

ABUSIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS WITH MINORS: Implications of Intervention

Óscar Herrero Mejías
Meritxell Pérez Ramírez
Laura Negredo López



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DEL INTERIOR

SECRETARÍA GENERAL
DE INSTITUCIONES
PENITENCIARIAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community measures are sanctions that the judicial authorities can impose in response to criminal action that do not imply deprivation of liberty. On the contrary, the person stays in their community environment but has the obligation to carry out a series of tasks or activities that seek reparation for the crime committed and, at the same time, aims to prevent recidivism.

In Spain, these measures were introduced into our legal system in 1995 and currently the most relevant measures are suspended sentences, working for the benefit of the community, and post-prison probation. These three measures can include treatment obligations for convicted persons and in the case of working for the benefit of the community, the imposed days can be fulfilled by attending educational workshops or specific treatment programs, at the request of the prison administration. In the case of sexual delinquency, the Program for the Control of Sexual Assault (PCAS) is applied for the most common categories of sexual offenders (both for sexual assault of adults and child sexual abuse).

Given the evidence that child pornography consumers have specific needs that cannot be covered with the PCAS program, the prison administration decided to develop the program "Outside the Network: intervention program against sexual delinquency with minors in the network" that was published in 2015. This program is aimed exclusively at persons convicted of the crime of possession or dissemination of sexually explicit materials of minors sentenced to an alternative measure including a treatment program.

Those who were subjected to sexual abuse or suffered other traumatic experiences in their child-

hood are more likely to commit sexual offenses towards minors as adults. These are also risk factors for recidivism as well as because of their correlation with other factors.

In this work we have studied the psychological characteristics of men who have suffered different types of AEC (sexual, physical, and/or emotional abusive experiences in childhood), and who have been convicted of sexual crimes with underage victims. For this purpose, sexual offenders with a history of AEC and those without these experiences have been compared.

When grouping these abusive experiences together, the group of men who have suffered these experiences show the following characteristics:

- They tend to show a deficit profile in social aspects. They show greater social avoidance and social anxiety, feelings of loneliness and lower self-esteem.
- When comparing the different types of AEC, quite similar results emerge regardless of the type of abuse analyzed. Only the following few differences could be found.

Regarding sexual abuse:

- Significant differences in social avoidance and social anxiety.
- A significant difference in the ICMS (interest in child molestation scale), which suggests that sex offenders with a history of childhood sexual abuse have a more intense sexual interest towards minors.

Regarding emotional abuse:

- They were more avoidant and anxious in their social relationships, and with greater feelings of loneliness.

Regarding physical abuse:

- The same differences are reproduced as when considering the AECs as a whole.

Correlational analyses were also carried out to explore the relationship between the different variables evaluated:

- Socio-emotional variables are strongly related. Social avoidance and social anxiety, and feelings of loneliness.
- The sexual interest in minors (assessed using ICMS) was positively related to personality traits of externalizing sensation seeking, impulsivity and lack of fear) and with thoughts that justify sex with minors (assessed using the Sex with Children Scale SWCS).
- These favorable attitudes of engaging in sex with minors were negatively and intensely related to cognitive, emotional, and general empathy towards children. These attitudes were also negatively associated with general intellectual ability as measured by the Matrices test.

Taken together, the correlational analysis of the variables considered in the study suggests the portrait of a sex offender with AEC with:

- difficulties in their social relationships and low self-esteem
- more antisocial and uninhibited personality traits that are associated with sexual interest in minors
- attitudes that legitimize sex with minors (which are associated with lower intellectual performance)
- low empathy towards minors.

In summary, the data indicates that, in terms of the pathways model, the main ethological pathway that explains the link between experience of abuse and sexual delinquency in adulthood is that of deficits in intimacy.

When specific forms of abuse are studied separately,

the results are similar in the case of physical and emotional abuse. On the contrary, regarding sexual abuse, significant differences emerge in the ICMS scale, indicating a greater sexual interest towards minors in those participants who had experienced sexual abuse in their childhood.

They also presented differences in scales belonging to the path of intimacy deficits such as loneliness, social avoidance and social anxiety and low self-esteem. While all these offenders (regardless of the type of childhood abuse suffered) share several adverse effects, the child sexual abuse seems to have a specific effect on sexual development.



FIADYS

secretaria@fiadys.org
fiadys.org