ScholarOne - VICTIM THEN, PEDOPHILE NOW: AN ANALYSIS

Nihaya Fathima\textsuperscript{1} and Amrita Muraleedharan\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Stella Maris College
\textsuperscript{2}Affiliation not available

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Abstract

Pedophilia is defined as recurrent and intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children—generally age 13 years or younger—over a period of at least six months. It must be noted, however, that not all individuals with said feelings act on them. So pedophiles can be distinguished using three categories: abstinent pedophiles (who vow never to have sexual relationships with children), passive pedophiles (who choose not to act on their desires out of fear of the repercussions—not out of their own choice) and active pedophiles (who actively seek to indulge in their fantasies). We have limited ourselves to active pedophiles however the other two categories, especially abstinent pedophiles, have not been completely disregarded. This paper is a consolidation of prior research findings on the commonalities between pedophiles placing an importance on victims-turned-perpetrators and the factors that abet this transition.
Abstract

Pedophilia is defined as recurrent and intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children—generally age 13 years or younger—over a period of at least six months. It must be noted, however, that not all individuals with said feelings act on them. So pedophiles can be distinguished using three categories: abstinent pedophiles (who vow never to have sexual relationships with children), passive pedophiles (who choose not to act on their desires out of fear of the repercussions — not out of their own choice) and active pedophiles (who actively seek to indulge in their fantasies). We have limited ourselves to active pedophiles however the other two categories, especially abstinent pedophiles, have not been completely disregarded. This paper is a consolidation of prior research findings on the commonalities between pedophiles placing an importance on victims-turned-perpetrators and the factors that abet this transition.

Keywords: Pedophilia, Victim-victimizer cycle, Crime perpetration, Child sexual abuse.
Introduction

The term *pedophile* comes from the Greek word “pedoiktos” which means erotic love of children. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition) defines pedophilia as recurrent, intense sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child (age 13 years or younger) for a period of at least 6 months. For a person to be diagnosed as a pedophilic individual, he/she must be at least 16 years old, and he/she must be at least 5 years older than the victim. However, this does not include individuals in their late adolescence who are in sexual relationships with a 13-year-old (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is important to note that pedophiles need not always act on their attraction towards prepubescent children (passive and abstinent pedophiles). Individuals who are plagued by distress or experience disruptions in their daily functioning as a result of their sexual leaning are also categorised as pedophiles.

In the legal sense of the word, pedophilia includes pedophilic attraction as well as pedophilic behaviour. Pedophilic attraction is a sexual preference which is not illegal despite its immoral connotations. On the other hand, pedophilic behaviour stems from pedophilic attraction (just as sexual infidelity stems from dissatisfaction).

Studies conducted over time and space were able to point out some characteristics of pedophiles. A lot of these studies try to answer the question regarding a child sexual abuser's feelings of guilt or lack thereof. Strassberg et al. found that a lot of these pedophilic individuals felt ashamed and guilt-ridden because of their socially unacceptable sexual preference. Some other studies state that pedophilic individuals have difficulty interacting with people and that they isolate themselves from the social environment (Glasser, 1988). Victimization in the childhoods of child sexual abusers was also seen to be quite common. This finding, however, has garnered a lot of
counterarguments just as it has support and therefore will be discussed in further detail in this paper.

There are two major categories of pedophiles namely exclusive or true pedophiles (sexuality is only directed towards prepubescent children) and non-exclusive pedophiles (can be directed towards both adults and prepubescent children) (Singh, 2017). However, most of the papers that we’ve chosen as reference material do not distinguish the two and so the results of said research should not be taken at face value. Instead, they distinguish adult sex offenders (commonly termed rapists) from child sex offenders and pedophiles who act on their urges from those who don’t.

Studies show that only about 50% of child sex offenders are actually pedophilic (attracted to children) (Blanchard et al., 2001; Schaefer et al., 2010) whereas the others are merely considered opportunists who may, due to their inability to develop and maintain emotional and sexual relationships with appropriately aged peers, look to satisfy their sex drives with weaker targets (children) as a sort of “surrogate” or “replacement partner” (Beier, 1998; Seto, 2008; Mokros et al., 2012b). Approximately 5% of men in the general population are found to be pedophilic with barely any conclusive evidence of the percentage of women suffering from pedophilia (as reviewed by Seto, 2009).

Although research has mentioned certain possible causal factors, there is not enough evidence to establish a strict cause-and-effect relationship of pedophilia. Some of these possible causal factors are family environment (abusive parent(s): lack of emotional, physical and financial support from parents), low level of qualification, fixation in their psychosexual stages (especially in their phallic stage), etc. Among these possible contributing factors, the most researched factor is that of sexual victimization in the childhood of adult pedophiles. It has been reported that a lot of child sex offenders have been victims of child sexual abuse themselves, however, not all victims of
child sexual abuse end up becoming abusers. The focus of our paper is on this correlation, i.e., the victim-victimizer cycle.

Research questions that this paper seeks to answer:

1. What are the odds of a pedophile having been sexually victimized as a child?
2. What factors influence whether or not a victim ends up becoming a perpetrator?
3. What are the possible reasons for the differences in the findings of various research papers (differences in control and experimental groups)?
4. How effective is therapy as a rehabilitative measure and in controlling pedophilia?

We will also be looking at the various treatment options in order to control the number of cases of child sexual abuse, be it in terms of reducing the likelihood of first-time offenders, re-victimization, breaking the victim-victimizer cycle or stopping the intergenerational transmission of incest.

For the purpose of this paper, we have referred to multiple studies on the relevant topics that have been published over a period of around 40 years (1982-2019). These papers were collected via sources such as Google Scholar, Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ), Academia, PubMed (NCBI), ResearchGate, etc.

It is important to note that...

- Most of the chosen reference papers do not distinguish pedophiles from child sexual offenders (who may or may not be pedophilic in nature).
- Due to the stigma attached to “pedophilia”, most of the numbers are not true indicators of the number of individuals suffering from pedophilic disorder but rather are indicative of the number of incarcerated offenders (pedophiles need not have acted on their urges so not all of
them get in trouble with the law).

- There is an underestimation of the number of female pedophiles reported because of societal views of women as incapable of being sexually abusive.

**Pedophiles: A Profile And Contributing Factors**

There is no “one-size-fits-all” profile for a child molester (Stevens, 2002). However, there are some common factors, or “reasons” for their conduct, that have been found to be present in a large proportion of these individuals. When considering child molesters and pedophiles, it is important to remember that not all child molesters are pedophilic in nature and neither are all pedophiles child molesters.

Non-pedophilic child molesters may engage in immoral, sexual activities with prepubescent children as a result of their inability to socialise and maintain emotional and sexual relationships with appropriately aged individuals (Tenbergen et al., 2015). Other contributing factors include agents of disinhibition like alcohol and drugs or various impulse-control disorders and supposedly men’s tendency to adjust their mating behaviour according to the availability of partners (Seto, 1999). So it’s not that certain males foster sexual feelings towards children, but rather, the very presence of the children (especially when outnumbering the number of appropriate partners) that can send the individual into a sexual frenzy, undermine morals, silence their inhibitions and cause them to act in a manner as to satisfy their sexual needs. Then, of course, there are the child molesters who foster a pedophilic sexual preference. Various research have pointed at a number of possible causal factors, but the explanations for their conduct given by pedophilic molesters are fairly consistent. These explanations, based on studies conducted on pedophilic behaviour, stem primarily from the perpetrator’s cognitive distortions and/or lack of sexual and emotional gratification. Simply put, cognitive distortions are self-serving assumptions, beliefs and attitudes. It is a type of defence mechanism in the sense that it protects one’s self-concept by rationalising their
behaviour even if it’s clearly immoral (“The child also enjoyed it so it was not rape.”, “I was just loving the child. There’s nothing wrong with that.”, “I see myself in that child. Just like me, even he is neglected by his family and craves love and appreciation. I just gave that to him.” etc.). Sometimes, it just so happens, be it due to their lack of social skills or the fear or being judged negatively over their pedophilic leaning, some pedophiles feel emotionally starved and/or sexually deprived. This inability to satisfy their affiliation and sex needs may encourage them to turn their attention to the weaker target or a surrogate partner in children though they may be aversive to the very idea. Their unsatisfied drive disinhibits them, at least temporarily while the guilt plagues them post-coitus.

Studies by Tenbergen, et al., (2015) assessed the possible neuropsychological factors that could influence the onset of pedophilia as a sexual preference. There were four such theories. The first was the frontal lobe theory. This theory recognised the differences in the orbitofrontal cortex (responsible for behaviour control especially the inhibition of behaviour (Bechara et al., 2000; O’Doherty et al., 2003)) and the left and right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex in pedophilic men as opposed to the control subjects. It was seen that volume differences or dysfunction in the area could be responsible for the sexual behaviour disorder in pedophilia though it couldn’t explain the pedophilic sexual preference (Graber et al., 1982; FlorHenry et al., 1991; Burns and Swerdlow, 2003; Schiffer et al., 2007, 2008a, b). The temporal lobe theory claimed that disturbances in the temporal lobe (like lesions, hippocampal sclerosis, etc.) could be the cause of hyper sexuality in pedophiles – increase in pedophilic behaviour or the extent of deviant sexual interests (Hucker et al., 1986; Langevin et al., 1988). Ponseti’s studies further supported the role of the temporal lobe in the expression of hyper sexuality (Schiltz et al., 2007; Ponseti et al., 2012). However, this theory also cannot fully explain the etiology of the preference. The other two theories speak of the effects of the sex dimorphic brain structures (as a result of testosterone exposure) on pedophilia development and the combined effects of the frontal and temporal lobes on pedophilic sexual
preference expression (and its associated behaviours).

Although there hasn’t been enough research done on the neuropsychological aspects to state a cause and effect relationship of the disorder, pedophilia is currently viewed as the result of the interaction between neurodevelopmental and environmental factors.

This paper primarily focuses on the highly researched contributive factor of pedophilia: the correlation between victims of child sexual abuse and their subsequent identification as pedophiles.

Victim-Victimizer Cycle

Current research has recognised that there is a correlation between being a victim of child sexual abuse and becoming a perpetrator in adult life. In a study conducted on 280 juvenile sexual offenders by the national forensic CAMH service, it was found that among these sexual perpetrators, 71% of the subjects had been sexually abused as a child, 66% physically abused, 74% neglected, 49% had been victims of domestic violence and 25% had been through all five forms of abuse (Vizard, Hickey, French, & McCrory, 2007). However, these factors were not common to all pedophiles and studies have hypothesised other possible causal factors as well (as discussed above).

Research has shown that incest, which is one of the most common forms of child sexual abuse, can have effects that can last over three generations. Studies have assessed its role on the victim-victimizer cycle and have found that sensitivity to incestual, pedophilic behaviour decreased with the individual’s prior exposure to the same. Studies show that an individual who was sexually abused by a family member as a child (or who had witnessed it happen to some other child in the family) may take up the role of the abuser in the cycle by becoming a parent.
participant or by fostering incestuous behaviour in other family members (Cooper and Cormier, 1982). Summit and Kyro (1978) stated that, "Just as abused children are at risk of becoming abusive parents, sexually abused girls are at risk of selecting an abusive partner and failing to protect their children from intrusion." In that case, the mother is termed an *incest carrier* (Berry, 1975). The other method by which the mother can transmit incest from one generation to the next is comparatively less common. This involves the mother herself initiating sexual contact with her own kids. Incest transmitted through the father is a more active process. The father who, as a child, either witnessed or was the victim of incest, was found to initiate sex with his own kids. Raphling et al. (1967) provided a detailed case describing the transmission of incest through three generations. The patient, aged 39, had witnessed his father engage in incest with his three sisters. Once he got married and had kids of his own, it had become clear that he had identified with his father as he initiated sex-plays with his daughters and encouraged his son to do the same. In another case, the mother who had been abused by her father as a child failed to protect her daughter from the same fate. The mother’s husband, Mr. B, to some extent, saw this as an opportunity. Curious about the whole ordeal, he “...did it to see how far you could go. I got caught, he (Mrs. B’s father) didn’t.” He had a certain fascination with the heredity process and spoke of said fascination, thereby allowing for the illustration of one aspect of inter-generational transmission of incest namely the longing for immortality and the desire to project oneself into the future by directly spreading his gene pool. This longing for immortality and youth is often expressed by incest fathers, be it symbolically or consciously (Cooper and Cormier, 1982).

The victim-victimizer hypothesis has been and continues to be tested over the years in order to prove the correlation. The need for such studies arises out of the suggestion that victims of child sexual abuse, especially victims who were very young, may have been confused about the situation thereby causing them to perceive and internalize an image of the abuser. By doing so, the
self, emotion, thoughts and behaviour of the victim becomes similar to the thoughts and feelings of the abuser which could result in the victim turning into an abuser in their later life (Frankel, 2002). However, the findings regarding the effect of childhood abuse on pedophilia must be looked at with caution since the methods used for data collection is not too reliable (self-reports by incarcerated child sex offenders). Researchers might have to come up with better means to test the reliability of the collected data.

Another causal factor of the victim-victimizer cycle deals with the family environment in which a child sexual abuse victim has been brought up. A study conducted by Lambie et al. (2002) proves the influences of the familial environment by interviewing two groups of male child sexual abuse survivors, one group consisted of 41 victims who later became a child sexual abuser. The other group consisted of 47 male child sexual abuse survivors who went in a resilient mode. Incarcerated pedophiles reported fantasizing and masturbating more after their victimization and they also reported that their familial environment acted as a barrier to receive sufficient emotional support. While comparing the offender group with the resilient group, the resilient group received more emotional support from their family and friends. This group also had a higher level of education, more peer friendships and more emotional support from family and friends. It is important to provide sufficient emotional and physical support to children who were sexually abused and also to give them essential therapy to prevent them from internalizing their abuser and turning into one themselves.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy which focuses on helping an individual overcome their cognitive distortions by making them aware of their negative thoughts and helping them respond to said thoughts in a more appropriate manner. CBT is found to be effective in treating sexually victimized children (Vizard, 2013) by preventing them from
internalizing their abuser. It was also found effective in curbing juvenile child sexual abusers from re-offending. A 10-year follow-up RCT of 135 children (aged 5-12 years) with sexual behavioural problems categorized the subjects into three groups: a group who was given 12 sessions of group CBT, one that was given group play therapy and a control group of non-sexual behavior children. It was found that the group given CBT, like the control group, did not have any sexual contact with children as opposed to the play therapy group (only 2% in the CBT group and 3% in the control group had offended as opposed to 10% in the play therapy group). This research allowed the authors to conclude that CBT is indeed an effective treatment method (Vizard, 2013).

Another research worth considering when discussing the probable causal factors of pedophilia is the relationship that the pedophile holds with his/her mother. Research on this matter has reported conflicting results with Wilson and Cox (1983) finding their non-forensic sample of pedophiles to have had greater degrees of difficulty relating to their mother and were less likely to characterise her as a “good woman“. On the other hand, Tingle et al. (1986) found their sample of offenders to be highly attached to their mothers, though they also claimed that they felt like they couldn’t turn to their mothers to discuss their problems. To top it all, early psychoanalytic theorists suggested that narcissism as a result of the Oedipal fixation was a factor contributing to the development of pedophilic interests. Clearly, more research on the subject is warranted.

Who is at risk?

Although so far we have primarily focussed on why some pedophiles sexually abuse children and why some don’t, research has also pointed out a couple of factors that make the obvious victims, the children, more susceptible to such acts. Studies suggest that children who feel lonely and/or uncared for (Vikas Kumar Singh, 2017), who have been sexually victimised before (Carson et al.,
2013), who come from broken families, homes plagued with domestic violence and generally children looking for better prospects and a better future (Deb and Mukherjee, 2011) are the more common targets of child sexual victimization. Their vulnerability makes them easy prey and their abundance, especially in a country like India, puts them in that much more risk.

Drawbacks Of Existing Research

As with studies on most topics, one of the hardest parts of conducting said study (especially one that is quantifiable in nature) is the data collection process. Care must be taken to ensure that the sample chosen fits the description agreed on and is representative of all individuals fitting the bill. Current studies on pedophilia is limited by this factor. The data that has been collected for most studies comes either from the national/international register of the number of child sexual abuse cases or through self-report via online surveys and the likes. The problem with these methods are as follows...

Limitations Of Using The Official Register For Data:

- It only accounts for the cases that have been reported to authorities, so there is a very high possibility of an underestimation of the numbers as a large number of cases of child sexual abuse go unreported.
- Even among the provided number of incarcerated or accused individuals, there is no way to be sure of the prevalence of pedophilia as the current methods of diagnosing said disorder, i.e., penile plethysmography or even the threat of a polygraph test can be manipulated.
- The number of female child sexual molesters is grossly undervalued as a result of society’s belief of women being incapable of committing such a heinous crime. Even when such instances are reported, society is quick to dismiss it.
Limitations Of Using Self-Report:

- The problem of missing data is one that is quite common with survey studies. The studies conducted on pedophilia was no exception to this. The sensitivity of the research topic does nothing but worsen this premonition.

- The reliability of the data is dependent on the honesty of the respondent. The inability to cross-check the data makes it even more difficult to ensure its validity. Even if the subjects of the study were to be victims of child sexual abuse and not the perpetrators, reliability of data collected would still be questionable as it is dependent on the victims’ ability to recognise and label the abuse and also on the accuracy of their memories.

The issue with the data collection would have at least been slightly mitigated if there existed a reliable enough diagnosis method (that didn’t depend on the reports of the experimental subjects). There are quite a few diagnosis methods available though not without their individual shortcomings. The more widely used of these is Penile Plethysmography (PPG) or Phallometry (occasionally complimented with a polygraph test).

**Penile Plethysmography:**

Penile Plethysmography, commonly called Phallometry, is one of the methods used to measure pedophilic interest in men. It is used to measure the volume of blood that flows to the penis, which indicates the sexual arousal of the person to erotic stimuli, when exposed to stimuli that are found to be sexually arousing by pedophilic men. The sexual stimuli is categorized under various classes (according to Tanner) like prepubescent, pubescent and adult (female and male). There are two methods through which this test is taken: circumferential method which measures the changes in penile girth through a wire band fitted around the base of the penis (Bancroft et al.,
1966) and volumetric method which involves fitting a glass tube around the penis to measure the calibrated air output as the result of erection (Freund, 1963). Both these methods are considered to be relatively valid and reliable since measurement of the physiological changes is more accurate than the subject’s own interpretation.

However, despite its acceptance, PPG is considered a controversial diagnostic tool as, in Judge Noonan’s words “by committing a crime and being convicted of it, a person does not cease to be a person. A prisoner is not a mere tool of the state to be manipulated by it to achieve the purposes the law has determined appropriate in punishment” (U.S. vs. Weber, 2006).

**Polygraph:**

To find out the reliability of victimization in the childhood of pedophiles, Hindman conducted a study which compared paroled male pedophiles over two periods. The first period spanned from 1980 to 1982 where she interviewed 40 patients while the second period spanned from 1982 to 1988 wherein she interviewed 129 patients. In the second period, pedophiles were told that they would be taking a polygraph test and if the results of the test contradicted their self-report then they would return to jail. The first period, on the other hand, had no such conditions. In the first period, 67% reported that they were molested as a child whereas 29% from the second period (who were threatened with consequences if found to be dishonest) reported that they were molested as a child. This indicates that some incarcerated pedophiles might have lied about their supposed childhood sexual victimisation in order to receive a lighter sentence given that pedophilia, especially pedophilic behaviour, is frowned upon in society.

The reliability of the polygraph test remains a controversial subject. A polygraph test measures the physiological changes that occur in a person but, the American Psychological Association (APA) states that there is no means to validate the notion that the physiological changes that occur are a result of the subjects’ deceptiveness. A person may be anxious even when he/she is
telling the truth. Alternatively, a subject who is being dishonest can inhibit the resultant physiological changes or redirect his/her attention thereby attaining the aforementioned state. Therefore, polygraph tests are not considered to be reliable.

Clearly, the need of the hour is to find a diagnostic tool that does not infringe upon the subject’s human rights but is reliable and inclusive of all sexes.

**Conclusion**

Although the purpose of this paper was to understand the victim-victimizer cycle, specifically with regards to sexual crimes against children, and the extent of its validity, the authors are of the belief that further research is necessary to fill the gaps that current research fails to answer. We have classified these gaps under two broad categories namely methods of data collection and reliability of collected data.

**Method Of Data Collection:** Most relevant studies on pedophilia acquire their data either from Government records of incarcerated child molesters or through web surveys (self-report). Both of these have certain limitations that result in the exclusion of a significant number of individuals with pedophilic preferences (like women, pedophiles who have not assaulted and are indifferent to their preference—may use child pornography to satisfy needs and child molesters who have not been reported due to various factors among others). This limitation undermines the existing research to a significant degree due to its inability to be generalised. Hence, we believe resources must be invested on a more effective and apt method of data collection.

**Reliability Of Data Collected:** Given that a large portion of the data on these studies come from incarcerated child molesters, the reliability of the information drops. There is a certain fear of repercussions that looms over a perpetrator’s mind. Studies have shown that incarcerated individuals may furnish the information given (for example: claiming to have been victimized as
children themselves, disassociating themselves from the crime by insisting that it was the effect of some external factor like alcohol, drugs, mental instability, etc., and thereby rejecting the notion of being pedophilic in nature, etc.) if it means a lesser sentence.

Besides the need for better diagnostic tools, future research must also seek to explain pedophilia in women, probable genetic causes of pedophilia and the effects of child pornography on the onset of pedophilia.
Reference


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