

A Preliminary Examination of Pedohebephilic Interest in a Community Sample of Women

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Background: Most research on pedohebephilia is conducted with male adult forensic populations. There are some exceptions to this, including two case studies of women with sexual interest in children who sexually offended and a limited number of studies that have inquired about sexual interest in children in a general community sample that included women. Together, these studies suggest that a small group of women report pedohebephilic interest. Given the focus on males with pedohebephilia, it is unclear if our understanding of key sexological features of pedohebephilia (e.g., exclusivity of interest) generalize to women. In the present study, we provide the first examination of features of pedohebephilia among women (age interest, exclusivity, sexual response gradient, gender interest, and age of onset).

Method: We recruited 228 individuals (8.8% or 20 participants whose biological sex was female) with pedohebephilia to an anonymous online survey on the development of sexual interest in children and risk factors for perpetration of sexual abuse. Participants were recruited via online communities for people with pedohebephilia and social media (Twitter). Participants completed several self-report measures that assessed different features of pedohebephilia (e.g., emotional attraction, sexual behaviour), the focus of pedohebephilia interest (e.g., exclusivity, gender interest, sexual response gradient), and age of onset. Due to sample size constraints, our analyses were restricted to reporting descriptive statistics about these key features in women, alongside the same information for men.

Results: Women with pedohebephilia reported a significant sexual component to pedohebephilia in that sexual attraction and fantasies were more oriented to children than adults. Interestingly, 20% of women reported that they had been arrested, charged, or convicted for a sexual offence against a child. Sexual behaviour and socio-emotional aspects of pedohebephilia appeared to be more oriented towards adults than children. Further, 80% reported interest in both prepubescent and pubescent children and 50% of women reported interest in boys. None of the women in the sample reported non-exclusive sexual interest to children and adults. Lastly, women became aware of their first sexual attraction during childhood but awareness of pedohebephilia occurred later in adolescence, with an average duration of the interest occurring over a 20-year period.

Discussion: Our preliminary examination suggests that many features of pedohebephilia documented in men applies to women. Although our research involves a small convenience sample of women, we believe the results have important implications for furthering our understanding of pedohebephilia in women. The results also suggest important areas for clinicians to query when women present for clinical services with reports of pedohebephilia.

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2020 ATSA Conference | Friday October 23 | POSTER

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