

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Child Abuse & Neglect



Cognitive schemas and sexual offending: Differences between rapists, pedophilic and nonpedophilic child molesters, and nonsexual offenders[☆]



Vera Sigre-Leirós*, Joana Carvalho, Pedro Nobre

Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciência da Educação da Universidade do Porto, Rua Alfredo Allen, 4200-135 Porto, Portugal

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 June 2014

Received in revised form 7 September 2014

Accepted 1 October 2014

Available online 22 October 2014

Keywords:

Cognitive schemas

Sexual offending

Pedophilia

Rapists

Child molesters

Nonsexual offenders

ABSTRACT

Empirical research has primarily focused on the differences between rapists and child molesters. Nonetheless, a greater understanding of specific needs of specific subtypes of sex offenders is necessary. The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the early maladaptive schemas and different types of sexual offending behavior. Fifty rapists, 59 child molesters (19 pedophilic and 40 nonpedophilic), and 51 nonsexual offenders answered the Young Schema Questionnaire, the Brief Symptom Inventory, and the Socially Desirable Response Set Measure. Data were analyzed using sets of multinomial logistic regression, controlling for sociodemographic variables, psychological distress, and social desirability. Results showed that pedophilic offenders were more likely to hold the defectiveness and subjugation schemas compared to the other three groups. Likewise, nonpedophilic child molesters were more likely to hold the social isolation, enmeshment, and unrelenting standards schemas compared to rapists. Additionally, rapists were more likely to hold the vulnerability to harm, approval-seeking, and punitiveness schemas compared to nonpedophiles and/or nonsex offenders. Overall, our findings suggest that cognitive schemas may play a role in the vulnerability for sexual offending and corroborate the need to distinguish between the two subtypes of child molesters. Despite the need for further investigation, findings may have important implications for the treatment of sex offenders and for the prevention of sexual crimes.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Sexual violence is a widespread problem with high prevalence and significant personal and social repercussions (see [World Health Organization, 2012](#)). Therefore, empirical research on the correlates of this aggressive behavior is of utmost importance. Cognitive distortions are offense-supportive attitudes and/or post-offense rationalizations that have historically been an important component of cognitive behavioral treatment for sex offenders ([Maruna & Mann, 2006](#); [Yates, 2013](#)). Besides, there is a growing consensus that such cognitions arise from underlying cognitive schemas, and these schemas should be the primary target of sex offenders' treatment ([Beech, Bartels, & Dixon, 2013](#); [Maruna & Mann, 2006](#); [Yates, 2013](#)). A schema may be defined as a cognitive structure that includes stable beliefs and assumptions about the self, others and the world, and functions as a broad organizing principle that directs the cognitive processing of one's life events ([Beck, 1995](#);

[☆] This study was part of a larger research project supported by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT) in Portugal (grant: SFRH/BD/73032/2010).

* Corresponding author.

Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Specifically, in order to gain a better understanding of an offender's cognition, we should assess cognitive schemas from both sexual (related to his type of offense) and nonsexual (related to his general-level beliefs) themes (Beech et al., 2013).

Available studies on schemata in sexual offenders have found different key themes in rapists and child molesters. Schemas of suspicious/hostility to women, sexual entitlement, grievance, and a need for control have been found in rapists whereas child molesters presented a greater sense of worthlessness (Mann & Hollin, 2001; Milner & Webster, 2005). Ward (2000) suggested that sex offenders' schemata can better be viewed as implicit theories about the nature of the victim, the offender, and the world. Five core implicit theories were identified, respectively for child molesters (children as sexual objects, entitlement, dangerous world, uncontrollability, and nature of harm; Ward & Keenan, 1999), and for rapists (women are dangerous, women are sex objects, male sex drive is uncontrollable, entitlement, and dangerous world; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004; Polaschek & Ward, 2002).

More recently, some studies have shown a relationship between Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMSs) and sexual aggression using sexually aggressive adolescents (Richardson, 2005), college samples of men reporting sexual aggression against women (Sigre-Leirós, Carvalho, & Nobre, 2013) or convicted sexual offenders (Carvalho & Nobre, 2014; Chakhssi, Ruitter, & Bernstein, 2013). The EMSs consist in broad, dysfunctional themes or patterns regarding oneself and one's relationship with others that develop primarily as a result of adverse early experiences (e.g., neglect, abuse), particularly in the nuclear family (Young et al., 2003). In line with that assumption, early family dysfunction and different types of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional and neglect) have been consistently identified in the developmental history of sex offenders (e.g., Connolly & Woollons, 2008; Lee, Jackson, Pattison, & Ward, 2002; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998). For instance, findings from a meta-analysis conducted by Jespersen, Lalumière, and Seto (2009) showed that a sexual victimization history was significantly more prevalent among adult sex offenders compared to nonsexual offenders. Likewise, child molesters (including pedophilic and nonpedophilic) were more likely to have been sexually abused than sex offenders against adults. Similarly, in a meta-analysis on adolescent sexual offending, Seto and Lalumière (2010) found that a sexual abuse history, exposure to sexual violence, and/or neglect were among the most relevant explanations for this behavior, compared to adolescent nonsexual criminality. Furthermore, Marshall and Barbaree's *Integrated Theory* (1990) proposes that childhood attachment problems, particularly with parents, may create important vulnerabilities that increase the likelihood of an individual to commit sexual offenses. Indeed, EMSs are vulnerability factors for later psychological/personality problems being strongly related to emotional, interpersonal, and behavioral difficulties (Young et al., 2003).

Young proposed 18 EMSs divided into five general domains (cf. Young et al., 2003): (1) disconnection/rejection domain (individuals with schemas in this domain are unable to form secure and satisfying bonds to others); (2) impaired autonomy/performance domain (schemas from this domain characterize individuals with problems related to self-individuation and autonomy); (3) impaired limits domain (individuals with schemas in this domain present difficulties related to interpersonal reciprocity and self-discipline); (4) other directedness domain (schemas from this domain characterize individuals consistently seeking other's approval); (5) over vigilance/inhibition domain (individuals with schemas from this domain suppress feelings and impulses, being consistently alert and vigilant).

Findings from studies conducted with convicted offenders showed that EMSs from the disconnection/rejection domain (i.e., abandonment, social isolation, and defectiveness/shame) and from the other-directedness domain (i.e., subjugation and self-sacrifice) were more prevalent in child molesters compared to nonsexual violent offenders. Compared to rapists, child molesters showed a trend to have higher scores on the social isolation schema (Chakhssi et al., 2013). Compared to a nonoffender control group, child molesters were further found to present overall higher scores in all domains, except in the impaired limits domain, whereas rapists endorsed more schemas from the impaired autonomy domain. Additionally, child molesters showed significant higher levels in the pessimism schema compared to rapists (Carvalho & Nobre, 2014). Overall, these recent empirical studies suggest that EMSs may influence sex offenders' perceptions about themselves, others and the world, likely playing a role in offending behavior, particularly in child molesters.

The present study was based on the claim that while empirical research has primarily focused on the differences between rapists and child molesters, a greater understanding of specific features of particular subtypes of sex offenders (i.e., pedophilic offenders) is necessary. Sexual offending against children and pedophilia (i.e., a paraphilia characterized by persistent sexual interest in prepubescent children) are often conflated, however they are not synonymous. About 40–50% of sex offenders with child victims present pedophilic interests (Seto, 2004, 2009), and empirical research has shown some significant differences between the two child molesters subtypes (e.g., Strassberg, Eastvold, Wilson Kenney, & Suchy, 2012). Pedophilic offenders are more likely to sexually reoffend and require different interventions (Seto, 2009). Taking this evidence into account, investigation on specific correlates of pedophilia compared to other offending types is required.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the EMSs and different types of sexual offending behavior. Specifically, we intended to compare three subtypes of sex offenders (rapists, pedophilic and nonpedophilic child molesters) and a nonsex offender group on the basis of these cognitive schemas. The study is partially exploratory given the lack of research on the cognitive profile of pedophilic child molesters. Besides, in light of prior findings on EMSs in convicted sexual offenders (Carvalho & Nobre, 2014; Chakhssi et al., 2013) we expected that schemas from the disconnection/rejection domain, from the other-directedness domain, and from the overvigilance/inhibition domain would characterize child molesters, whereas schemas from the impaired autonomy/performance domain would characterize rapists.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/344700>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/344700>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)