

FR-MID-01

Sexual Interest in Children in Forensic and Community Samples

Symposium Chair: Skye Stephens, PhD, R Psych
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Sexual interest in children refers to pedophilia (sexual interest in prepubescent children); hebephilia (sexual interest in pubescent children) and pedohebephilia (sexual interest in prepubescent and pubescent children). Sexual interest in children is important in the assessment and management of those who commit sexual offences, as it is emphasized in virtually all theoretical models of sexual offending against children and is a strong predictor of sexual recidivism. Due to the centrality of this concept, there has been increased attention to programs that can provide mental health services to people with sexual interest in children who are not involved in the criminal justice system and are interested in seeking help to manage their sexual interest.

The symposium is comprised of three presentations focused on sexual interest in children conducted in the research lab of the symposium chair. The first presentation examines differences in sexual interest in children among men who commenced their criminal careers at different developmental stages. This presentation will aid in furthering understanding the unique offending patterns of people with sexual interest in children. The second presentation focuses on the development of a behavioural assessment measure to identify hebephilia. This presentation introduces a new measure which can be used in clinical practice as part of a comprehensive forensic assessment of sexual interest in children. The final presentation examines what clinicians and people with sexual interest in children believe should be included in an educational workshop that would aim to increase competency among clinicians to treat this population. The presentation provides important insight on factors that people with sexual interest in children would like emphasized in treatment to ensure it is a positive and meaningful experience. It is expected that the symposium will hold broad appeal to researchers studying atypical sexual interest, as well as clinicians who provide assessment, treatment, and prevention services in forensic and community settings.

This symposium is rated: Adult | Intermediate | Clinical & Research

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2020 ATSA Conference | Friday October 23 | 12:45 PM – 2:15 PM

Age of Sexual Offending Onset and Sexual Interest in Children

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Background: An important concept in developmental life-course criminology is the criminal career, which encapsulates the onset, duration, and evolution of criminal behaviour over an individual's lifetime (MacLeod et al., 2012; McGee & Farrington, 2019). Until relatively recently, research on the criminal career has focused on offending that starts in adolescence, resulting in comparatively less research dedicated to those whose sexual offending starts later in life. There is evidence to suggest that those whose sexual offending onsets in adulthood may be at higher risk of offending against children and by extension more likely to have a sexual interest in children (Francis et al., 2014). The focus of the present study is to examine those whose sexual offending emerges at different times across the lifespan and if there are differences in the presence of sexual interest in children. **Methods/Results:** An archival dataset of 747 men who committed at least one sexual offence will be used for the present study. The dataset will be organized by age of onset of sexual offending [adolescence (< 18), emerging adulthood (19-29), established adulthood (30-60), later adulthood (60+)] based on official and self-reported offending. Regression analyses will be used to determine whether age of onset is associated with different indicators of sexual interest in children (e.g., SSPI-2 scores, phallometric test results). **Discussion:** It is possible that different etiological models may be needed for different period of sexual offending onset. A nuanced understanding of age of sexual offending onset and its association with sexual interest in children will allow us to identify the prominence of this factor across different developmental periods.

Learning Goals

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand the current body of literature on the age of onset of sexual offending.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand underlying risk factors that are associated with different ages of onset of sexual offending.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to identify age related offending characteristics of those who are at higher risk of re-offending against children.

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Creating and Validating a Behavioural Measure of Exclusive Hebephilia

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Background. The Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interest-Revised (SSPI-2; Seto, Stephens, Lalumière & Cantor, 2017) is a five-item measure of pedophilic interest based on victim characteristics. Originally developed to measure pedophilia, the measure better reflects pedohebephilia as opposed to exclusive hebephilia (i.e., sexual interest in pubescent children without any interest in prepubescent children or adults; Stephens et al., 2019). The purpose of the current study is to create a measure assessing exclusive hebephilia based on victim characteristics in adult men who have sexually offended. **Method/Results.** The sample includes 1,900 adult men who committed at least one sexual offense against a victim under the age of 15 and were assessed at a large sexual behaviour clinic. Assessment information was entered into a research database, which included victim information and volumetric phallometric results. In the sample, 16% had exclusive hebephilia; 59% did not meet the phallometric cut-off for sexual interest in children and represented the comparison group. We plan to examine the ability of the original SSPI-2 and additional items (e.g., victims aged 15-16; Stephens et al., 2017) might be combined into a new measure that can accurately classify men with hebephilia. If we can develop a measure of exclusive hebephilia, the psychometric properties of the measure (e.g., sensitivity and specificity) will also be examined. **Discussion.** Results from this study have implications for clinicians who are interested in using behavioural measures to assess sexual interest in children. Ideally, clinicians will be better able to precisely categorize individuals as having an exclusive interest in pubescent children. This will allow for better risk management recommendations, especially in terms of understanding risk to potential future victims.

Learning Goals

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand the existing literature on current assessment tools used to assess sexual interest in children, with a focus on hebephilia.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand the creation and validation of the Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests Revised (SSPI-2) and the psychometric properties of a new behavioural measure to assess exclusive hebephilia
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to discuss the creation of a new assessment measure of exclusive hebephilia and how it could be incorporated into current assessment practices

Informing the Development of a Workshop for Treating Minor-Attracted Persons

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Skye Stephens, PhD, R Psych
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Background. Clinicians have cited a lack of competency as a reason for their reluctance to treat minor-attracted persons (MAPs) living in the community (Alanko et al., 2014; Steils-Glenn, 2010). In this context, minor attraction refers to sexual interest in prepubescent and/or pubescent children. The present study represents the first step in developing an educational workshop for clinicians to increase competency and willingness to treat MAPs who reside in the community. **Method.** Clinicians and MAPs were recruited to an anonymous online survey that included open ended questions about material that should be included in an educational workshop. Clinicians ($n = 101$) were asked what they thought should be included in such a workshop and barriers that could prevent participating in the workshop. MAPs ($n = 183$) were asked what they thought should be included in the educational workshop so that clinicians would be equipped to provide effective treatment to MAPs. Responses were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis using NVivo software. **Results.** Clinicians most frequently endorsed that a workshop should include information on therapeutic methods that are most effective when working with MAPs, as well as explicit discussions around risk assessment, mandatory reporting, and human sexuality (e.g., information on paraphilias and sex positivity). MAPs focused largely on the need to increase clinician understanding of the sexual interest, stigma reduction, and the importance of the clinician-client relationship through the promotion of a positive therapeutic relationship (e.g., empathy, non-judgemental stance). According to clinicians, the largest barrier to attending the workshop is accessibility (i.e., cost and location). **Discussion.** This study will highlight to clinicians what factors clinicians and MAPs think are important to increase competency to treat MAPs, which may be useful to clinicians who currently provide these services. Additionally, the presentation will consider how these findings will be incorporated into an educational workshop for clinicians on treating MAPs in the community.

Learning Goals

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand MAPs' treatment needs and experiences with mental health services
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand what clinicians and people with sexual interest in children believe needs to be included in an educational workshop that would increase competency to work with MAPs.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand elements of interventions that clinicians and people with sexual interest in children believe are integral for effective treatment of sexual interest in children.

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Skye Stephens is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Saint Mary's University (Halifax, NS). Most of her research has focused on the conceptualization, assessment, and management of sexual interest in children. Additionally, she is a registered Clinical and Forensic Psychologist in Nova Scotia and works with adolescents and adults with a focus on those who have come into conflict with the law for illegal sexual behaviour.

Brandon Burgess is in the first year of his MSc in Applied Psychology – Forensic Psychology Stream. In 2018 he graduated from Saint Francis Xavier University with a B.Sc in Psychology with Honours. His research interests include trajectory research on the offending patterns of late-onset sexual offenders, and risk assessment. After completing his MSc, he plans to pursue a PhD in order to become a Clinical Forensic Psychologist.

Martina Faitakis, BA, is a graduate student in the Applied Forensic Psychology program at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has previously worked as a research assistant at the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre in Edmonton, AB, coding for a large-scale research project entitled "Optimizing Risk Assessment for Domestic Violence." Under the supervision of Dr. Skye Stephens, her thesis will create and validate a measure for exclusive hebephilia. Martina has broad research interests in the areas of intimate partner violence, child sexual offending and risk assessment measures.

Kailey Roche is in her second year of the MSc. in Applied Psychology – Forensic Stream. Her thesis focuses on informing the development of a workshop to increase mental health professionals' competency to treat minor attracted persons. Her research interests include developing treatment programs for non-offending men with minor attraction, sex offender risk assessment and treatment, atypical sexual interests, and community reintegration.