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Father-Daughter Incest: Investigating Family Dynamics and Risk Factors in German-Speaking Fathers

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Much is known about the causes of child sexual abuse generally, but less is known about incestuous child sexual abuse. For example, antisocial orientation and sexual deviance are two major risk dimensions for sexual offenses (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004), yet systematic reviews indicate that these risk factors are less relevant for incestuous sexual offenders against children, who typically score lower on both dimensions (Pullman, Sawatsky, Babchishin, McPhail, & Seto, 2017; Seto, Babchishin, Pullman, & McPhail, 2015). Therefore, it is likely that other factors are more relevant. Theoretical work suggests that family dynamics play an important role in incest. For example, having no close, early physical proximity between family members increases the risk for incestuous behavior (Parker & Parker, 1986; Shepher, 1971; Spiro, 1958; Talmon, 1964).

The current study is based on an anonymous online survey of German-speaking adult fathers with at least one daughter (current $N = 150$; anticipated $N = 400$). We aim to examine the prevalence of father-daughter incest, and to examine how fathers who commit sexual offenses against their own children are different from fathers who do not commit such offenses yet also have a daughter, in order to identify candidate factors. We will also test the Westermarck hypothesis that early physical proximity to the child leads to sexual indifference or even aversion by comparing incestuous fathers with non-incestuous fathers. Finding out more about factors associated with incest can help us to better understand the motivation behind these offenses to ultimately to reduce them through assessment and treatment.

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Julia S. Albrecht is a Berlin-based psychologist. In 2017, she received her Master's degree in psychology of rehabilitation and completed her thesis through the Prevention Project Dunkelfeld in Berlin. In January and February 2018, she was placed as a research student at the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research investigating incestuous sexual offenses against children. Other research interests include the assessment of risk factors for child sexual abuse, particularly psychopathy and pedophilic interests.

Lesleigh E. Pullman is a Ph.D. candidate in Experimental Forensic Psychology. Lesleigh earned her B.A.(hons) from Carleton University in 2011, under the supervision of Dr. Kevin Nunes. That same year, she continued her education in the combined MA-Ph.D. program in Experimental Psychology at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Seto (Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research, University of Ottawa). Her current research involves examining etiological explanations of incestuous sexual behaviour, particularly from an evolutionary psychology framework. Other areas of interest include psychopathy, hypersexuality, and resiliency as it relates to criminal behavior.