

POSTER

How Come I Don't Have Anyone?: Attachment Deficits in Juvenile Sex Offenders

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Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a widespread problem that has been associated with a variety of short and long term negative health outcomes (McMahon and Puett, 1999, Finkelhor, 1994; Brown & Finkelhor, 1986; Briere & Elliot, 1994; Boyer & Fine 1992;). Sexual offending continues to emerge as a major social crisis resulting in significant psychological and emotional costs to victims and their families (Johnston and Ward, 1996). Respected researchers have suggested that childhood sexual abuse (CSA) has been associated with adverse impacts ranging from psychiatric disorders or mental health problems (Molnar, Buka & Kessler, 2001; Banyard, Williams & Siegel, 2001), to behavioral problems (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelhor, 2001) and suicide (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1995). Investigators have also posited that the long term effects of CSA may reach far into adulthood (Briere & Elliot, 1994, Finkelhor & Brown, 1985) and extend beyond the primary victim of abuse to society at large (Wang & Holton 2007). Many investigators have adopted an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), recognizing the breadth of negative outcomes to individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. In fact, the Centers for Disease control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Assembly have declared sexual violence a public health priority (McMahon and Puett, 1999).

Epidemiological evidence suggests that juveniles are responsible for a large percentage of sexual offenses. Adolescent sexual offending accounts for up to 40% of reported sexual offenses in North America (Burton, 2000). Prentky, Knight, Sims-Knight, Straus, Rokous and Cerce (1989) identified childhood familial experiences as important in the development of sexual aggression. Recent theories indicate that some adolescents and adults who sexually offend do so as a result of attachment deficits (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Marshal, 1993; Ward, 1995). Despite these suggestions, there are a paucity of studies that have examined the role of attachment in the etiology of adolescent sexual offending.

This study investigates the relationship between attachment and adolescent sexual offending within the context of Bartholomew's four factor model of attachment (i.e.:

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Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied and Dismissing - Bartholomew, 1990, 1991, 1994). Participants were categorized into these four attachment categories based on their responses to select items from a parental supervision questionnaire. The Supervision items used to categorize adolescents included: (1) The amount and type of communication (i.e., about school, adolescent's behavior, relationships) between adolescent and parent; (2) The amount of time and number of activities that adolescents engaged in with their parent(s); (3) The amount of time and number of organized activities that adolescents' were involved in with peers; and (4) Adolescents' history of maltreatment (i.e., neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, combination). These variables represent a small subset of the questions posed in the Supervision Questionnaire administered as part of a national prevention study supported through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This measure generally explored the types of strategies parents utilized for monitoring their sons' behavior.

The study sample for this investigation is composed of three adolescent groups drawn from seven different states (Oregon, Texas, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Florida). These groups included: juvenile sex offenders (N=369), juvenile delinquents (N=402), and juveniles from the community (N=271; i.e., no history of illegal behaviors). Participants from the three adolescent groups will be matched on a number of key demographic variables (i.e., age at last offense, age at time of measure administration, and offender ethnicity) to minimize the potential for confounds.

A logistic regression analysis will be conducted to evaluate the overall research question. For this analysis study variables (i.e., amount and type of communication with parent, involvement in organized activities, and history of maltreatment) will be used to predict group membership (i.e., juvenile sex offender, juvenile delinquent, community adolescent). If history of maltreatment is found to significantly predict group membership, additional post hoc analyses will explore the impact of the individual types of abuse and neglect. A similar post hoc analysis approach will be pursued if the variable reflecting the different types of communication is significantly related to group membership.

Finally, study findings will be discussed in terms of implications for enhancing the effectiveness of juvenile sex offender treatment and fostering the development of prevention and early intervention strategies.