

The Role of ACE and Dangerous World Implicit Theory in Sexually Offending Against Children

Gaye Ildeniz, MSc
Caoilte Ó Ciardha, PhD
University of Kent

Recently, research in understanding individuals who commit sexual offences against children has started to focus on the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) in the development of sexually abusive behaviour. Research shows that childhood emotional and sexual abuse as well as neglect (ACE) can predict sexual offending behaviour (e.g., Langton, Murad, & Humbert, 2015; Levenson et al., 2016). Grady, Levenson, and Bolder (2016) have proposed an etiological model of ACE to sexual offending suggesting that exposure to ACE is associated with the development of criminogenic needs that contribute to sexually abusive behaviour. In order to understand sexual offending behaviour against children, understanding their cognition and cognitive processes (e.g., beliefs, attitudes and attributions) is as crucial as understanding their previous experiences (e.g., ACE). In this study, we investigate whether exposure to ACE is a predictor of developing certain cognitive constructs as well as problematic sexual behaviour involving children, within a community sample.

The 'implicit theories' theory has been very influential in providing a framework with which to understand the cognition of individuals who sexually offend against children (Ward, 2000; Ward & Keenan, 1999). The *dangerous world* implicit theory is one of the implicit theories hypothesised by Ward and Keenan (1999). They proposed that some individuals who sexually offend against children have schematic beliefs that the world is an inherently dangerous and hostile place. The dangerous world implicit theory involves the belief that it is necessary to punish women and children who are perceived as threatening as well as perceiving children as more accepting and dependable than adults where they can understand the offender's need and sexual desires and are happy to gratify them. Ward and Keenan (1999) argued that implicit theories can be held by non-offenders, and that they may be necessary but not sufficient to cause offending. In addition, based on psychological research from other domains, Ward (2000) proposes that implicit theories mainly develop early in childhood in order to explain regularities in individuals' environment.

This is a two-wave study with a community sample recruited through online crowdsourcing to examine the underlying mechanism of the development of sexual offending behaviour against children. Wave 1 includes 700 participants completing a number of measures including ACE, dangerous world implicit theory item-based scale, self-report past problematic sexual offending behaviour involving children since the age of 18 and proclivity to sexually offend, alongside with four other psychological constructs; hostile attribution bias, hostile sexism, emotional congruence with children and the implicit theory of children as sexual beings. In wave 2, participants will be asked only to self-report problematic sexual behaviour involving children in the past

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | POSTER

approximately three months (since wave 1).

In this current study, as well as aiming to understand how these constructs are associated, we aim to examine the underlying mechanism of the development of sexual offending behaviour against children. Following Ward's theoretical proposal of holding implicit theories to be developed in early developmental years, the current study aims to examine whether certain cognitive constructs (including *dangerous world implicit theory*, *hostile attribution bias*, *hostile sexism*, *emotional congruence with children*, and *the implicit theory of children as sexual beings*) account for the link between adverse childhood experiences and sexual offending behaviour as proposed by Grady et al. (2016).

Gaye Ildeniz received her BSc (Hons) in Psychology from the University of Essex, UK, in 2014. She received her MSc in Forensic Psychology in 2015, from the University of Kent, UK, under the supervision of Dr Caoilte Ó Ciardha. She is currently a PhD Researcher in Forensic Psychology and Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Kent, UK. She is still working with Dr Ó Ciardha and her research interests include understanding social cognition in individuals who have committed sexual offences against children.