

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

T-18

They Need Somebody and Not Just Anybody: Help-Seeking Behavior in Minor-Attracted Persons and Their Informal Network

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Help-seeking behaviour is a complex construct that refers to an adaptive coping process that is the attempt to obtain external assistance to deal with a mental health concern (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Encouraging help-seeking behavior is considered to be one of the greatest challenges to effective prevention and treatment of mental disorders, given the reluctance of people exhibiting these disorders to seek professional help (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). It is not surprising that minor-attracted people (MAPs) struggle with this issue as well. Only a small proportion considers disclosing their deviant sexual interests to a mental health care practitioner (Dombert et al., 2016), and only a minority of sexual offenders has sought help prior to their arrest (Levenson, Willis, & Vicencio, 2017; Piché, Mathesius, Lussier, & Schweighofer, 2018). MAPs seem to experience a wide range of psychological (e.g., fear of consequences and shame), social (e.g., experienced stigmatizing attitudes from the general public and professionals), and practical obstacles (e.g., affordability and finding an experienced mental health care practitioner) that prevent them from seeking help (Levenson et al., 2017). But despite the growing acknowledgment of the need for primary and secondary preventive services, current knowledge on help-seeking behaviors in MAPs remains limited. In addition, although several preventive services like Stop it Now! aim to address the needs, questions and worries of the MAPs' informal network (e.g., friends and family), the literature on this topic also remains scarce.

The current symposium aims to address these gaps by exploring help-seeking behaviors in MAPs and in their informal network. The first presentation describes a study on the psychosocial well-being and help-seeking behavior in MAPs from the general community. This study aimed to explore the psychosocial well-being and help-seeking behaviors in MAPs, as well as the relation between their psychosocial well-being and help-seeking behavior. The second presentation focuses on how Stop it Now! Flanders (Belgium), a prevention project on child sexual abuse, tries to lower the barriers of help-seeking behavior in MAPs. This presentation will describe the help-seeking process in MAPs through case studies and will discuss which specific interventions might help preventive services on the primary, secondary and tertiary level overcoming help-seeking resistance. The third and final presentation will address help-seeking behavior of members of the informal network of MAPs (e.g. relatives and friends). Given the potential role of the informal network in the prevention of child sexual abuse and the possible distress network-members might experience themselves after discovering the deviant sexual interest toward minors in for instance a relative, it is surprising that this topic has received, to our knowledge, no

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consideration in the literature yet. Therefore, the purpose of the third presentation is to draw attention of practitioners and researchers to the help-seeking behavior in the MAPs' informal network by illustrating the efforts of Stop it Now! Flanders to lower these barriers and by discussing a case study.

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Exploring Help-Seeking Behaviour and Psychosocial Well-Being in Minor-Attracted Persons

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Recent studies suggest that experienced stigma might not only have a negative impact on the dynamic risk factors for sexual offending (Jahnke & Jena, 2018), but might also prohibit help-seeking behaviour in minor-attracted persons (MAPs; Levenson, Willis, & Vicencio, 2017). Additional psychological (e.g., fear of consequences and shame), social (e.g., experienced stigmatizing attitudes from the general public and professionals), and practical obstacles (e.g., affordability and finding an experienced mental health care practitioner) that prevent MAPs from seeking help, have also been identified in recent studies (Levenson et al., 2017; Piché, Mathesius, Lussier, & Schweighofer, 2018). However, given that previous studies have mainly focused on individuals who were incarcerated or in treatment for sexual offending, little is known about the help-seeking behaviours in individuals who live in the community. In addition, the psychosocial well-being of MAPs and its relation to help-seeking behaviour is not well understood yet.

The current study aimed to address these gaps by (1) exploring the MAPs' psychosocial well-being and perceived stress, (2) exploring help-seeking behaviour in MAPs, and (3) examining

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the link between psychosocial well-being and help-seeking behaviour in MAPs. Fifty-five participants ($M=38$ years, $SD=15.09$; 95% males) from the general population who experience sexual interests in minors filled out an online survey containing an ad hoc survey on help-seeking behaviour, the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), and the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes et al., 2008). Results show that, compared to a control group, MAPs did not exhibit lower levels of mental health, but they did report heightened levels of stress. Participants who have sought help for their sexual interests, seem to mainly have contacted both formal (e.g., psychologist or psychiatrist) and informal (e.g., family or friends) sources (52%) or only formal sources (43%). Although most of the participants reported positive experiences with seeking help, a significant proportion indicated that the support they received was not helpful (5.6-20%), making it less likely they will contact these people or services again in the future. Counterintuitively, no association was found between help-seeking behaviour and psychosocial well-being. Current findings illustrate that negative experiences with sources of help might hamper future help-seeking behaviour in MAPs. Also, a positive relation between help-seeking behaviour and psychosocial well-being should not be taken for granted. Hence, it seems crucial that we extend our understanding of the decision-making process around choosing a particular form of help and its success in helping MAPs in order to make the available support services more effective.

Learning Goals:

The current presentation aims to:

- Increase knowledge on help-seeking behaviour in minor-attracted persons (MAPs);
- Increase awareness of the underlying mechanisms of help-seeking behaviour as well as the MAPs' positive and negative experiences with seeking help;
- Elicit discussion about efforts that should be made to encourage help-seeking behaviour in MAPs.

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Facilitating Help-Seeking Behavior in Users of the Stop It Now! Helpline

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The nonprofit organization Stop it Now! aims to prevent child sexual abuse by informing the general public about pedophilia, by offering free, anonymous support to everyone who is concerned about their own sexual feelings, thoughts or behavior towards minors, and by offering support to those individuals who are concerned about the feelings or behavior of others. Hence, Stop it Now! aims to provide preventive services at primary, secondary and tertiary level for those who seek help.

It is often assumed that the decision to seek help is the result of a reasoned and rational processes. However, growing evidence suggests that social reaction processes may also underlie one's spontaneous willingness to seek help. In line with these findings, the dual-process prototype/willingness model (PWM; Gerrard, Gibbons, Houlihan, Stock, & Pomery, 2008) describes two information-processing pathways to health-risk behavior: a reasoned pathway largely determined by intention, and a social reaction pathway largely determined by the general willingness to engage in certain behaviour. The model is found to be useful to identify important targets for interventions with regard to a wide range of risky behaviors, such as unsafe sex (Myklestad & Rise, 2007) and sexting (Walrave et al., 2005), as well as with regard to professional psychological help-seeking behaviour (Hammer & Vogel, 2013). To our knowledge, this decision-making model has not been applied to help-seeking behavior in MAPs yet. In the current presentation, we will discuss how the PWM may improve our understanding of help-seeking behavior in MAPs, and hence, may improve the preventive services that Stop it Now! offers. Two case studies will be described to illustrate how this model and the aforementioned empirical results (cfr. presentation 1) translate into clinical practice.

Learning Goals:

This presentation aims to:

- Enhance knowledge on a dual-process model in predicting help-seeking decisions;
- Provide in-depth insights in the application of this decision model in help-seeking behavior for minor-attracted persons and people at risk for child sexual abusive behavior;
- Provide in-depth insights into the implementation of this model in the Stop it Now! program.

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Help-Seeking Behaviour in People Observing Worrying Sexual Behaviour Towards Minors in Significant Others

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Various psychological (e.g., fear of consequences and shame), social (e.g., experienced stigmatizing attitudes from the general public and professionals), and practical obstacles (e.g., affordability and finding an experienced mental health care practitioner) seem to hamper help-seeking behavior in minor-attracted persons (MAPs) (Levenson, Willis, & Vicencio, 2017; Piché, Mathesius, Lussier, & Schweighofer, 2018). Recent research suggests that MAPs approach informal sources for support (e.g., friends and family) more often than formal sources (e.g., counselors and psychologists) (Levenson et al., 2017). Moreover, the informal network might also play an important role in the detection of worrisome sexual interests and behaviours towards minors, and hence in the prevention of child sexual abuse. However, it can be assumed that these disclosures or discoveries might elicit distress and help-seeking behavior in the network. To our knowledge help-seeking behaviour in MAPs' informal network has not received any attention in the literature.

The aim of the current presentation is to address this gap by exploring the help-seeking behavior in the MAPs' informal network. First, we will illustrate how applying the dual-process prototype/willingness model (PWM; Gerrard, Gibbons, Houlihan, Stock, & Pomery,

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2008) might assist us in understanding and predicting help-seeking decisions in the MAPs' informal network. Second, we will discuss how Stop it Now! Flanders (Belgium) aims to lower barriers in seeking help for people who are concerned about sexual interests or behavior towards minors in others. And third, a case study will be presented to exemplify the informal network's motivations to seek help from Stop it Now! Flanders and how Stop it Now! Flanders has subsequently tried to address their questions and concerns.

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Learning Goals:

The current presentation aims to:

- Increase awareness of the concerns and the obstacles the informal network of MAPs might struggle with when seeking help;
- Provide in-depth insights into the efforts of the Stop it Now! program to address the concerns and questions of the minor-attracted persons' informal network;
- Elicit discussion about efforts that should be made to address the needs of the informal network.

Wineke Smid is head of the research department at Van der Hoeven Kliniek (part of Forensic Care Specialists) in Utrecht, the Netherlands. She divides her time between conducting and supervising empirical research projects, carrying out individual (risk) assessments of residential high-risk sex offenders and providing feedback of state of the art knowledge to various stakeholders in Dutch society. Wineke Smid conducted a national study on Sex Offender Risk Assessment in the Netherlands and is currently involved in a number of research projects focusing on the assessment and treatment of sexual self-regulation risk factors for sex offenders (sexual deviance, sexual preoccupation, sexual coping) as well as fundamental sexological research on the Incentive Motivational Model.

Kasia Uzieblo is senior researcher at the Forensic Care Specialists (the Netherlands) and visiting professor at Ghent University and at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium). She is the founder and coordinator of the forensic division of the Flemish Association of Clinical Psychologists. She is also the past-president of the Dutch Chapter of of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (NL-ATSA). Her main research interests are psychopathy, sexual and domestic violence, and psychological assessment in forensic populations. She has

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published several national and international papers and has given numerous presentations on the aforementioned topics.

Minne De Boeck has a master's degree in Criminology and in Conflict & Development Studies. She works at the University Forensic Centre (UFC) in Antwerp, Belgium. The UFC is Flanders' reference centre with regard to the guidance and treatment of patients with paraphilia and/or sex offenders. The UFC also offers support to professionals from criminal justice and mental health settings. As a criminologist within the UFC, Minne De Boeck is responsible for the coordination of the support centre and is part of the intake team of the treatment centre. She also coordinates the risk assessments and risk management conducted within the UFC. Furthermore, Minne De Boeck is the project manager of Stop it Now! Flanders and is a board member of the Dutch chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers.