



PII S0145-2134(97)00045-8

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: EFFECTS OF AGE, SEX, AND GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES

CARRI MAYNARD AND MICHAEL WIEDERMAN

Department of Psychological Sciences, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, USA

ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study examined how sex of the child and the adult and age of the child influence perceptions regarding the abusiveness of adult-child sexual interactions and attributions of blame and responsibility to the adult in such incidents. The relationship of gender-role attitudes to perceptions of child sexual abuse was also investigated.

Method: Undergraduate students ($N = 404$) read one of eight vignettes depicting a sexual interaction between a child and an adult in which sex of the child, age of the child, and sex of the adult were manipulated. Respondents then answered questions regarding their perceptions of the abusiveness of the incident and attributions of responsibility and blame to the adult.

Results: Scenarios depicting a 15-year-old were rated as less abusive, and less responsibility was attributed to the adult, relative to vignettes involving a 7-year-old. Respondents also rated scenarios depicting opposite-sex interactions as less abusive relative to scenarios describing same-sex interactions. When vignettes depicted a 15-year-old, less blame was attributed to the adult relative to when vignettes depicted a 7-year-old with an adult of either sex, with the least amount of blame being attributed to the adult involved with an adolescent of the opposite-sex. Gender-role attitudes were not significantly related to ratings of abusiveness or attributions of responsibility and blame.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that age of the child may influence ratings of abusiveness and attributions of responsibility and blame. Ratings of abusiveness and attributions of blame also appear to be influenced by the sex pairing in the interaction. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

Key Words—Sexual abuse, Perceptions, Gender-roles.

INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC ATTITUDES CONCERNING child sexual abuse are important because they can affect the reporting of sexual abuse, the prosecution of perpetrators, and the provision of clinical services. Research has demonstrated that individuals with stereotypic beliefs will remember and interpret events about a target person in a way that will bolster and support the current stereotyped beliefs (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991; Dawes, 1988). Williams and Farrell (1990) examined this phenomenon with regard to how allegations of sexual abuse were handled in the legal system. Examining 43 cases of child sexual abuse in day care settings, they found support for the hypothesis that cases fitting the stereotype of adult males fondling prepubescent females were likely to elicit

The current article is based on a thesis project completed by the first author in partial completion of the requirements for a Master's degree from Ball State University.

Received for publication August 12, 1996; final revision received February 5, 1997; accepted February 10, 1997.

Reprint requests should be addressed to Carri Maynard, Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43402.

©1997 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

a formal response whereas those at variance with this scenario required that additional aggravating conditions be present before formal actions were taken. These findings suggest that allegations of sexual abuse coming from a male child, or allegations involving a female adult, are less likely to receive legal action.

To better understand the factors which affect actions taken in allegations of child sexual abuse, previous research has examined the variables which affect people's perceptions of child sexual abuse and attributions of blame and responsibility for such incidents. Finkelhor and Redfield (1984) and Waterman and Foss-Goodman (1984) examined the effects of the age and sex of the child on attributions of blame in hypothetical child sexual abuse scenarios. They found a main effect for the child's age in attributions of blame, such that when an adolescent was depicted, the interaction was rated as less abusive and adolescents were blamed more relative to younger children. Broussard and Wagner (1988) found that, although there was no main effect for the child's sex, the sex of the child interacted with respondent sex. Male respondents attributed significantly less responsibility to the adult when the child was male than when the child was female, whereas female respondents saw adults as similarly responsible regardless of the sex of the child.

Finkelhor and Redfield (1984) suggested that the sex of the adult was an important variable in decisions and attributions about sexual abuse. Unfortunately, there has not been an adequate examination of the sex of the adult in relation to perceptions of child sexual abuse. It is highly possible that the sex of the adult may be related to attributions regarding the abusiveness of adult-child sexual interactions. Understanding the influence of the adult's sex as well as the child's sex may help explain varying reactions to child sexual abuse.

Although Waterman and Foss-Goodman (1984) did vary the sex of the adult, they used only opposite-sex interactions and they did not directly consider what effect varying the sex of the adult might have had on attributions of blame. Sex of the adult was not a factor in the analyses these authors performed; rather, effects of the adult's sex were interpreted based on the effect of the child's sex. By not directly examining the effects for sex of the adult, these authors introduced a potential confound into their study. Broussard and Wagner (1988) did vary adult sex as well as child sex. Although they reported no significant main effects for the sex of the adult on attributions of responsibility to the child or the adult, these authors did not report whether the adult's sex interacted significantly with the child's sex or respondents' sex on attributions of blame.

Researchers who have examined sex of the adult more directly have reported mixed results concerning the impact of this variable on people's perceptions of sexual abuse. For example, Broussard and Wagner (1988) found that the amount of responsibility attributed to the child or to the adult was not significantly affected by the sex of the adult.

Other researchers have found that the adult's sex influences people's perceptions of child sexual abuse, typically through an interaction with the child's sex. Overall, results of these studies tend to correspond to cultural stereotypes. Broussard, Wagner, and Kazelskis (1991) found that college students tended to view an interaction of a male child with a female adult as less representative of child sexual abuse. Furthermore, respondents generally believed that male survivors of female perpetration were relatively unharmed by the experience.

Sex of the respondent has also been examined in relation to judgments concerning child sexual abuse. In general, female respondents are more likely to view adult-child interactions as representative of child sexual abuse and blame the child less, whereas men tend to rate adult-child sexual interactions as less abusive and attribute more blame to the child (Broussard & Wagner, 1988; Finkelhor & Redfield, 1984; Jackson & Ferguson, 1983; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984).

Although these apparent sex differences are important, Deaux (1984) noted that across research topics, effects due to sex of the respondent have been rather small in most cases. An alternative to using biological sex as a subject variable is to consider gender-role attitudes. Only one study of perceptions of child sexual abuse included potential relationships between gender-role attitudes and perceptions of child sexual abuse, finding that gender-role ideology correlated with survivor

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات