Child Sex Abuse Perpetrators among Male University Students

Kathryn Becker-Blease  
Washington State University Vancouver

Daniel Friend and Jennifer J. Freyd  
University of Oregon

ABSTRACT

Previous studies indicate that approximately 21% of undergraduate men report attraction to “little children”, 4 – 9% report having fantasies about sex with a child, and 5 – 6% report masturbating to these fantasies. Between 3 and 7% report some likelihood of having sex with a child if there was no chance they would be caught (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Smiljanich & Briere, 1996). Understanding potential for perpetration among young adult men is important for prevention, but research on perpetration in non-convicted samples is limited. We asked 531 undergraduate men about their experiences with abuse as a child, as well as perpetration of child sexual abuse. Approximately 18% report fantasies about child sexual abuse and 8% have masturbated to these fantasies. Four percent indicate some likelihood that they would have sex with a child, and just over 2.5% report having perpetrated at least one sexually abusive act against a child. More studies in this survey report fantasies about child sex than in past surveys, perhaps because of the increased availability of child pornography, or differences in willingness to admit such fantasies. The results are discussed in terms of the need for prevention programs that target potential and unrecognized perpetrators.

Participants

- 531 male Psychology students
- Age M = 19.8, SD = 2.6
- Race/ethnicity
  - White, non-Hispanic 77%
  - Asian 7%
  - Black, non-Hispanic 2%
  - Hispanic 3%
  - Native American 1%
  - Other 10%

Measures

- Perpetration of physical and sexual abuse against children and intimate partners
- Physical and sexual child victimization
- Questions about attraction to sexual abuse of children and adults
- Perpetration of at least one sexually abusive act against a child
- Sexual attraction to a child
- Likelihood of having sex with a child
- Masturbation to fantasies about sex with a child
- Likelihood of having sex with an unwilling adult
- Questions about attraction to sexual abuse of children and adults

Attraction Questions

Similar to Briere & Runtz (1989) and Smiljanich & Briere (1996)

Comparison with Previous Studies

- Attracted to little children
  - Briere & Runtz (1989) N = 193
  - This study N = 531
- Child sex fantasies
- Masturbated during child sex fantasies
- Any likelihood to have sex with child

Implications

Resources for perpetrators and potential perpetrators lag behind those available to victims and potential victims.

Only perpetrators can prevent violence.

Future Directions

Links between early abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and perpetration.

Prevention and intervention strategies.

Community research with adolescents and older men.

Works Cited


Past Research

- 21% of undergraduate men report attraction to “little children”
- 4 – 9% report having fantasies about sex with a child
- 5 – 6% report masturbating to these fantasies
- Between 3 and 7% report some likelihood of having sex with a child if there was no chance they would be caught (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Smiljanich & Briere, 1996).

Attraction Questions

“Little children sometimes attract me sexually.”

“I am afraid that I need to be institutionalized for protection against my own sexual impulses.”

Contact Information

Kathy Becker-Blease  
kblease@vancouver.wsu.edu

Presentation available:  
http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/becker-b/ and at http://dynamic.uoregon.edu