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## Child Abuse & Neglect



# Childhood sexual victimization, pedophilic interest, and sexual recidivism<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The goal of the current study was to examine the extent to which child sexual abuse (CSA) and particular characteristics of CSA are associated with pedophilic interest and sexual recidivism.

**Methods:** Subjects were 462 adult male sexual offenders who had been incarcerated in Canadian federal prisons.

**Results:** Compared to sexual offenders who had not been sexually abused, those who had been sexually abused before age 16 sexually offended against significantly younger victims and had significantly more indicators of pedophilic interest. This was the case whether we examined self-reported or officially documented CSA. Offenders who had been sexually abused exclusively by a male had significantly more indicators of pedophilic interest than those who had been sexually abused exclusively by a female. These findings are consistent with past research and theory suggesting that CSA may play a role in pedophilia and sexual offending against children. CSA exclusively by a female abuser predicted *higher* rates of sexual recidivism than abuse by a male or both a male and female abuser. Among offenders with victims 15 years old or younger, a closer relationship between offender and abuser predicted higher rates of sexual recidivism. The relationship between CSA and sexual recidivism was significantly moderated by actuarial risk. More specifically, CSA predicted higher rates of sexual recidivism among higher risk offenders, but CSA did not predict sexual recidivism among lower risk offenders. This novel finding raises the possibility that CSA may play a role in sexual recidivism for some offenders.

**Conclusion:** If future research replicates this CSA by risk interaction and identifies the constructs and processes involved, CSA may be worth considering in risk assessment and treatment.

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### Introduction

Many theories posit that sexual victimization in childhood plays an important role in later sexual offending against children (e.g., Burton, 2003; Johnson & Knight, 2000; Kobayashi, Sales, Becker, Figueredo, & Kaplan, 1995; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Marshall & Marshall, 2000; Seto, 2008; Ward & Siegert, 2002) and studies generally find an association between childhood sexual abuse and sexual offending against children. Recent meta-analyses on adult and adolescent samples have found that sexual offenders have significantly higher rates of childhood sexual abuse than nonsexual offenders (Jespersen, Lalumière, & Seto, 2009; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Whitaker et al., 2008). Furthermore, sexual offenders against children have

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significantly higher rates of childhood sexual victimization than sexual offenders against adults (Jespersen et al., 2009; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Whitaker et al., 2008). Even when information beyond self-report is used to document childhood sexual victimization, these differences remain significant and in the same direction (Jespersen et al., 2009; Seto & Lalumière, 2010). Together these findings suggest childhood sexual victimization is associated with sexual offending against children.

### *CSA and pedophilic interest*

It has been suggested that CSA may lead to the development of pedophilia (i.e., sexual attraction to children) for some victims, which may in turn lead to sexual offending against children (e.g., Freund & Kuban, 1994; Freund, Watson, & Dickey, 1990; Seto, 2008). Consistent with this suggestion, there is some evidence that childhood sexual victimization is associated with indicators of pedophilia among sexual offenders, such as offending against many child victims, male child victims, and having many prior sexual offenses (e.g., Craissati, McClurg, & Browne, 2002; Simons, Wurtele, & Durham, 2008; see Seto, 2008, for a review). Examining pedophilia more directly, Lee, Jackson, Pattison, and Ward (2002) found that offenders diagnosed as pedophiles (DSM-IV) had greater odds of having been sexually abused before age 14 than non-pedophilic offenders.

Freund and colleagues (Freund et al., 1990; Freund & Kuban, 1994) used phallometric assessment to classify participants by sexual preference and compared pedophiles and non-pedophiles on their rate of self-reported childhood sexual victimization by an abuser 18 years or older. Freund et al. found that pedophiles reported higher rates of childhood sexual abuse than men who showed a sexual preference for adults. More specifically, Freund et al. found that rates of childhood sexual abuse before age 16 were highest for heterosexual pedophilic sexual offenders against children (28.6%) and homosexual pedophilic sexual offenders against children (25.9%), intermediate for sexual offenders against children with preference for adults (19.6%), and lowest for sexual offenders against women with preference for adult females (13.9%), nonoffenders with a preference for adult males (11.8%), and nonoffenders with a preference for adult females (10.7%).

Freund and Kuban (1994) attempted to replicate and extend their initial findings with a sample of heterosexual participants who had sexual contact with girls or women. Freund and Kuban failed to replicate their earlier findings for abuse before age 16. Specifically, they did not find clear differences between the pedophilic sexual offenders against children and the other groups on rates of childhood sexual abuse before age 16. However, childhood sexual abuse before age 12 was most frequent for heterosexual pedophilic sexual offenders against children (33.7%), relative to sexual offenders against children with preference for adults (17.3%), sexual offenders against women with preference for adult females (17.6%), and nonoffenders with a preference for adult females (13.4%). Taken together, these results generally suggest that childhood sexual victimization is associated with pedophilia among sexual offenders (also see Seto, 2008, for a review).

### *CSA characteristics associated with pedophilic interest*

Given that most people who were sexually abused as children do not go on to commit sexual offenses against children, it is possible that only some characteristics of the abuse, abuser, or victim are associated with pedophilic interest (e.g., see Seto, 2008, for a review). Some of the CSA characteristics that have been considered are gender of abuser, age at victimization, and relationship to abuser. As noted above, Freund and Kuban (1994) found a relationship between child sexual victimization and pedophilia only for victimization before age 12 but not for victimization before age 16. This raises the possibility that younger age at victimization is associated with pedophilic interest.

In terms of abuser gender, Freund et al. (1990) found that the rates of childhood sexual abuse by a male abuser were very similar to and followed the same pattern as those reported above for abuse by a male and/or female; homosexual and heterosexual pedophiles had the highest rates of childhood sexual victimization. However, the rates of childhood sexual abuse exclusively by a female abuser were relatively low for all groups; the lowest rate was 2.0% among nonoffenders with a preference for adult males and the highest rate was 8.3% among sexual offenders against women with a preference for adult females. Freund and Kuban (1994) also found that the rates of childhood sexual abuse before age 12 by a male abuser were very similar to and followed the same pattern as those reported above for abuse by a male and/or female. The rates of childhood sexual abuse exclusively by a female abuser followed the same pattern but were lower for all groups compared to the rates for a male abuser and a male and/or female abuser. In all cases, pedophilic heterosexual sexual offenders against children had the highest rates of childhood sexual abuse prior to age 12. Thus, childhood sexual victimization may be associated with pedophilia when the abusers were male, but not necessarily when abusers were exclusively female.

With regard to the relationship between abuser and offender, Lussier, Beauregard, Proulx, and Nicole (2005) found that sexual victimization by an extrafamilial abuser was associated with phallometrically assessed pedophilic interest in a sample of sexual offenders against children, but that victimization by an intrafamilial abuser was not. Taken together, these studies suggest that pedophilic interest may be associated with childhood sexual victimization at a younger age, by a male abuser, and by an unrelated abuser.

### *CSA and sexual recidivism*

Although rates of CSA are higher among sexual offenders against children, CSA is associated with pedophilic interest, and pedophilic interest is a good predictor of sexual recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004), the available evidence

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