

POSTER

The Effects of Offender Age and Offender-Victim Relationship on Modus Operandi Strategies to Lure Child Sex Abuse Victims

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Effective child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention and intervention programs are predicated on our ability to identify and address visible risk factors that suggest an individual is "setting up" or grooming a child or teenager for sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse offenders hold a wealth of insight into how these crimes are committed. In fact, offenders have access to aspects of the CSA modus operandi (MO) process that is otherwise unavailable. Prevention programs can benefit greatly from incorporating MO information into their design and one of the most promising areas along the MO continuum is how offenders lure their victim(s) for the purpose of committing CSA (Kaufman & Patterson, 2010). This study investigates luring strategies in terms of two potentially important offender variables (i.e. offender age and offender-victim relationship).

Despite the fact that the existing literature points to significant differences between adolescent and adult CSA offenders, this distinction is often not attended to in research on CSA. In fact, previous research on MO has identified significant differences in adolescents' and adults' use of MO strategies intended to gain victim compliance in abusive acts, and to maintain victim silence (Kaufman et al., 1998). It has been suggested that differential access to resources and varying perceptions of authority may be at the root of these findings (Kaufman et al, 1998). For example, adolescent perpetrators have been found to employ a broader range of grooming strategies (e.g., bribes and enticements, threats and coercion) and tend to use them more often as part of their offending (Kaufman et al, 1998). As with offender age, differences in offender-victim relationships have also been neglected in the literature (Trickett, Noll, Reifmann, & Putnam, 2001). At the same time, significant differences between intra- and extra-familial offenders have been found with regard to how perpetrators gain victim trust, gain victim compliance in the abusive acts, and maintain victim silence (Kaufman et al., 1996; Kaufman et al., 1998). At present, findings in this literature are mixed and only one study (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000) has explored luring strategies as part of the MO process (and only in descriptive terms).

This study examined the effects of offender age and offender-victim relationship on the use of strategies to lure victims for the purpose of committing CSA. Data was taken from a larger investigation which included 414 adult and 370 adolescent CSA offenders from eight different states and examined a number of broader research questions.

While the literature on offenders' modus operandi is quite limited, a number of hypothesized relationships are proposed. It is anticipated that adolescent CSA offenders will be found to use bribes and enticements and threats and coercion with greater frequency than adult CSA offenders. In

addition, it is predicted that intra-familial CSA offenders will use threats and coercion with greater frequency than extra-familial CSA offenders. In contrast, it is also hypothesized that extra-familial CSA offenders will use bribes and enticements and drugs and alcohol with greater frequency than intra-familial CSA offenders. Finally, this study was designed to explore two potential moderating relationships. First, we investigate the potential moderating impact of offender age on the association between the victim-offender relationship and the use of drugs and alcohol as a luring strategy. Second, the study examines the potential moderating impact of victim-offender relationship on the association between offender age and the use of drugs and alcohol as a luring strategy. The implications of study findings will be discussed with regard to treatment and prevention efforts in this area, as well as for its possible impact on related policy decisions.