

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | POSTER

### **Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: Can We Learn from Minor Attracted Persons?**

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A primary sexual attraction to children is one of the strongest predictors of sexual abuse against children (Babchishin, Hanson, & VanZuylen, 2015). With as many as 8% of boys and 20% of girls having experienced some form of sexual abuse over their lifetime (Preda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009), it is not difficult to understand why the public tends to think 'pedophile' is synonymous with 'child molester' (Cantor, 2012).

However, isolated acts of child sexual abuse are largely committed by non-pedophilic men, or men whose primary sexual interest is not children (Blanchard, Kuban, Blak, Cantor, & Klassen, 2009). Conversely, there is an important proportion of individuals with a sexual interest in children, or minor attracted persons (MAPs) who endorse little to no sexual activity with children and commit to living law abiding lives (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). In addition, a large proportion of child sexual abuse that never gets detected (Beier, Grundmann, Kuhle, Scherner, Konrad, & Amelung, 2014). Together this suggests there is something different about individuals who are convicted of sexual crimes against children and those who are not. Given their known risk for offending against children, non-offending MAPs provide a unique population of study to determine what primary strategies may be used to prevent child sexual abuse.

Traditionally, research has focused on tertiary prevention strategies (i.e., those directed at a population already demonstrating/engaging in the problematic behaviour of interest), to prevent recidivism in convicted sex offenders. For example, incarceration, long prison sentences, and sex offender registration have been identified as tertiary prevention strategies (Mitchell & Galupo, 2016). While there is some evidence to indicate that these consequences of criminal actions may serve as a primary prevention tool (e.g., by decreasing the rates of first-time arrests for sex crimes due to fear for the potential negative outcome); Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Armstrong, & Sinha, 2010), few studies have focused primarily on primary prevention. Recently, Mitchell and Galupo (2016) interviewed two groups of men who self-reported an attraction to children: those who had committed a sexual offence against a child, and those who had not. They asked the men about an instance where they had made a choice not to commit an offence and how specific factors (e.g. the possibility of incarceration) influenced their decision not to act. Overall, they found one of the most influential factors to be potential harm to the child. However, no study has inquired about behavioural and/or cognitive *actions* that have been taken by individuals who self-report an attraction to children when deciding not to commit an offence against a child.

This study aims to identify specific strategies used by MAPs when they are in a position to engage in sexual activity with a child or consume child pornography. These actions will be identified by specific reference to avoidance or evasion of a situation involving a child or how they resisted accessing child pornography. Data was collected from several online forums for MAPs. Six months of forum posts from March 2016 – Sept 2016 were

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pulled, totaling 4522 independent topics to analyze. We conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the first three months (i.e. March 2016 – June 2016) of posts to establish the presence of identifiable strategies. Results indicate that there are several identifiable strategies that MAPs use. For example, many MAPs try to educate a child (whom they call a ‘young friend’) about why they cannot have a romantic/sexual relationship with them. In addition, many MAPs limit their behavior with a young friend (i.e. keeping just shy of sexual activity) to avoid the scrutiny of the public. We are also conducting a thematic analysis on the second block of posts (i.e. June 2016 – Sept 2016) to confirm our findings from the first block. This analysis is ongoing and is expected to conclude by Fall 2018.