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Exploring the Relationship Between Early Antisocial Behavioral Patterns and Modus Operandi of Juvenile Sexual Offenders

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Juvenile sex offenders (JSOs) are a heterogeneous population (Lussier & Blokland, 2013). Attempts to capture and explain this heterogeneity are primarily based on typologies that focus on the event or the individual, but not both. Event-based typologies consider factors such as the age of the victim or relationship between victim and offender (e.g., Worling, 2001) whereas individual-based typologies consider, for example, the presence or absence of nonsexual offending in the background of JSOs (e.g., Butler & Seto, 2002). The current study used a developmental criminology framework to examine and describe synchronicity between the early behavioral patterns of JSOs (i.e., the individual-based aspect of JSO typologies) and the modus operandi for their sexual offense (i.e., the event-based aspect of JSO typologies). More specifically, according to Loeber and Hay (1994), disruptive and aggressive behavior is stable across time, but the manifestation of these behaviors is heterogeneous across the life course. Loeber and Hay proposed a three-pathway developmental model (authority-conflict, overt, and covert) in which disruptive and antisocial behavior follows an ordered sequence, changing manifestation severity while still reflecting the same underlying construct (e.g., overt behaviors that escalate from minor assault to assault with a weapon). McCuish, Lussier, and Corrado (2015) showed that JSOs, like juvenile nonsex offenders, tend to show distinct patterns of overt or covert behavior during the early stages of childhood.

Thus, using data from the Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study, we examined whether a JSO's childhood behavioral pattern (e.g., overt, covert) corresponded with the overt or covert nature in which they perpetrated their sexual offense. Latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to explore differences in latent behavioral patterns of JSOs and these behavioral patterns were compared against a measure of the extent to which an individual's sexual offense represented the type of overt or covert nature of antisocial behavior as outlined in the developmental criminology literature (Loeber & Hay, 1994; McCuish et al., 2015). This approach addressed recent recommendations to refocus attention to juvenile sex offending behavior and the developmental context in which it occurs (Lussier, 2017).

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