

# Concerning Sexual Behaviour in Children under 12: The Role of the Family

Alexandra M. Zidenberg<sup>1</sup> & Tracey Curwen<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario; <sup>2</sup>Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario

<sup>3</sup>Radius Child and Youth Services, Toronto, Ontario

## Introduction

- Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is thought to be a main factor in the development of concerning sexual behaviours (CSB)<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately 28% of victims engage in CSBs<sup>2,3</sup>
  - As most victims do not engage in CSBs, CSA as the causal factor is too simplistic
- Personal and family dysfunction may be related to some CSA victims engaging in CSBs<sup>4</sup>
- A systemic literature review by Boisvert and colleagues<sup>5</sup> found that children with CSBs were more likely to live in families with poor stability, higher instances of abuse and neglect, and poor sexual boundaries
- The purpose of this study was to examine whether family factors contribute to the development of CSBs by child (<12 years of age) victims

## Methods

- Data was collected through clinical file reviews
  - Located at agencies in southern Ontario
- Trained graduate and undergraduate research assistants read and coded clinical files
- Files were coded using the GAIN (formerly AR-RSBP)<sup>6</sup>
  - An empirically guided assessment tool for children under 12 years of age
- Subsample of data from a larger project

## Research Questions

In a sample of children (<12 years) with CSA:

1. Is there a relationship between having a poor family sexual environment and developing CSB?
2. Is there a relationship between living in a negative home environment and developing CSB?
3. Is there a relationship between family instability and the development CSB?

## Participants

99 children aged 4 to 12

Gender (%)

Male	56
Female	42
N/A	2

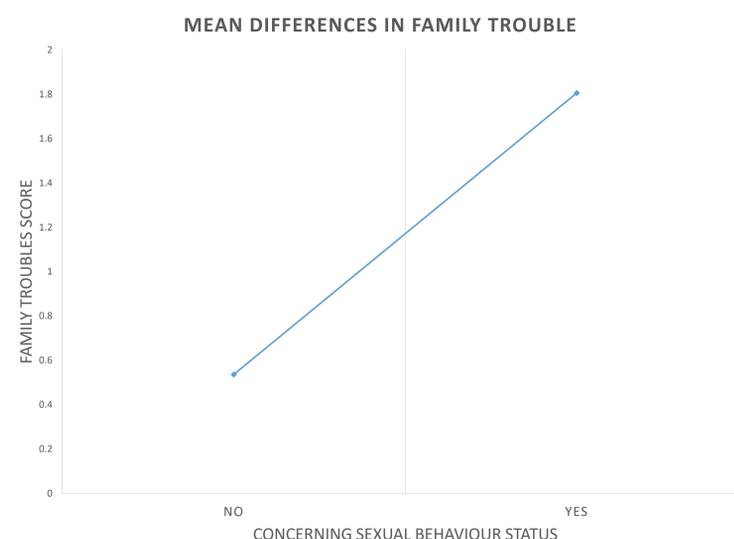
Average Age in years (SD) 8.00 (2.29)

CSB		No CSB	
Gender (%)		Gender (%)	
Male	76	Male	18
Female	24	Female	82
Average age in years (SD)		Average age in years (SD)	
M = 8.39 (2.13)		M = 7.77 (2.61)	

## Results

### ANOVA

- A one-way ANOVA was used to compare scores between victims with and without CSB on a scale of family troubles
- The family trouble scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) consists of witnessing violence, family instability, negative home environment, and parental/guardian rejection
- Children with CSBs had higher mean score on the family trouble scale ( $M = 1.80$ ) compared to children without CSBs ( $M = 0.54$ ); Welch's  $F(1,66.96) = 19.06, p < .001$



## Results Continued

### Logistic Regression

- A logistic regression (using a forward stepwise method) was conducted to ascertain victims' CSB history from family sexual behavior, family instability, negative home environment, parental rejection, and witnessing violence
- Statistically significant model ( $\chi^2(1) = 16.128, p < .001$ )
- Witnessed violence was significant ( $\exp(B) = 10.60$ )
  - The odds for victims witnessing violence being in the CSB group are 960% higher than the odds for nonwitness victims being in CSB group
- No other predictor variables were significant
- Family instability approached significance ( $p = .072$ )

## Conclusion and Implications

- CSA is not sufficient to explain the development of CSB in children
- Family variables may explain why some children who are victims of SA go on to display CSBs while most do not
- Children with CSB tended to have more family troubles
- Witnessing violence may be important to understanding childhood CSB etiology for sexual abuse victims
- Family instability should be further investigated as a predictor of child SA victims engaging in CSBs
- Clinicians may consider implementing CSB prevention methods for CSA victims who witnessed family violence and/or experience multiple family issues

## References

- 1 Boisvert, I., Tourigny, M., Lanctôt, N., Gagnon, M. M., & Tremblay, C. (2015). Psychosocial Profiles of children referred for treatment for sexual behavior problems or for having been sexually abused. *Sexual Offender Treatment, 10*(2), 127-141.
- 2 Kendall-Tackett, K. A., Williams, L. M., & Finkelhor, D. (1993). Impact of sexual abuse on children: A review and synthesis of recent empirical studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 113*(1), 164-180. doi:10.1037//0033-2909.113.1.164
- 3 Pithers, W. D., Gray, A., Busconi, A., & Houchens, P. (1998). Children with Sexual Behavior Problems: Identification of Five Distinct Child Types and Related Treatment Considerations. *Child Maltreatment, 3*(4), 384-406. doi:10.1177/1077559598003004010
- 4 Hershkowitz, I. (2011). The effects of abuse history on sexually intrusive behavior by children: An analysis of child justice records. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 35*(1), 40-49.
- 5 Boisvert, I., Tourigny, M., Lanctôt, N., & Lemieux, S. (2016). Comportements sexuels problématiques chez les enfants: Une recension systématique des facteurs associés. *Revue De Psychoéducation, 45*(1), 173-207.
- 6 Curwen, T. (2011). A framework to assist in assessing children's risk to repeat concerning sexual behaviour. In: Calder, M.C. (ed). *Contemporary practice with young people who sexually abuse: Evidence-based development*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing Ltd.