



## Pedophilic sexual interests and psychopathy in child sexual abusers working with children<sup>☆</sup>



Daniel Turner<sup>a</sup>, Martin Rettenberger<sup>a</sup>, Lena Lohmann<sup>a</sup>, Reinhard Eher<sup>b,c,d</sup>, Peer Briken<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute for Sex Research and Forensic Psychiatry, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Martinistraße 52, 20246 Hamburg, Germany

<sup>b</sup> Federal Evaluation Center for Violent and Sexual Offenders (FECVSO), Austrian Prison System, Vienna, Austria

<sup>c</sup> Department of Forensic Psychotherapy, Ulm University Hospital, Ulm, Germany

<sup>d</sup> Violence Research and Prevention Centre (IGF), Vienna, Austria

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### ABSTRACT

Research has identified stable and dynamic characteristics in child sexual abusers working with children (CSA-W) that may distinguish them from other child sexual abusers (CSA). However, in previous research CSA-W have usually been included in the group of extra-familial CSA (CSA-E). Two hundred and forty-eight forensic-sexological reports about CSA conducted by the Federal Evaluation Centre for Violent and Sexual Offenders in the Austrian Prison System were evaluated retrospectively. One hundred and nineteen intra-familial CSA (CSA-I), 66 CSA-E, and 38 CSA-W were compared with regard to static risk factors, indicators of psychopathy, and pedophilic sexual interests. CSA-E had the highest risk of recidivism as measured by the Static-99 total score, followed by CSA-W. Furthermore, CSA-E had more previous convictions than CSA-W. Both CSA-E and CSA-I had higher total scores on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised than CSA-W. CSA-W had the highest prevalence of pedophilia diagnoses according to DSM-IV-TR criteria, as well as the highest rate of pedophilia with an orientation toward male children, and the highest frequency of male victims. CSA-W also had the highest total scores in the Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests. CSA-W seem to constitute a group with particular risk factors and criminogenic needs, that is, they show more indicators of pedophilic sexual interests but less general antisociality and psychopathy, and would thus seem to be distinguishable from other CSA. Future research should focus in particular on evaluating differences in the grooming strategies used by CSA-W to commit and disclose child sexual abuse, as well as on the resources of this particular offender group.

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Researchers have suggested that most cases of abuse occurring in an institution or organization entrusted with the supervision and care of children remain undetected (Finkelhor, 1979; Firestone, Moulden, & Wexler, 2009). Nevertheless, research about child sexual abuse within an institutional setting seems to be scarce and current research attempts have focused primarily on case reports (Colton, Roberts, & Vanstone, 2010; Moulden, Firestone, & Wexler, 2007; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). It has been suggested that child sexual abusers (CSA) constitute a heterogeneous group with regard to various

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\* Corresponding author address: Institute for Sex Research and Forensic Psychiatry, Center for Psychosocial Medicine, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Martinistraße 52, D-20246 Hamburg, Germany.

psychological and criminological characteristics (Bogaerts, Declercq, Vanheulen, & Palmans, 2005; Fisher & Mair, 1998; Levin & Stava, 1987; Magalhaes et al., 2009). However, in most previous studies child sexual abusers working with children (CSA-W) have usually been included in the group of extra-familial child sexual abusers (CSA-E) and have not been studied separately. Nevertheless, a variety of stable and dynamic characteristics have been identified that differentiate CSA-W from CSA-E and intra-familial CSA (CSA-I). It is above all the hierarchical relationship between a CSA-W and his victim(s), which is established and secured by the institution in which the offender and the victim are engaged, that distinguishes CSA-W from other CSA (Margolin & Craft, 1989; Moulden, Firestone, Kingston, & Wexler, 2010; Nhunda & Shumba, 2001; Sullivan & Beech, 2004).

In this context, Sullivan and Beech (2004) compared demographic, psychiatric, and offense-specific characteristics of 41 CSA-W with those of 142 CSA-E and 78 CSA-I. Similar to previous research findings (cf. Haywood, Kravitz, Grossman, Wasyliw, & Hardy, 1996; Langevin, Curnoe, & Bain, 2000; Plante, Manuel, & Bryant, 1996), they reported that CSA-W had a significantly higher IQ, were more highly educated, and significantly older than CSA-E and CSA-I. CSA-W had also abused more children throughout their lifespan, their victims were more often male, and the victims were older at the time the abuse started (Sullivan & Beech, 2004; Sullivan, Beech, Craig, & Gannon, 2011). In this context, previous research indicated that having a large number of child victims as well as primarily male victims is highly correlated with pedophilic sexual interests (Freund & Blanchard, 1989; Seto & Lalumière, 2001; Seto, Lalumière, & Kuban, 1999). Moreover, it was found that CSA-W show a higher level of emotional over-identification with children and were more likely to have victim-blaming attitudes compared to CSA-I and CSA-E (Sullivan et al., 2011). However, it remains unclear whether the decision to take on a job or to participate in a spare time activity that includes direct contact to children is motivated by a higher emotional congruency with children or by the wish to facilitate access to children (Colton & Vanstone, 1996; Mack & Yundina, 2012; Moulden et al., 2007). Several researchers have described a high emotional congruency with children and the children's world as an important etiological factor in explaining the emergence of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1984; Ward & Beech, 2006) and postulated a relationship with high levels of pedophilic sexual interests (Fisher, Beech, & Browne, 1999).

On the other hand, CSA-W were found to have fewer previous convictions for a sexual or violent offense compared to CSA-I and CSA-E (Haywood et al., 1996; Loftus & Camargo, 1993; Sullivan & Beech, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2011). Previous research has linked criminal history and in particular a high number as well as a high diversity of previous offenses to a strong antisocial orientation and a high level of psychopathy in sexual offenders (Caspi et al., 1994; Goffredson & Hirschi, 1990; Rettenberger, Boer, & Eher, 2011). This finding would indicate that CSA-W may show less antisocial tendencies or fewer indicators for psychopathic traits when compared to CSA-I and CSA-E. In support of this suggestion, one previous study found a lower prevalence of antisocial personality disorder in clergy CSA compared to other CSA. However, no differences were found between the groups with regard to alcohol or drug abuse problems (Langevin et al., 2000).

Despite these important differences between CSA-W and other CSA subgroups, they also seem to share some characteristics. Within this context, CSA-W have exhibited similar grooming strategies to CSA-I; for example, they have used less violence, threats, and coercive strategies during the offense and have more often used emotional manipulation or their authority to keep their victims from disclosing the abuse (Leclerc, Proulx, & McKibben, 2005; Moulden et al., 2007; Nhunda & Shumba, 2001). On the other hand, it was shown that CSA-W and CSA-E demonstrated a comparable level of deviant sexual interests and sexual preoccupation (Sullivan et al., 2011).

Because deviant sexual interests and an antisocial orientation or a high level of psychopathy have been identified as the most important predictors for sexual recidivism in sexual offenders (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Quinsey, Lalumière, Rice, & Harris, 1995), it can be hypothesized that the existence of high levels of pedophilic sexual interests on the one hand and the absence of antisocial personality traits on the other might predispose CSA-W to be a special group within the CSA population. In light of these considerations, a precise characterization of CSA-W would appear important in order to identify as early as possible those individuals at risk of offending and thereby provide help as well as possibly prevent cases of abuse (Sullivan & Beech, 2002, 2004). Furthermore, a better understanding of CSA-W and their strategies would also help to provide effective treatment methods by focusing treatment more accurately on the specific needs and strengths of this particular CSA subgroup (Kaufman, Hilliker, Lathrop, Daleiden, & Rudy, 1996). The present study aims to evaluate to what extent CSA-W differ from CSA-I and CSA-E with respect to static risk factors, indicators of pedophilic sexual interests, and indicators of psychopathy.

## Method

### Data collection

In Austria, convicted sex offenders are evaluated by the Federal Evaluation Centre for Violent and Sexual Offenders (FECVSO; Eher, Matthes, Schilling, Haubner-Maclean, & Rettenberger, 2012) for planning purposes relating to the correctional scheme (Rettenberger, Matthes, Boer, & Eher, 2010). All the information gained in the initial diagnostic process at the FECVSO is subsequently summarized in forensic-sexological reports. The reports, therefore, include information about previous employment and the social environment of the offenders. They also contain information about previous offenses and the index offense, personality factors, biographical and sexual development, risk assessment, and psychiatric and sexual disorders. Finally, the reports include information about the most effective psychotherapeutic or pharmacological approaches toward reducing the risk level of the individual evaluated. For the purposes of the present study, information about the study

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