

THE LINK BETWEEN CHILDHOOD SEXUAL VICTIMISATION AND LATER SEXUAL OFFENDING: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF VALIDITY

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive examination critically evaluates the intricate relationship between childhood sexual victimisation and subsequent sexual offending behaviours. This exploration navigates the historical shifts in societal perspectives on sexual abuse, acknowledging the involvement of both genders as both victims and perpetrators. While a widely held belief suggests a causal connection between childhood sexual abuse and later sexual offending, this analysis underscores the need to exercise caution in making sweeping generalisations. Indeed, research findings emphasise that this linkage is neither universal nor unequivocal. The investigation thoroughly dissects prevailing theories, encompassing the victim-to-victimiser cycle, social learning theory, and personality development theory, to illuminate the mechanisms underlying the transition from victim to offender. Supported by empirical evidence, this inquiry substantiates the hypothesis that a history of childhood sexual abuse is more prevalent among individuals who later engage in sexual offending. Nevertheless, it conscientiously acknowledges the limitations and research gaps that exist, particularly in terms of the cycle of violence. Ultimately, this exposition concludes that while childhood sexual abuse is a significant factor in some instances of sexual offending, it neither singly predicts nor dictates such outcomes universally. Consequently, it advocates for the implementation of early intervention programs aimed at aiding abused children and underscores the necessity for comprehensive policies and support systems to deter sexual offending. Moreover, it underscores the paramount importance of understanding the profound impact of trauma on individuals and advocates for empathetic and informed responses to this pressing societal issue.

This comprehensive analysis contributes to the ongoing discourse on this critical topic, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the connection between childhood sexual victimisation and subsequent offending behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

The delineation of sexual abuse has changed by moral and cultural values in each era. In older times, sexual abuse offenders were regarded as males only; however, in contemporary times, the research has highlighted the part of females as sexual offenders as wellⁱ. It is a general belief that those who in childhood were sexually abused, later as adults, repeatedly engage in abusive relationships where they are either victims or victimise adults and childrenⁱⁱ. But in some term, this as a fallacy which is being exploited to defend or justify the conduct of those who sexually abuse childrenⁱⁱⁱ. One of the frequently studied consequences of male childhood sexual abuse is the sexual victimisation of others when they grow up. One of the motives for the interest is the greater frequency of reported childhood sexual abuse cases, which is more significant amongst sexual offenders. Moreover, many adult sexual offenders profess that they were victims of childhood sexual abuse, a circumstance which has been named as abuse excuse^{iv}. Children exploited by childhood abuse are expected to demonstrate a growth in the tendency to develop criminal behaviour and participate in adult criminal acts^v. Adolescent and childhood development might be extensively and detrimentally affected by encounters with sexual abuse, of which a few are linked to sexual offending during pubescence^{vi}. Some research suggests that the early start of sexual behaviour is associated with sexual abuse during childhood^{vii}. In contrast, many studies have focused on pubescent sexual offenders. They suggest that sexual offending set about during adolescence and that sexual abuse of this age group is quite common^{viii}. The social learning theory of aggression describes how aggressive patterns develop and what leads people to act aggressively, along with as to what is the reason for encouragement for such actions after such delinquent actions have commenced^{ix}. The victim-to-victimiser model claims to elucidate the interconnection betwixt being a victim of sexual abuse to turning into a victimiser, ascribing sexually abusive behaviour to an anticipated cycle of cognitive deformation and abusive behaviours^x. Finally, according to the sexually abused-sexual abuser hypothesis, a connection exists between sexual offending and the history

of sexual abuse; therefore, those who face sexual abuse have a higher probability of perpetrating sexual offences^{xi}.

DO VICTIMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE BECOME SEXUAL OFFENDERS?

Former research has reported that the enduring consequences of childhood abuse are connected to sexual offending. However, it is not to say that everyone who has suffered childhood abuse becomes a sexual offender^{xii}. The research corroborates the concept of the victim-to-victimiser cycle in a small percentage of male offenders, but it does not corroborate the same for female victims^{xiii}. It was suggested that the cycle of abuse in males was due to sexual abuse done by a female, hence the general belief amongst researchers that there is an interconnection between boys becoming an adult offender of child sexual abuse and sexual activities with people older to them^{xiv}. Another research has further implied that when a nonbiological parent raises a child who becomes a sexual offender, it is more probable that they will experience higher recidivism and face conviction for violent crimes than those raised by their biological parents, as they have a congruous bond with their parents which helps in the maturing of behavioural and emotional apprehensions needful to suitably function in the society^{xv}. From research, it was observed that 36.6% of sexual offenders of male victims were sexually abused, while the percentage of sexual offenders of female victims was 18.2%^{xvi}. Sexual offenders were found to have a direct connection with their offenders, more violent and prolonged sexual victimisation, the experience of penetration during their sexual abuse, and more chance of being sexually abused by a male offender, in contrast to nonsexual offenders^{xvii}. The paedophilic sexual attraction is regarded as an important causal factor of risk amongst sexual offenders; however, there has been less empirical evidence concerning the treatment^{xviii}. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the most critical factors existing among a few sexual offenders related to paedophilic interest are detached, egomaniacal and predacious patterns of committing a crime and facing childhood sexual abuse when they were young^{xix}.

HOW DOES THE TRANSITION FROM VICTIM TO OFFENDER TAKE PLACE?

Social learning theory proposes that sexual victimisation of males leads to them gaining sexually abusive behaviour and explains the apparatus with which sexual aggression is learnt. A sexually abused child is traumatised, who then becomes attached to the trauma while recreating their own experience and they develop patterns in offending while becoming more detailed, secret, and unchangeable over time^{xx}. The study relied upon General Strain Theory to test and create a model of the childhood abuse-crime connection, where it was found that early childhood sexual abuse is a predictor of offending in pubescent by using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The theory is partly underpinned by the effects of childhood abuse on offending for both males and females liaised by the index of symptoms of depression. The effect of sexual abuse among females is suggested to be liaised by closeness to mothers, whereas for men the effect is more vigorous and is related to irresponsible peers, attachment to school and their closeness to their mother^{xxi}. Personality development theory explains how violence is transferred from one generation to the next generation and describes why some children who are exposed to violence turn into violent offenders whereas others may not. Schema therapy used to understand trauma faced during childhood results in great emotional pain and hinders the healthy and normal emotional development of the child, resulting in the child to develop a perverted view of himself as well as others^{xxii}. The research showcases, that child sexual abuse is linked with sexual offending in adulthood, where medical and criminological explanatory variables were accounted for^{xxiii}. One probability is that chance of abuse becoming normalised in a family might increase when abuse has occurred across various family members and over generations^{xxiv}. The continuation of the cycle of sexual abuse might be affected in two ways by the parenting style in the family. Firstly, abused children will go on to abuse other people because the parenting style might have conveyed that abuse is an acceptable way to solve problems, they face^{xxv}. Secondly, a few styles of parenting might fall short of giving children the support that they need after facing abuse; for instance, in a study of 100 sexually abused children, mothers who were neglected or provoked anxiety in their children were more likely to affect the adverse outcomes in their children including aggressive behaviour being externalised^{xxvi}. It is also proposed that the reverberations of child abuse might

lead to sexually abused boys externalising their trauma and pain and turning into sexual and violent offenders^{xxvii}.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE CYCLE OF VICTIM-TO-OFFENDER

The sexually abused-sexual abuser hypothesis asserts that a particular connection exists between sexual offenders and their history of sexual abuse. Hence people who faced sexual abuse are more likely to sexually offend later. It was observed that historically there is a higher rate of sexual abuse among adult sexual offenders than nonsexual offenders^{xxviii}. In research on the victim-to-victimiser hypothesis, 908 cases were studied using longitudinal research, where sexual victimisation was assessed as a risk for more crimes, and it was found that neglected and abused children have a higher risk of becoming violent criminals and an offender than those who were not abused^{xxix}. Children who are exposed to child sexual abuse, including full sexual penetration or an attempt, were 2.4 times more likely to have disorders than those who had not experienced childhood sexual abuse^{xxx}. It was evaluated that facing childhood sexual abuse accounted for almost 13% of the mental health problems faced by the subjects of research^{xxxi}. Child sexual abuse was noted for 5.8% of the violent delinquents and 13% of the sex offenders, at 18.9% of child molesters showed the highest rate. It was also noted that those who lived at foster homes or had a violent environment in the nuclear family were at higher risk of child sexual abuse^{xxxii}. Furthermore, people such as prostitutes, child molesters, sex offenders and those who committed crime repeatedly, belonged to the group of criminals who were sexually abused when they were children^{xxxiii}. The research proposed that facing child sexual abuse can lead to a higher risk of committing child abuse^{xxxiv}. Studies on sexual violence victims and offenders propose that victims usually face many psychopathological symptoms^{xxxv}. In contrast, offenders showcase externalising behaviour^{xxxvi}.

The research which studied the prevalence of childhood sexual and physical abuse by studying 54 child molesters and 97 incarcerated rapists found four prime findings^{xxxvii}. First, the actual number of sexual assaults faced during the childhood of a child molester was higher than the reported incidences in the literature. Secondly, sexual assault faced by child molesters in their childhood was double than what was faced by rapists in their childhood. Thirdly, rapists were victimised by a family member triple the time that child molesters faced. Finally, when a sexual

assault did happen, it was connected to other many other indicators of family insecurity and instability. In a research, subjects were primarily repeat offenders, males with a previous record of sexual assault or confessing to similar previous crimes, of which 178 were child sex offenders and 170 were adult sexual offenders. Data was obtained through interviews about their medical history, in which it was found that 31% of offenders had faced sexual trauma from ages 1 to 15. The most common kind of trauma for child molesters was violent sexual abuse and for rapists it was coercion into sexual acts. 50 cases were of sexual assault against children, where such offenders were abused in their childhood by their family members. Adult women offenders were found to be higher than numbers reported and in many cases the offenders during sexual assaults tried to copy their victimisation^{xxxviii}. When comparing histories of sexual abuse experienced by the nonsexual offender and sexual offender inmates, 65 male inmates were interviewed and asked about their family background and their history of sexual abuse. 62% of rapists, 20% of nonsexual offenders and 50% of child molesters were sexually abused, with sexual offenders reporting the sexual abuse the most. It was found that history of sexual abuse was related to other features of unstable family background and is likely a key factor for becoming a sexual offender^{xxxix}.

LIMITATIONS

Many psychological theories in research and literature explain the conduct of male sexual offenders, suggesting that child sexual abuse is a factor for the victim to turn into an offender. However, such theories do not explain that as to why most victims of child sexual abuse are female while most of the offenders of child sexual abuse are male^{xl}. The sexually abused-sexual abuser hypothesis postulates that people who are sexually abused during their childhood, especially males, are at a high risk of becoming sexual offenders later in life. This theory was tested by surveying connections between offending and maltreatment in a group of 38,282 men with a history of maltreatment and at least one crime, and no particular connection between sexual offending and sexual abuse was found^{xli}. Conventionally, women have been perceived to have a less recorded rate of crime as compared to males. Women are generally perceived as victims in the research and have no official recognition that they can be sexual offenders of children^{xlii}. Evidence suggests that males are more likely to be child sexual abuse victims, but

most research does not focus on male victims; hence them being under-studied^{xliii}. Childhood sexual abuse is double the rate in child molesters when compared to that of rapists, while rapists face childhood sexual abuse done by a member of the family three times more than child molesters face^{xliiv}. Despite this, how a particular type of abuse faced by a child relates to becoming an offender later on, has not yet been researched adequately^{xliv}. The popular belief that sexually abused children are at a high possibility of becoming sex offenders was not corroborated by research^{xlvi}. Even with enough evidence of the connection between offending and maltreatment during childhood, how the cycle of violence works remains ambiguous^{xlvii}.

CONCLUSION

As noted from the discussion and evidence, it would not be wrong to say that child sexual abuse does form an essential factor for the victims of child sexual abuse to transition into sexual offenders. New research proposes that early interposition programmes should target children who have faced neglect and abuse. It suggest that practices and policies that we have today aimed at future risk for sexual offending for children who are sexually abused must be reassessed^{xlviii}. It is conspicuous that not all sexual offenders have experienced childhood sexual abuse, and not all sexual abuse victims develop into sexual offenders. The occurrence of sexual abuse seems neither adequate nor necessary for sexual offending^{xlix}. Violent sexual conduct is not caused by sexual abuse alone; nevertheless, a pattern of occurrences comprising emotional dismissal, physical abuse and sexual abuse might result in an increase in the risk of sexual abuse victims who are male becoming sexual offenders themselves^l. The governments should fund the development of improved and reinvigorated measures, for example, accountability and support circles other than the ad hoc resources, control offender risk, and safeguard possible victims^{li}. Legal administration and prosecution must be urged to make allowances for the detrimental and inimical effects of child sexual abuse on victims and the policies devised to monitor male sexual offenders to reduce the risk of victimisation^{lii}. The cycle of sexual abuse by sexual offenders must be interrupted by clinicians, as a hostile family environment serves as a basis for sexual offending in the future^{liii}. Research proposes that the role of pernicious effects in female sexual offending is a pertinent target for treatment, where to resolve and understand the effects of past trauma on everyday life is an essential foundation

for a healthier future^{liv}. Tackling the issues includes developing more enterprising responses to risk and risk control in which experiences of victims form the central definition and response for child sexual abuse. This could incorporate a variety of support and help services for affected children and families, the children, and families vulnerable to sexual abuse, as well as a variety of fewer punitive justice^{lv}.

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