

POSTER

Self-Reported Sexual Interest in Children among the General Population

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Very few studies have examined the extent to which men and women in the general population exhibit a sexual interest in children. Most empirical research has been conducted with men (primarily) and women who have acted on their interests, have been caught, convicted, and incarcerated for committing sexual offenses against minors. As few sexual offenders are caught and convicted, a forensic sample is probably not representative of the population of adults who have sexual interests in children (Neutze et al., 2011). With respect to studies utilizing non-incarcerated, non-clinical samples, researchers have asked adults (mostly male college students) to self-report their sexual attraction to, or sexual interest in children, but few women have been queried about their pedophilic interests.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the prevalence of sexual interest in children and child pornography use among the general population (i.e., men and women) and to examine the distinct developmental experiences associated with self-reported sexual interest. Participants (262 females and 173 males) were recruited online from an Internet marketplace, completed questionnaires assessing sexual interest and adverse childhood experiences. Among men, 6% indicated some likelihood of having sex with a child if they were guaranteed they would not be caught or punished; 2% of women endorsed this item. Nine percent of males and 3% of females indicated some likelihood of viewing child pornography on the Internet. Overall, nearly 10% of males and 4% of females endorsed at least one item associated with sexual interest in children. In comparison to those who did not report a sexual interest in children, males and females with sexual interest in children reported higher likelihoods of engaging in other antisocial or criminal behaviors and also reported more dysfunctional childhoods (i.e., histories of sexual abuse, early sexual experiences, animal abuse, and insecure parent-child attachments). This presentation concludes with a discussion of theoretical implications of the findings (e.g., generalist vs. specialist) and suggestions for preventing the sexual victimization of children.