Juvenile sexual offenders: relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending

Hillary Rimel
Abstract

Sexual abuse, as well as physical abuse, can lead to many negative outcomes for adolescents and adults. One possible and serious outcome of sexual abuse is later sexual offending. However, the nature of the relationship between abuse and later offending is unclear. This study aims to better understand the possible relationship between sexual abuse, physical abuse, and later sexual offending. A significant relationship was found between sexual abuse and sexual offense severity. Significant differences were also found between sexually abused and non-sexually abused JSOs regarding specific sexual offending behaviors (abusing a victim seven years or younger, abusing a male, abusing multiple victims) and a significant relationship was found between sexual abuse and sexual offending. Physical abuse was not related to sexual offense severity in this study, which may be due to limitations in the scale of sexual offense severity used. Further research in this area is necessary to enhance interventions and other treatments for sexually abused youth and juvenile sexual offenders in order to prevent future sexual offending behaviors.
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

JUVENILE SEXUAL OFFENDERS:
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL OFFENDING

By

HILLARY RIMEL

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Degree Awarded:
Spring 2014
The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Hillary Rimel defended on April 18, 2014.

Dr. Janet Kistner
Thesis Director

Dr. Joseph Hellweg
Outside Committee Member

Dr. Barbara Licht
Committee Member
Introduction

Being sexually abused as a child has been shown to lead to a number of negative outcomes for adolescents and adults, including a greater risk of psychopathology and incarceration (Asberg & Renk, 2012), deficits in control and flexibility of cognitive functions (Navalta 2006; Nikulina & Widom, 2013), and frequent tobacco smoking (Kristman-Valente, Brown, & Herrenkohl, 2013). One particularly concerning outcome associated with child sexual abuse is sexual offending (Mallie, Viljoen, Mordell, Spice, & Roesch, 2010); however, the nature of the relationship between sexual abuse and later offending is unclear. Not all children who are sexually abused become sexual offenders, and similarly, not all sexual offenders have a history of sexual abuse. Even in samples of sexually abused children who later sexually offend, we still do not know much about characteristics of their past abuse experience and how it is related to their own offenses. The aim of this study is to better understand the relationship between previous abuse experiences and later sexual offending in a sample of juvenile sexual offenders (JSOs).

Though results from numerous studies suggest that sexual offenders in general have experienced higher rates of sexual abuse than other offenders and the general public (Jespersen, 2009; Thomas & Fremouw, 2009), the rates of sexual offenders who have been sexually abused vary. Two studies found that between approximately 40% of juvenile sexual offenders had been sexually abused previous to committing sexual offenses (Lalumiere & Seto 2010; Rasmussen 1999). Others reported that as many as 80% of their sample of JSOs had a history of sexual abuse (Friedrich & Luecke, 1988; Romano & De Luca, 1997; Veneziano, Veneziano, & LeGrande, 2000). In regards to rates of children who have been sexually abused and become sexual offenders, the Unites States General Accounting Office concluded that between 7% and
26% of sexually abused male children went on to commit sexual offenses as adolescents or adults (Thomas & Fremouw, 2009).

Though a relationship may exist between sexual abuse and later offending, the nature of the relationship is unclear, and the way in which sexual abuse specifically contributes to later offending is also unclear (Burton, 2003). Some studies have shown that sexual offenses committed by individuals who had previously been sexually abused tend to include similar characteristics to their own abuse experience (Barbaree & Marshall, 2008; Laws & Marshall, 1990). In addition, in samples of sexually abused children, some research indicates that sexual abuse and abuse severity are not related to later offending (Rind, et. al, 2001). However, there is some evidence suggesting that children sometimes model the abuse that they have experienced (Laws & Marshall, 1990), and that specific characteristics of their abuse may be related to later offending against others. For example, some children who experienced sexual abuse involving penetration with objects later committed sexual offenses involving penetration with objects (Barbaree & Marshall, 2008). Another study showed that adolescents who were abused before age 5 and by a male were more likely to abuse males under the age of 5, compared to adolescents who were not (Veneziano et al., 2000). Some of these data suggest that severity and characteristics of prior abuse may relate to later sexual offending.

Several theories have been developed to explain this relationship, the most cited being Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. The Social Learning Theory proposes that one’s first sexually abusive act will in some way model the abuse that they, themselves have experienced (Bandura, 1978). The theory suggests that this victim-offender relationship can be due to positive association with, and exposure to, beliefs that support sexual offending, supposed gains and rewards that their own abuser received, and cognitive distortions related to potential victims and
sexual behavior (Burton, 2003). Social Learning Theory goes on to suggest that abused youth may commit further sexually abusive acts in order to resolve an internal conflict resulting from previous trauma. Offenders who have experienced sexual abuse and have internalized positive associations to that trauma may experience positive psychological and physiological responses, like rewarding thoughts or orgasm, when thinking of their own sexual abuse or sexual abuse in general. These conflicting emotions can be difficult to handle and some feel a sense of mastery over this conflict by acting out the behaviors associated with their own abuse and, in turn, become offenders themselves (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006).

Given this theory, it makes sense to say that children may eventually model their past sexual abuse experiences in their later sexual offenses. This could mean children with less severe sexual abuse histories will commit less severe sexual offenses, and that children with more severe sexual abuse histories will go on to commit more severe sexual offenses. However, few studies have specifically examined the relationship between severity of sexual abuse and severity of later sexual offending. Many studies show that sexual abuse is more common in sex offenders than other offenders and other studies show that sexual abuse severity is related to sexual versus other types of offending (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006). What has not been given much attention in research literature is severity of sexual abuse and its relationship to sexual offenses within a sample of juvenile sexual offenders.

Defining severity in the case of sexual abuse and sexual offending and deciding what actions should be regarded more or less severe than others is difficult, and it is a much-debated subject. While there is no universal differentiation between levels of abuse or offense severity, many sources do agree that sexually abusive acts not involving physical contact are less severe than those involving touching or penetration (Heath, Bean, & Feinauer, 1996; Kendall-Tackett
et. al. 1993). Being a victim of sexual abuse at age seven or younger, males being abused by a male, and abuse by multiple perpetrators are also factors that have been found to cause more psychological impairment, and thus deemed more severe (Romano & DeLuca, 1996). A more controversial decision regarding severity is whether or not being sexually abused by a relative is more severe than being sexually abused by a stranger or non-blood related family member or friend. Ultimately, the closeness of the relationship between the persecutor and the victim is what has the most influence regarding the severity of the abuse, and the most commonly held opinion is that abuse is more severe if committed by a family member (Kendall-Tackett et. al., 1993).

Sufficient scales of sexual abuse and offense severity that incorporate the opinions of the majority of researchers should include factors such as the method of abuse (i.e., verbal, exposure, penetration), the age of the victim at time of abuse, the gender of the perpetrator and victim, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, and whether or not there were multiple perpetrators (Heath et al., 1996). Other factors that also may be indicative of more severe sexual offending include use of a threat and sexually offending multiple victims.

The relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending is not straightforward and it is likely that there are many factors playing a role in this relationship. One of these factors that may impact the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending is a history of physical abuse. Studies suggest that in the general population, experiencing both sexual and physical abuse tends to lead to poorer outcomes for people than if they had experienced sexual or physical abuse alone. Multiple victimization, compared to experiencing one type of abuse, can lead to more delinquency and criminal behavior in an individual, more use of alcohol or illicit drugs, and social deficits (Lowencamp, Holsinger, & Latessa, 2001). In samples of sexual offenders, multiple victimization is related to risky sexual behaviors (Lacelle & Hebert, 2012), as well as
dissociation, alienation, and aggression (Leibowitz, Laser, & Burton, 2011). One study found that among a sample of sexual offenders, those who had been both sexually and physically abused reported the highest levels of alienation, and that feelings of alienation may be related to feeling powerless (Martin, 1996). If sexual offenders who have experienced multiple victimization have a higher risk of feeling powerless, perhaps they will commit sexual offenses that are more severe in order to regain that power. Because the combination of a history of sexual and physical abuse tends to lead to overall worse outcomes for various populations, it is plausible that this form of multiple victimization will lead to poorer outcomes in other instances, such as more severe levels of sexual offending.

The purpose of this study is to address four questions related to sexual abuse and offending in a sample of juvenile sexual offenders. 1) Are characteristics of sexual offending similar to characteristics of their own abuse? 2) Do characteristics of sexual abuse predict sexual offense severity? 3) If so, does having a history of physical abuse moderate this relationship and predict greater sexual offense severity? 4) Do sexually abused and non-abused sexual offenders differ on sexual offense severity and sexual offense severity indicators? Furthermore, does physical abuse moderate the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offense severity in the total sample? By answering these questions, the researcher aims to better understand the possible relationship between sexual abuse, physical abuse, and later sexual offending.

Method

Archival data were the source of data for this study. The sample consisted of adjudicated, juvenile sexual offenders in a high security juvenile justice facility located in the south eastern United States. Data were collected from the institutional files of 547 adjudicated juvenile sexual
offenders, 173 of whom had a documented history of sexual abuse and 374 who did not. The institutional files were reviewed and coded by graduate students at Florida State University and double data entry of the coded variables was completed by trained undergraduate lab assistants at the same university. Before coding files independently, graduate students achieved 80% reliability or higher.

Measures

*Sexual abuse characteristics and severity indicators.* Sexual abuse was considered present if official documents in the youth’s file, such as a predisposition report or psychological report, contained documentation that the youth had been a victim of sexual abuse. Indicators of sexual abuse severity included age when abused (i.e., seven or younger), whether the perpetrator was a male, and whether the youth was abused by multiple perpetrators.

*Physical abuse.* Physical abuse was also considered present if the youth’s file contained reported or documented physical abuse in a predisposition report, psychological report, or other official documents. If a youth had experienced physical abuse, a rating of “Yes,” was given and if no physical abuse was experienced, a rating of “No,” was given.

*Sexual offense severity.* Sexual offense severity was rated on a scale of “0” to “7,” based on the age of the victim (i.e., seven or younger), the relationship to the victim (i.e., family member versus non-family), whether the victim was a male, whether multiple perpetrators were involved, whether the youth offended multiple victims, use of threat, and physical intrusiveness. A rating of “1” was given if any of these indicators were present, and intrusiveness received a point if the offender sexually penetrated the victim in any way during the sexual offense. If the
participant committed multiple sexual offenses, only the most severely rated offense was used for the purposes of this study.

Data Analysis

The JSOs were separated into groups of those who had a history of being sexually abused and those who did not. SPSS was used to analyze all data in this study. Data were examined for outliers and acceptable values of skewness and kurtosis. Chi-square analyses and t-tests were used to compare juvenile sex offenders in our sample who had a history of sexual abuse and those who did not on demographic variables, criminal history, and sexual offense severity indicators. Chi-square analyses were used to test whether the characteristics of sexual abuse for JSOs was similar to characteristics of their sexual offenses. T-tests were used to examine whether the sexual abuse severity characteristics and a history of physical abuse were related to sexual offense severity. Linear regression was planned to examine whether physical abuse moderated the relationship between sexual abuse characteristics and sexual offense severity in the sexually abused sample. Linear regression was used to examine whether physical abuse moderated the relationship between a presence of sexual abuse, rather than sexual abuse severity, and sexual offense severity in the total sample. Alpha was set at .05 for all tests.

Of the 173 juvenile sexual offenders who were sexually abused, 67 were missing data for at least one sexual offense severity indicator. Regarding missing data, 60 juveniles were missing data on the age that they were sexually abused, 15 were missing data on the gender of their abuser, and 11 were missing data on whether they experienced abuse by multiple perpetrators. Sexual offense severity scores were available for 147 sexually abused JSOs and 314 non-sexually abused JSOs.
Results

A total of 547 files of juvenile sex offenders, including those who had a history of sexual abuse and those who did not, were reviewed for this study. The total number of juvenile sexual offenders in our sample who had a history of sexual abuse was 173 (32%). Sixty percent of the total sample was Caucasian and 37% was African American. The average age at first referral for the total sample, or the age when first receiving a criminal charge in the juvenile justice system, was 12.83 years (SD = 2.15), the average age of admission to the current facility was 16.01 years (SD = 1.37), and the average total number of commitments to a juvenile justice facility was 1.44 (SD = .80). The mean total number of adjudications for the whole sample was 5.96 (SD = 5.76), the average number of nonsexual adjudications was 4.46 (SD = 5.70), the average number of sexual charges was 2.30 (SD = 2.40), and average sexual adjudications was 1.53 (SD = 1.50). The average total number of sexual offense victims for the whole sample, including sexually abused and non-sexually abused JSOs, was 1.46 (SD = 1.18), and the average age of the victims was 8.68 years (SD = 5.06).

Juvenile sex offenders with a history of sexual abuse were more likely to be Caucasian than those without a history of sexual abuse, $\chi^2 (1) = 29.63, p < .05$. The sexually abused sample of juvenile sexual offenders had more sexual charges, $t (542) = -2.16, p = .03$, and fewer nonsexual adjudications, $t (544) = 1.95, p = .05$, than those who were not sexually abused. There were not differences between the groups on total number of adjudications, total number of sexual adjudications, age at first referral, age at admission to the current facility, or total number of commitments to a juvenile justice facility (See Table 1).
Data for the sexual abuse severity characteristics, age at sexual abuse, gender of abuser, and multiple abusers, were available for 113, 158, and 147 sexually abused JSOs, respectively. Of those with data, 69% was abused at or before age 7, 85% was abused by a male, and 33% was abused by multiple perpetrators. Sexual abuse severity characteristics were not related to sexual offense severity indicators. There was no significant difference in the likelihood of offending a child age seven or younger between groups of JSOs who had themselves been sexually abused seven years of age or younger (60%; n = 47) and eight years of age or older (69%; n= 24), $\chi^2 (1) = .72, p = .40$ (Figure 1). Furthermore, there was not a significant correlation between the age when the JSO was sexually abused and the age of the youngest victim ($r = -.09, p = .33$). There was no significant difference in the likelihood of sexually abusing a male between JSOs who had been sexually abused by a male (50%; n = 68) and those who had been sexually abused by a female (35%; n= 8), $\chi^2 (1) = 1.91, p = .17$ (Figure 2), and there was no significant difference in the likelihood of committing a sexual offense with multiple perpetrators when comparing JSOs who had been abused by multiple perpetrators (8%; n = 4) and those who had not (4%; n =4), $\chi^2 (1) = 1.16, p = .28$ (Figure 3).

The possible sexual offense severity scores ranged from 0 to 7, though the actual range was 0 to 6 with a mean of 2.96 (SD = 1.33) in the sexually abused group. Independent samples t-tests were used to determine if there was a significant relationship between sexual abuse severity characteristics (i.e., age when abused, gender of abuser, and abuse by multiple perpetrators) and sexual offense severity. Comparisons between JSOs who had been sexually abused at age seven or younger and age eight or older showed that age at abuse was not related to sexual offense severity, $t (89) = -.90, p = .37$. When examining age at abuse as a continuous variable there was no significant correlation between age at abuse and offense severity ($r = -.19, p = .07$).
Comparisons between JSOs who had been sexually abused by a male and those who were sexually abused by a female showed that gender of the perpetrator was not related to sexual offense severity, $t (132) = -0.49, p = .63$. Comparisons between JSOs who had been abused by multiple perpetrators and those who had not showed that abuse by multiple perpetrators was not related to sexual offense severity, $t (136) = -1.41, p = .16$.

Of 173 sexually abused JSOs in this sample, 76 (44%) were also physically abused. An independent samples $t$-test was also computed to determine if a history of physical abuse was related to sexual offense severity, in the sexually abused JSOs. Comparisons between JSOs who had a history of physical abuse and those who did not showed that a history of physical abuse was not related to sexual offense severity, $t (143) = -0.66, p = .51$. Chi-square analyses showed that physical abuse was not associated with any of the seven sex offense severity indicators. Because sexual abuse severity indicators were not related to sexual offense severity, physical abuse was not tested as a moderator between sexual abuse characteristics and sexual offense severity.

Though neither sexual abuse severity nor the presence of physical abuse predicted sexual offense severity in the sexually abused sample of juvenile sexual offenders, the differences in offense severity scores and offense severity indicators between the sexually abused and non-sexually abused samples are worth noting. By comparing differences in the presence of sexual offense severity variables between JSOs with and without a history of sexual abuse we will be able to understand if being sexually abused is related to different patterns or behaviors of sexual offending, in particular, those behaviors related to offense severity. $T$-test results revealed that JSOs with a history of sexual abuse had higher sex offense severity scores (mean = 2.94, SD = 1.33) than non-sexually abused JSOs (mean = 2.43, SD = 1.23), $t (460) = -4.03, p < .05$. After
completing Chi-square tests to compare sexual offense severity variables between JSOs with and without a history of sexual abuse, the data showed that JSOs with a history of sexual abuse were more likely to have offended a victim that was seven years of age or younger, compared to those without a history of sexual abuse (58% vs. 44%), $\chi^2 (1) = 9.83, p < .05$. Sexually abused JSOs were also more likely than the non-sexually abused group to have offended a male victim than JSOs without a history of sexual abuse, (48% vs. 26%) $\chi^2 (1) = 24.91, p < .05$. The data also showed that those with a history of sexual abuse were less likely to have committed a sex offense with other perpetrators than those without a history of sexual abuse (6% vs. 12%), $\chi^2 (1) = 4.63, p < .05$, but those with a history of sexual abuse were more likely to have multiple victims than those who had no history of sexual abuse (35% vs. 25%), $\chi^2 (1) = 4.24, p < .05$. No significant differences were found between JSOs with and without a history of sexual abuse for any other sexual offense severity variables, including offense intrusiveness (i.e., victim penetration), use of a threat during the offense, and victim relationship (See Table 2).

Finally, the relationship between physical abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual offense severity was examined for the whole sample of JSOs. As mentioned previously, 44% of the sexually abused JSOs were also physically abused. In addition, 20% of the non-sexually abused group was physically abused, for an overall sample physical abuse rate of 27.7%. Those with a history of sexual abuse were more likely than the non-sexually abused group to be physically abused, $\chi^2 (1) = 33.53, p < .05$. Multiple regression was used to test whether the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offense severity was moderated by the presence of physical abuse, in the total sample. The two predictors, sexual abuse and physical abuse, and the interaction between them were entered simultaneously and the overall model was significant, $F(3, 458) = 5.62, p < .05$. Results indicated that sexual abuse was the only significant predictor in
the model. Neither physical abuse nor the interaction was significantly related to sexual offense severity. See Table 3.

Discussion

Childhood sexual abuse is related to many negative psychological, physical, and behavioral consequences in adolescents and adults. One of these related outcomes is sexual offending, though the relationship between sexual abuse and later sexual offending is unclear. Specifically, some but not all, victims of sexual abuse later commit sexual offenses, and some but not all juvenile sexual offenders have a history of sexual abuse.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether: 1) characteristics of sexual offending are similar to characteristics of the abuse experienced by the JSOs, 2) characteristics of sexual abuse predict sexual offense severity, 3) having a history of physical abuse moderates the relationship between sexual abuse severity and sexual offense severity, 4) sexually abused and non-abused JSOs differ on sexual offense severity indicators and whether the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offense severity was moderated by physical abuse. The ultimate aim of this study was to better understand the possible relationship between sexual abuse, physical abuse, and later sexual offending in juvenile sexual offenders.

We found that characteristics of sexual abuse were generally unrelated to sexual offense characteristics, including specific offending behaviors and offense severity. Second, physical abuse was also not related to sexual offense severity. However, important differences were found between sexually abused and non-sexually abused JSOs on sexual offending behaviors.

Thirty two percent of our sample of juvenile sexual offenders had a history of being sexually abused, which is fairly consistent with the percentages reported in other studies of
incarcerated juvenile sexual offenders (Friedrich & Luecke, 1988; Lalumiere & Seto 2010; Rasmussen 1999; Romano & De Luca, 1997; Veneziano et al., 2000). In the sexually abused group, the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending was examined in two ways. First we examined consistency between individual sexual abuse severity indicators with corresponding sexual offense severity indicators (i.e., age at abuse, gender of perpetrator, abuse by multiple perpetrators). In contrast to some previous findings (Barbaree & Marshall, 2008; Laws & Marshall, 1990; Veneziano, Veneziano, & LeGrande, 2000) we found that specific characteristics experienced through sexual abuse were not associated with JSOs being more likely to engage in those same offending behaviors. Specifically, JSOs who were abused at a young age, abused by a male, or abused by multiple perpetrators were no more likely than other offenders to display those same behaviors in their own offenses. These results suggest that JSOs do not appear to be re-enacting these specific aspects of abuse in their sexual offending, and therefore do not support the social learning theory playing a role in the relationship between sexual abuse characteristics and sexual offense characteristics. However, only a few abuse-specific behaviors were examined in this study, but these juveniles may be modeling several other behaviors associated with sexual abuse, such as the relationship to the perpetrator, specific sexual acts, methods to gain victim compliance, or a variety of other sexual abuse characteristics not included in this study.

Second, we examined whether or not sexual abuse severity characteristics, individually, were related to overall more severe offending. Sexual offenses were considered more severe when the victim was age seven years or younger, when the victim was male, when multiple perpetrators were present, when the JSO offended multiple victims, when the victim was a relative, when threat was used, and when the offense was intrusive (i.e., penetration versus no
penetration). On average, the JSOs in this study had three out of seven offense severity indicators, suggesting that this sample committed moderately severe sexual offenses. However, when groups with and without each abuse severity characteristic (i.e., abused at age seven or younger, by a male, or by multiple perpetrators) were compared on the sexual offense severity score, there were no significant differences found. It is possible that other characteristics of abuse, not present in this study, such as relationship between perpetrator and victim, time between abuse and offense, and if treatment was received, are individually related to sexual offense severity. Alternatively, there may be no one characteristic of sexual abuse that is related to a more severe pattern of sexual offending behavior. Sexual abuse is a complex and multi-faceted occurrence. It may be instead that a combination of sexual abuse characteristics and the interaction between them is related to characteristics of later sexual offending, including sexual offense severity.

In line with that idea, JSOs with a history of sexual abuse had more severe sexual offenses than those without a history of sexual abuse. Examination of individual sexual offense severity indicators showed that sexually abused JSOs were more likely to have multiple, young male victims than non-sexually abused JSOs. Research shows that offending young male children is associated with high levels of sexual deviance and related to higher sexual re-offense rates in adult sexual offenders. The JSOs in our sample ranged from age 12 to 20 years, and if the sexually abused JSO are committing offenses that are similar to adult offenses that are often associated with higher re-offense rates, these juveniles may be more likely to sexually reoffend as adults. However, the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual re-offense is clearly complicated as studies show that sexual abuse is not typically related to sexual recidivism in adult or adolescent sexual offenders. It may be that sexual abuse severity, rather than the
presence of sexual abuse is related to sexual deviance and sexual recidivism in juvenile sexual offenders, but this has not yet been examined. More research is needed to clarify the relationship between sexual abuse, sexual re-offense, sexual deviance, and specific victim characteristics. Further research in this area may lead to a better understanding of treatment needs, such as treatment related to the trauma of sexual abuse or education about socially appropriate sexual behaviors.

Several studies have found that a presence of physical abuse as well as sexual abuse is related to greater impairment, such as risky sexual behavior, aggression, and feelings of alienation in juvenile sexual offenders. However, little is known about the sexual offense characteristics of JSOs with multiple victimization. Contrary to expectations, physical abuse was not related to sex offense severity, regardless of sexual abuse history, nor did it moderate the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offense severity. In this sample, a history of sexual abuse was the only variable related to sex offense severity and the idea of multiple victimization resulting in more severe sex offenses was not supported. This may be because physical abuse is related to interpersonal violence (Herrenkohl, Mason, Kost Hawkins, & Abbott, 2004; Merrill, Thomsen, Crouch, May, Gold, et. al., 2005), not specifically sexual offending. Also, we did not measure physically violent factors, nor did we have access to specific violence indicators, like use of force or other aggressive behaviors including hitting, kicking, or general injury to the victim, when considering sexual offense severity.

This study had both limitations and strengths. The large sample of severely delinquent, incarcerated JSOs may be a limitation to this study, as the findings may not generalize to other samples such as less delinquent JSOs, those in outpatient treatment, and females. It is important to consider that there may be different relationships found between sexual abuse and sexual
offending for JSOs who have committed less severe offenses. This study was also limited by the few details available on sexual abuse. Some variables, such as the relationship between the victim and perpetrator in the case of the JSOs' sexual abuse and information on specific sexual acts, were not available for the sexually abused sample, and therefore could not be incorporated into this study. As noted earlier, it may be that other aspects of sexual abuse that were not available for this study are related to sexual offending characteristics and severity.

Strengths of this study were the large sample of juvenile sexual offenders and the details of their sexual offenses, as well as the availability of official documented measures of both sexual and physical abuse. While there are disadvantages to relying solely on official records, a large advantage to using them in this study was that our data did not rely on self report from JSOs who have committed considerably severe offenses, both criminally and sexually. Another strength of this study was the examination of specific indicators of sexual abuse to sexual offense in a large and severely offending sample of JSOs.

Many studies show that a relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offense exists, but this relationship remains unclear. It is possible that examining other specific aspects of sexual abuse will help researchers to better understand the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending. Further research on this subject may lead to future treatment options for sexually abused individuals and juvenile sexual offenders.
Table 1

Demographic and Criminal History Means and Standard Deviations for the Total Sample, Sexually Abused, and Non-Sexually Abused JSOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Sexually abused JSOs</th>
<th>Non-sexually abused JSOs</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ or $t$</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>29.63*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at first referral in years</td>
<td>12.83 (2.15)</td>
<td>12.89 (2.07)</td>
<td>12.80 (2.18)</td>
<td>-.43*</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at admission in years</td>
<td>16.01 (1.37)</td>
<td>16.07 (1.35)</td>
<td>16.09 (1.39)</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitments</td>
<td>1.44 (.80)</td>
<td>1.40 (.73)</td>
<td>1.46 (.83)</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsexual adjudications</td>
<td>4.46 (5.70)</td>
<td>3.77 (4.85)</td>
<td>4.79 (6.04)</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual adjudications</td>
<td>1.53 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.61 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.49 (1.20)</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual charges</td>
<td>2.30 (2.40)</td>
<td>2.58 (2.18)</td>
<td>2.17 (2.02)</td>
<td>-2.16*</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Figure 1

Association Between JSO’s Age at Sexual Abuse and Age of Sex Offense Victim

![Graph showing association between JSO's age at sexual abuse and age of sex offense victim.](image)

\[
\chi^2 (1) = .72, \ p = .40
\]

Figure 2

Association Between Gender of JSO’s Sexual Abuser and Gender of Sex Offense Victim

![Graph showing association between gender of JSO's sexual abuser and gender of sex offense victim.](image)

\[
\chi^2 (1) = 1.91, \ p = .17
\]
Figure 3

Association Between Sexual Abuse by Multiple Perpetrators and Sexually Offending with Multiple Perpetrators

\[ \chi^2 (1) = 1.16, \ p = .28 \]
Table 2

Sexual Offense Severity and Severity Indicators for Sexually Abused and Non-Sexually Abused JSOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity indicators</th>
<th>Sexually abused</th>
<th>Non-sexually abused</th>
<th>t or $\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(total n)</td>
<td>(total n)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual offense severity score</td>
<td>2.94 (n = 148)</td>
<td>2.43 (n = 314)</td>
<td>-4.03*</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim 7 or younger</td>
<td>58% (n = 173)</td>
<td>44% (n = 373)</td>
<td>9.83*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male victim</td>
<td>48% (n = 173)</td>
<td>26% (n = 372)</td>
<td>24.91*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple perpetrators</td>
<td>6% (n = 158)</td>
<td>12% (n = 337)</td>
<td>4.24*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple victims</td>
<td>35% (n = 173)</td>
<td>25% (n = 373)</td>
<td>4.63*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of threat</td>
<td>18% (n = 160)</td>
<td>19% (n = 345)</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive</td>
<td>78% (n = 173)</td>
<td>72% (n = 373)</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimized family member</td>
<td>57% (n = 167)</td>
<td>51% (n = 349)</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Table 3

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Sexual Offense Severity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE_B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>2.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse X</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$

Figure 4

Sexually Abused JSOs Compared to Non Sexually Abused JSOs on Sexual Offense Severity Indicators
References


