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The Proportions of Heterosexual and Homosexual Pedophiles Among Sex Offenders Against Children: An Exploratory Study

KURT FREUND and ROBIN J WATSON

Previous investigations have indicated that the ratio of sex offenders against female children vs. offenders against male children is approximately 2:1, while the ratio of gynephiles to androphiles among the general population is approximately 20:1. The present study investigated whether the etiology of preferred partner sex among pedophiles is related to the etiology of preferred partner sex among males preferring adult partners. Using phallometric test sensitivities to calculate the proportion of true pedophiles among various groups of sex offenders against children, and taking into consideration previously reported mean numbers of victims per offender group, the ratio of heterosexual to homosexual pedophiles was calculated to be approximately 11:1. This suggests that the resulting proportion of true pedophiles among persons with a homosexual erotic development is greater than that in persons who develop heterosexually. This, of course, would not indicate that androphilic males have a greater propensity to offend against children.

As part of an ongoing investigation of potential epidemiological connections between gynephilia (an erotic preference for physically mature females), androphilia (an erotic preference for physically mature males), and heterosexual and homosexual pedophilia, the following study is an exploration of differences between heterosexual and homosexual pedophilia. The recognition of pedophilia as a specific disorder is attributable to Krafft-Ebing,[1] however, some authors continue to use this term to denote a variety of different clinical pictures.[2, 3] In females, pedophilia is either very rare[4] or virtually nonexistent.

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The revised third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*[5] lists the essential feature of pedophilia as "recurrent, intense, sexual urges and sexually arousing fantasies of at least six months duration, involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child" (p. 284). Such fantasies are indeed one of the foremost characteristics of pedophilia; however, relying on self-reports of fantasies is of little diagnostic value since pedophiles rarely admit their true erotic fantasies. In the following, the term "prepubescent," used to denote the period of childhood, is defined as ending at age 11. This age limit was adopted from Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, and Christensen.[6]

Phallometric studies (using continuous recording of penile volume changes at presentation of pictures of nude female and male children and adults) have demonstrated that a majority of sex offenders who victimized two or more children (unrelated to them) respond more to movies and slides of nude children than to pictures of nude physically mature persons.[7-9] They *erotically prefer* children to adults.

The definition of pedophilia as an erotic preference and the assessment of this preference by means of the phallometric test make possible diagnosing a much larger proportion of sex offenders against children as pedophiles (with sufficient specificity) than using these patients' self-reports. This has been demonstrated previously.[10, 11] For this reason, the present study used the phallometric test as the differential diagnostic indicator of pedophilia.

In an earlier study,[12] of which the present study is a continuation, the incidence of (male) sex offenders against female children was compared with the incidence of such offenders against male children. The proportions of these two offender groups was approximately 2:1, omitting individuals who offended against children of both sexes. This was in agreement with earlier findings.[6, 13] Furthermore, a recent literature search by Cameron,[14] which involved 17 additional studies on sex offenders against children, listed the ratio of victimized female to male children in the majority of cases also as approximately 2:1. This differs substantially from the ratio of gynephiles to androphiles (among males who erotically prefer physically mature partners), which is approximately 20:1.[15-18]

The discrepancy between the proportions of sex offenders against female children and such offenders against male children on the one hand, and of gynephiles and androphiles on the other, was unexpectedly large. Therefore, we supposed this difference to be robust enough to indicate, even at this superficial level of information, to warrant further research in this direction.

Abel, Becker, Mittelman, Cunningham-Rathner, Rouleau, and Murphy[19] have demonstrated that nonincestuous offenders against male children have many more victims than such offenders against female children. According to Table 2 of that study, the mean number of victims of nonincestuous offenders against female children was 19.8, while that of such offenders against male children was 150.2. It has been convincingly argued that the much larger number of victims of offenders against

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male children increases the risk of these offenders being caught.[19, 20] However, the rate of the increase of this risk with the number of victims is unknown.

The tendency of the group of offenders against male children toward a greater number of victims suggests that this group may contain a larger proportion of true pedophiles than the group of offenders against female children. This is in agreement with the results of an earlier study.[11] In addition to determining the specificity of the phallometric test of pedophilia, this study assessed the test's sensitivity using groups of nonincest offenders who victimized two or more children as index cases. These multiple victimizer groups can be supposed to consist of a large majority of true pedophiles. Our clinical estimate was that 90% of these offenders against female children and 95% of these offenders against male children were true pedophiles. Under this supposition, the proportion of individuals phallometrically diagnosed as pedophiles could be used as an indicator of the sensitivity of the phallometric method. This in turn made possible calculation of an estimate of true pedophiles in groups of sex offenders of differing compositions and among offenders against only one child. On the basis of similar estimates, the present investigation converted the proportions of sex offenders against female children vs. such offenders against male children into an estimate of the proportion of heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophiles.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 465 nonpsychotic sex offenders against female or male 6–11-year-old children (omitting those who had offended against children of both sexes), aged 18–55 years inclusive. Of the 273 offenders against female children, 79 were accused of or charged with offenses against only one child, 116 for offenses against two or more children, and 78 for offenses against at least one female child *and* at least one female pubescent. Of the 192 offenders against male children, 50 were accused of or charged with an offense against only one child, 69 were accused of or charged with offenses against at least two children, and 73 were accused of or charged with offenses against at least one male child and at least one male pubescent. Table 1 demonstrates mean age, median education, and median Hollingshead-Redlich index of occupational status.[21] All individuals in the study were referred to us by psychiatrists who were assessing them either for lawyers (the majority of these subjects) or within the prison system. A few cases were referred to us by the Children's Aid Society or by probation officers. Almost all of the individuals were white. The overlap of the present sample with the earlier sample[11] is demonstrated in Table 1.

Following the completion of a study on incest,[22] we no longer saw clients who had offended against female children within only a daughter

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TABLE 1
Group Characteristics

Characteristic	Offenders Against Female Children			Offenders Against Male Children		
	single	multiple	ch + pub	single	multiple	ch + pub
N	79	116	78	50	69	73
Mean age*	32.7[a,b]	36.1[c]	37.3[c]	31.2[b]	32.2[a,b]	34.6[a,b,c]
SD age	10.2	9.2	9.4	8.9	10.0	9.6
Median education	8<Ed<12	8<Ed<12	8<Ed<12	8<Ed<12	8<Ed<12	8<Ed<12
Median occupation**	USL	USL	USL	SSL	USL	SSL
N for occupation	64	84	60	45	59	44
Mentally handicapped	8	10	3	8	19	8
Partial admitters	9	11	18	3	6	5
Full admitters	1	21	19	12	20	44
Number in F & W, 1991	20	29	11	7	14	9

Note: Pairs of figures sharing like suprascripts are not significantly different at $p < .05$. Single = charged for or accused of victimizing one child; multiple = charged for or accused of victimizing two or more children; ch + pub = charged for or accused of victimizing at least one child *and* at least one pubescent. SSL = semi-skilled labor; USL = unskilled labor. N for occupation = number of individuals for whom occupational status was known. Partial admitters = individuals who admit to having some sexual fantasies about minors; Full admitters = individuals who admit to a preponderance of sexual fantasies about minors. Number in F & W, 1991 = number of subjects included previously in Freund & Watson (1991).[11]
*$F(5,459) = 4.61$, $p < .001$
**Hollingshead & Redlich[21]

or stepdaughter relationship (the "sole-incest offenders"). For this reason, we did not have an analogous group of sole-incest offenders, and it was necessary to add an imaginary group of such offenders to the present sample of 273 nonincest offenders against female children. The size of this imaginary group was derived in accordance with the proportion reported in Abel et al.[20] The procedure is described below.

Procedure

Construction of the Group of Sole-Incest Offenders Against Female Children. In the study by Abel et al.[20] there were 224 individuals who had offended against female children in a nonincestuous context and 159 incestuous offenders against female children. There was, however, an overlap. Of the 224 individuals with nonincestuous offenses, 78 also had incestuous offenses. When subtracted from the group of incestuous offenders, this left a total of 81 sole-incestuous offenders. This is 36.2% (81 of 224) of the number of the offenders other than sole-incestuous (against female children). Therefore, we added 98 (approximately 36% imaginary sole-incestuous offenders to our sample of the 273 offenders against female children in a context other than sole-incest. The few incest offenders against male children who had no nonincest offenses have always been treated in our studies as nonincest cases; therefore, no imaginary sole-incest group of offenders against males was necessary.

Conversion of Porportions of Offenders Against Female Children vs. Sex Offenders Against Male Children into Estimates of Proportions of Heterosexual vs. Homosexual Pedophiles. This conversion was carried out in two ways:1)

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according to the proportions of pedophiles in the various offender groups, arrived at in the previous study,[11] and 2) by recalculating the sensitivities of the phallometric test for heterosexual and homosexual pedophilia according to data in the present study, and using these estimates to calculate proportions of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles among sex offenders against children. In these calculations two formulas (see formulas 1 and 2 below) were used.

In the study cited above as well as in the present study, sensitivities of the phallometric method for heterosexual and homosexual pedophilia were assessed according to formula 1: $sens = a/(b \times c)$, in which a is the number of individuals diagnosed as having an erotic preference for minors, b is the total number of individuals who received a valid phallometric diagnosis, and c is the clinical estimate of the number of individuals in the pertinent multivictim offender group (stated above as 90% for multivictim offenders against female children and 95% for multivictim offenders against male children).

The expected proportion (c^1) of pedophiles in the various other groups was estimated according to formula 2: $c^1 = a/(b \times sens)$. In this expression *sens* is the sensitivity calculated for the pertinent multivictim offender group (see above). A more detailed description of the diagnostic procedures is given in the paper cited above, and a full technical description is available on request.

The statistical comparison of the offender groups in regard to mean age was by analysis of variance and Tukey's honesty significant difference tests; the comparisons in regard to education and occupational status were by corresponding nonparametric tests (i.e., Kruskall-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U-test).

RESULTS

Table 1 lists the mean age, median education, and the occupational status of the groups of offenders. The offenders against at least one female child *and* at least one female pubescent were significantly older than the offenders with accusations or charges involving only one male or female child, and offenders with charges involving at least two male children. The offenders against at least two female children were significantly older than the offenders with accusations or charges involving only one male child. There were no further significant differences with respect to age, and no significant differences with respect to either other variable.

Table 2 demonstrates the number of offenders against female children, offenders against male children, and the number and proportion of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles in the various offender groups. The ratio of offenders against female children to offenders against male children was 1.93:1. However, the earlier cited finding of Abel et al.[20] of a 7.6 times larger mean number of victims of offenders against male children than the mean number of victims of offenders against female children also has to be considered. If the risk of an offender being caught can be expected to increase proportionally and linearly with each victim,

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TABLE 2
Estimated Proportion of Pedophiles

	Total N	Using Estimates from 1991 Study		Using New Sample Estimates	
		%	N	%	N
Offenders Against Female Children					
Single victim	79	44.5	35	61.6	48
Multiple victims	116	90.0	104	90.0	104
Ch + Pub victims	78	74.6	58	81.5	63
Incest offenders	98	25.0	24	25.0	24
Total	371	n/a	221	n/a	239
Offenders Against Male Children					
Single victim	50	86.7	43	76.4	38
Multiple victims	69	95.0	65	95.0	65
Ch + Pub victims	73	86.7	63	100.0	73
Total	192	n/a	171	n/a	176

Note. Numbers of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles were calculated using the estimated incidence proportions from Freund and Watson[11] and from data in the current study. Ch + Pub victims = offenders against at least one child under 11 *and* at least one pubescent aged 12–14.

the ratio of the offenders against female children vs. offenders against male children would have to be recalculated to 14.7:1 (1.93 × 7.66).

When incorporating the proportions of true pedophiles, this ratio changes. The sensitivities of the phallometric test of pedophilia calculated in the earlier study (cited above) by means of formula 1 were 78.2% for heterosexual pedophilia and 88.6% for homosexual pedophilia. The calculation of the sensitivities on the basis of data in the present sample rendered similar results:76.7% for heterosexual pedophilia and 84.9 % for homosexual pedophilia.

In our study,[22] the calculated proportions of pedophiles in these two groups (formula 2, see Method), were 24.6% pedophiles among the sole-incest offenders against only one female child (n = 21) and 25.6% pedophiles among the sole-incest offenders against two or more female children (n = 74).

In the earlier study, no estimates for groups of victimizers of only one male child and of victimizers of at least one male child *and* at least one male pubescent could be made because the numbers were too small. Therefore, the present study used the same estimate for victimizers of one male child *or* one male pubescent from the earlier study to estimate the number of pedophiles in the group of offenders with charges or accusations for victimizing one male child and the group of offenders against at least one male child *and* at least one male pubescent.

If assessed according to conversion method 1 (see above), the ratio of heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophiles in the present sample was 1.35:1. If assessed according to conversion method 2, this ratio was

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1.44:1. When considering the 7.6 factor of Abel et al., the two ratios of heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophiles, according to methods 1 and 2 above, would increase to 10.26:1, and 10.94:1.

DISCUSSION

The present study is part of a project that addresses potential etiological differences and connections between gynephilia, androphilia, and heterosexual and homosexual pedophilia. An earlier study assessed the ratio of the incidences of sex offenders against female children vs. sex offenders against male children.[12] This ratio (approximately 2:1) differed drastically from the ratio of gynephiles vs. androphiles (approximately 20:1).

Because not all sex offenders against children are pedophiles, the present study investigated whether this discrepancy reflected an analogous discrepancy between the ratio of the incidence of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles and the ratio of gynephiles vs. androphiles. The assessment of "true" pedophilia was carried out by means of a phallometric test procedure validated for this purpose.[11] The present study converted a ratio of offenders against female children vs. offenders against male children into the ratio of heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophiles.

The study also attempted to take into account the argument of Abel et al.[19, 20] that the much larger number of victims of offenders against male children increases the risk of these offenders being caught. Abel et al. did not estimate this risk increase (represented by the number of offenders caught) as a function of the reported number of victims. However, the numerous social factors entering the relationship between the number of victims and the risk of being apprehended at present permit only a tentative assessment. For this reason, the present study used an estimate for this increase that, on the basis of clinical experience, appeared to be realistic. This correction brought the ratio of heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophiles to approximately 11:1.

There does not appear to be any indication that the discussed differences between offender groups were due to differences in ethnicity, age, education, or occupational status. An interesting finding was that in contrast to nonincest cases, the proportions of pedophiles among incestuous single victimizers and multiple victimizers of female children appear to be equal, which is in agreement with the notion that a majority of these incest offenders are not pedophiles or, in other words, that in incest offenses against female children causes other than pedophilia are in the foreground.

The question might be asked why, at a stage where in this area of research there is still a dearth of knowledge and where the few available methods are still very crude, efforts are being made to test the validity of clinical or epidemiological impressions. It appears, however, that this should not be a reason to leave observed asymmetries unexplored, as long as the methods used in such explorations are sufficiently clear

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to make possible relatively unambiguous replication. This holds true in particular for etiologically oriented research into pedophilia where the existing etiological theories are basically untestable. The reason is, as demonstrated by Garland and Dougher,[23] that the observational basis of these theories is either highly unreliable or nonexistent.[24, 25]

At the present state of our knowledge in regard to the paraphilias, the method of "strong inference" inductive approach[26] used in the more developed sciences (e.g., molecular biology) can, however, only be crudely emulated. This may be accomplished by devising optimal crucial comparisons and multiple hypotheses that could make possible (in the present case very preliminary) simultaneous refutation of more than one hypothesis, serving to maximally narrow the number of the still unrefuted possibilities as much as possible.

Seen from this point of view, the present study may be interpreted as testing simultaneously three alternative hypotheses: 1) heterosexual pedophilia is equally related etiologically to gynephilia as homosexual pedophilia is related to androphilia; 2) with a heterosexual development, the resulting proportion of pedophiles is greater than with a homosexual development; 3) with a homosexual development, the resulting proportion of pedophiles is greater than with a heterosexual development.

The typical ratios for heterosexual vs. homosexual pedophilia, which would be expected for each of these three hypotheses if valid, are 20:1, a ratio notably larger than 20:1, and a ratio notably smaller than 20:1. The possibility that there is no etiological relationship whatsoever between pedophilic gender preference and gynephilia or androphilia cannot be excluded. Barring other factors, the most convincing support of this possibility would be a ratio of 1:1.

Support was given by these results to hypothesis 3, according to which a homosexual development notably often does not result in androphilia but in homosexual pedophilia.[12] Hypothesis 2 was weakened most; also weakened was hypothesis 1. This, of course, should not be understood as saying that androphiles may have a greater propensity to offend against children than do gynephiles, a myth refuted in an earlier study.[27]

The present results may be very temporary, either because subsequent estimates based on much greater numbers of subjects may be different, or because better methods of calculating these estimates may be found available in the near future and may not lead to the same conclusions as the present investigation. Nonetheless, the study reported above does not appear to be redundant as a first basis of orientation and challenge for constructing etiological theories of pedophilia.

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