what I’d done, I was like, obviously this was wrong, because [they] were way younger than me*”. Interestingly, no adolescent discussed the taboo of having sex with a family member. Together, these findings provide insight into the pathway toward sibling incest, and provide insight into the cognitive processing of adolescents who have committed a sibling offence. We will discuss the implications of our findings for the prevention and intervention of sibling incest.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Describe theoretically-informed familial factors associated with sibling incest.
- Describe family dynamics associated with adolescent sibling incest.
- Gain a better understanding of how adolescents conceptualize the onset of their incest behavior.

### **Reference:**

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.  
doi:10.1177/1252822X05279903
- Kuzel, A. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquire. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (pp.31-44). Newbury Park, CA: Sage

## **A Comparison of Adolescent Sibling Incest and Non-Sibling Incest Cases**

Kelly M. Babchishin, PhD  
The Royal’s Institute of Mental Health Research  
Elisabeth J. Leroux, MA  
Carleton University  
Michael C. Seto, PhD  
The Royal’s Institute of Mental Health Research

The current study is using the same participant pool as the first study, but compares adolescents who have sexually offended against a biological or sociolegal sibling to a group of adolescents who have sexually offended against unrelated victims, matched for having at least one sibling and for the same victim age and gender as the incest group. This sampling strategy means comparisons are not influenced by differences in victim age or gender between the two groups, or by whether the adolescents had access to a sibling. All adolescents consented to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Data collection is ongoing, and we currently have 5 adolescents in the incest group and 5 adolescents in the matched extrafamilial group.

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

As part of the iterative process of qualitative analysis, we have identified three etiological factors that distinguish the sibling incest group from the extrafamilial group thus far. Compared to the extrafamilial group, the sibling incest group described more sexualized family environments and greater sexualisation of their sibling. For example, one adolescent from the sibling incest group described how his sister would wear loose pants that he felt was, “...just to get my attention”. This adolescent went on to describe that “...she was doing that [wearing loose pants] for about six months....and at some point it aroused me...and I made the mistake of having the idea of having intercourse with my sister”. Another adolescent from the sibling incest group described how he sought out pornography that reminded him of his sister. This is in contrast to adolescents from the extrafamilial group who described their siblings as “friends” and articulated non-sexualized sibling boundaries. For example, an adolescent from the extrafamilial group described his relationship with his biological sister, “We respect one another’s privacy, but we’re still there for one another”.

Different themes also emerged between the two groups as it relates to the onset of their offence. Specifically, the themes regarding the offence catalyst for the sibling incest group revolved around a desire for a sexual outlet. For example, one adolescent from this group described, “I was watching pornography and wanted to feel good. My sister was wearing very short shorts, so I went into her room. I don’t remember what happened after.” This adolescent later reported, “I sometimes feel horny but have no release”. This is in contrast to the themes regarding the offence catalyst for the extrafamilial group, which revolved more around acting on an emotional connection. For example, one adolescent from the extrafamilial group reported, “At first it started off as feelings of friendship...I portrayed it as more of a romantic relationship...it made it seem okay that I could [have sex with him]...because of the way that I felt. [I realized] what I feel for him...that’s not love, I’m just lonely.” The current study provides an in-depth analysis of how the etiological pathway towards sibling incest is distinct from that of extrafamilial offending. Implications of our findings for the prevention and intervention of sibling incest will be discussed.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Describe differences in etiological factors between adolescent sibling and non-sibling incest
- Describe differences in offence characteristics between adolescent sibling and non-sibling incest
- Gain a better understanding of the nature of adolescent sibling incest

### **Reference:**

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.  
doi:10.1177/1252822X05279903
- Kuzel, A. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquire. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (pp.31-44). Newbury Park, CA: Sage

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

### **How Youth and Parents Cope with Post-Offence Stress Following Sibling Incest**

Elisabeth J. Leroux, MA

Carleton University

Kelly M. Babchishin, PhD

The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research

Michael C. Seto, PhD

The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research

The intra-familial nature of adolescent sibling incest places a unique strain on the families. Additionally, the stigma and shame associated with sibling incest can contribute to severe psychological distress for all members of the family. The aim of the current study was to examine coping mechanisms and post-offence stress faced by families involved in a sibling incest offence, compared to families involved in an extrafamilial sexual offence. The current study used the adolescent sample of the previous two talks, in addition to the parents of these adolescents. A total of five adolescent-parent sibling incest dyads (expected  $N=10$ ) and five adolescent-parent extrafamilial dyads (expected  $N=10$ ) were included. Within the extrafamilial dyads, all adolescents also had a sibling (60% have an opposite-sex sibling).

A preliminary thematic analysis has been conducted, focusing specifically on themes related to post-offence experiences and needs. To date, no significant thematic differences have been identified across the two groups. Most interviews, regardless of group, are characterized by a high degree of emotional distress and cathartic relief. For example, one adolescent who offended against his step-sister reported, *"It feels nice to get some of this off my chest, I wish I could do more of this stuff."* Similarly, a biological mother who was part of a sibling incest dyad stated, *"Thank you for this, it was like the therapy I needed."* Adolescent-parent dyads from the sibling incest and extrafamilial groups all reported increased social isolation, increased depression, increased need for mental health supports, inability to access mental health supports, and increased rejection from the community (e.g., expelled from school or sport program) since the offence. Overall, study findings suggest that the shame, fear, and stigmatization of sexual offending supersede group membership. For example, regardless of offence group, adolescents discussed the distress they felt in regards to their futures because of their offence. One adolescent from the sibling incest group reported, *"What's on paper is that I'm a monster who loves to have sex with children. I assume I will be treated unfairly and harshly...because of my offence type."* Similarly, an adolescent from the extrafamilial group reported, *"Having a criminal record, or something like this sex offence, won't ever get me a job."* Study findings have important implications for the post-offence adjustment and reintegration of adolescents who have committed a sexual offence. Gaining a better understanding of the roots of distress among this population can also inform best treatment practices. Implications of our findings for the prevention and intervention of sibling incest will be discussed.

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

### **Learning Goals:**

- Describe the post-offence psychological needs of adolescents and parents who have committed a sibling incest offence.
- Describe the post-offence psychological needs of adolescents and parents of adolescents who have committed an extrafamilial sexual offence.
- Gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences faced by families involved in a sibling incest offence compared to families involved in an extrafamilial sexual offence.

### **Reference:**

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82.  
doi:10.1177/1252822X05279903
- Kuzel, A. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquiry. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (pp.31-44). Newbury Park, CA: Sage

**Kelly M. Babchishin**, Ph.D. is an adjunct scientist at The Royal's Institute of Mental Health. Her current research involves identifying causal candidates for the onset of sexual offending behavior. Other research interests include change in sexual offending behavior across the lifespan, risk assessment, pedophilia, and online sexual offenders.

**Jennifer Gould** will have completed her B.A. (Hons) at Ryerson University in April 2018 and completed her Honor's thesis under the supervision of Dr. David Day. Her thesis examined the longitudinal impact of poly-victimization and residential mobility on justice-involved youth. Jennifer is also a research assistant in the Forensic Research Unit at the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research. Jennifer's other research interests include the experiences of individuals who are sexually attracted to children, pedophilia, serial offences and ritualistic offences.

**Elisabeth J. Leroux**, is a Ph.D. Candidate in forensic psychology at Carleton University, under the co-supervision of Drs. Michael Seto and Kevin Nunes. Elisabeth earned her Master's in Psychological Science at Ryerson University in August 2014. Her thesis was a mixed-methods evaluation of a community-based program for at-risk youth in Toronto, Canada. Her current research involves understanding the experiences of youth at the intersection of the mental health and criminal justice systems, with a focus on adolescents who have committed a sexual offence. Other areas of interest include youth sexual development, youth justice policy, and qualitative methodologies.