

From Victim To Abuser
Elizabeth D. Wilson

Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia
Helms School of Government

A National Divide: Assessing freedom & the rule of law in a post 2020 world.

March 24-26, 2022

Abstract

In the last decade, awareness of sexual abuse has been spear headed by celebrities, foundations, and the #Me Too Movement. While this awareness has brought to light the abuse experienced by grown women on movie sets and in the work place, it has failed to expose the sexual abuse experienced by young children in households and other private facilities. This paper highlights this abuse and brings awareness to the silent cry for help by these young children. What compels pedophiles to enact their sexual desires and fantasies? There is no clear answer to this question; however, recent studies suggest that pedophilia may stem from former childhood sexual abuse. This ideology “victim to abuser” will be juxtaposed with various scenarios and theories and examined throughout this paper.

Introduction

Throughout history, children have been grotesquely abused by adults to fulfill sexual desires. These unnatural sexual desires have been satisfied by child temple prostitutes, child brides, child sex trafficking (exploitation), and pornography. What compels pedophiles to sexually abuse vulnerable children? This question has been asked by criminal justice professionals and communities for centuries. If one could discover the origin of these sexual desires, then theoretically, child sexual abuse could become nonexistent. The ideology that pedophilia stems from former childhood sexual abuse could unearth new methods for treating child victims and combatting child sexual abuse.

Hypothesis: During adulthood, victims of child molestation, rape, exploitation, or pornography are often likely to go from victim to abuser by committing or engaging in the same heinous crimes.

Victims of Sexual Abuse

Unwittingly, individuals tend to view women as the victims of sexual assault (1 out of every 6 American women is molested) and men as rapists (Rainn, 2021, para. 2). While this depiction is accurate, it is vital to mention that men are often subjected to sexual abuse by both males and females. Frequently, foundations narrowly focus on advocating to end violation of women’s bodies that they neglect advocating for their male counterparts. For example, recent studies have concluded that 1 in 33 males are raped or experience attempted rape (Rainn, 2021). In the last decade, two sex scandals have been leaked to the public ultimately disclosing the true character of Father James Porter and Jerry Sandusky (CNN, 2021; The Boston Globe, 2004). Moreover, it was revealed that Father James Porter molested approximately 100 young boys and girls, resulting in his sentence of up to 20 years in prison (CNN, 2021). Unfortunately, Father James

Porter is just one of the 1,700 priests/clergies who were indicted for sexual abuse (Lauer, 2019). Similar to the priests, Jerry Sandusky has been charged with molesting over 15 boys resulting in an upward sentence of 60 years in prison (CNN, 2021).

Abusers

There has been a long-held myth that rapists are often strangers to the victim; however, this myth has been debunked. Recent studies, though, demonstrated that rapists are not strangers to the victim; rather, they are often family members, relatives, and intimate friends (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d). This type of sexual abuse is often called incest. Many individuals imagine incest being committed by a father, stepfather, or uncle; however, mothers and brothers are often contributors to this abuse (Siegel, 2019).

Furthermore, many individuals try to deny that women – who have been viewed for centuries as the nurturing member of the family – would molest and aid in abusing their biological and adopted children (Kort, 2021). “Maternal sexual abuse of sons is difficult for people to acknowledge because it violates taboos and core expectations of maternal behavior” (Kort, 2021, para. 1). For example, a Cambridge student named Marcus committed suicide, because he was unable to cope with the trauma, he experienced from being sexually abused as a child by his mother (NZ Herald, 2017). Likewise, “one woman and her brother had been sexually abused by their mother and then forced into “sexual play” with one another” (McDonald & Martinez, 2017, para. 20).

Additionally, many individuals find it unfathomable that brothers would molest their sisters. Sadly, sibling abuse is all too common and is considered the most prevalent abuse found inside households (Tener, 2019). Disturbingly, boys as young as seven have been known to rape their five-year-old sisters (Tener, 2019). While sibling rape may start at a young age, this rape can also be enacted by older brothers on their toddler sisters or high school sisters (Tener, 2019).

If these statistics are not grotesque enough, victims of sexual abuse admitted to multiple members of their family rapping them one after another (Katz et al., 2021). One survivor said, “once the night started, it was never known how it would end and who would come to their room: “You are asking me who touched me? Well, they all do. When I am going to sleep, I never know who will come. Sometimes it is one after the other like they were organizing everything” (Katz et al., 2021, para. 31).

Exposure to sex

Pornography is often the catalyst behind brutal sexual molestation. According to Siegel (2019), “watching violent or pornographic films featuring women who are beaten, raped, or tortured has been linked to sexually aggressive behavior in men” (p.10-2e). Exposure to pornography can start at a young age; for instance, a young male admitted to watching pornography at a young age with his dad (McKibbin, et al., 2017). This young man went on to say that “I love pornography” and “dirty Snapchats” (McKibbin, et al., 2017, para. 55). One survivor of sibling sexual abuse divulged that her “brother forced her to perform oral sex on his friend. She believed that they had been primarily influenced by pornography. Another woman reported that her brother began abusing her by showing her pornography as a means of teaching her to engage in sexual activities with him” (McDonald & Martinez, 2017, para. 25).

Unimaginable Horrors

Unfortunately, the shock value behind the terms “rape” and “molested” have slowly diminished over the past few decades as individuals have become desensitized. Rather than making a person cringe, these words seemingly make an individual experience more than a fleeting second of compassion for the victim who experienced these detestable acts. When the word “rape” is used, naively individuals picture a man holding down a woman and violating her body. Oftentimes, rape is more than just the uniting of sexual organs; rather, it can be a traumatizing, inhuman, and degrading experience. Sexual victims lose their value and are viewed more as an object than a human being.

For example, recent studies have discovered that male college students view pornography every day and try enacting the same sexual actions in pornography films on fellow college students (Foubert & Bridges, 2016). Not only is pornographic sex grotesque but it is also unsanitary. For example, the trendy thing on social media is to perform sexual intercourse orally or anally (Foubert & Bridges, 2016). In accordance with this trend, it is not uncommon for a campus man to “put his penis in a woman’s anus and then immediately into her mouth, without washing or changing condoms” or “inserting a penis down a woman’s throat so hard that it causes gagging and vomiting” (Foubert & Bridges, 2016, para. 8).

While it is harrowing to imagine a woman being exploited against her will for pornographic images/videos which will be sold online, it is even more detestable that children as young as a day old are also exploited across the internet for pornographic videos – this is often referred to as “child porn” (Handrahan, 2017, p. 51). Sadly, many fathers will sell videos of them raping their infant daughters (Handrahan, 2017). For example, “on one pedophile chat, a father who was raping his four-year-old daughter switched to raping his 18-month-old

daughter, saying ‘I’ve got to start early, even though she’s young ... before my daughter starts talking’” (Handrahan, 2017, p. 51). While it is appalling to think of infants being exploited on the internet, it is even more abominable to learn that men can put in orders for certain types of child pornographic videos. One man requested a video of an infant being raped and said, “the bloodier [the baby] the better” (Handrahan, 2017, p. 31).

Why the Silence?

Many individuals question why children of sexual abuse remain silent and avoid making allegations against their abusers and refrain from telling their parents. Often times the rhetorical answer is “shame” (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d.). While shame can be one of the leading causes for this self-imposed silence, the answer to this silence is often deeper than shame and is rooted in selflessness and family preservation (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d.). According to recent studies, many children “understand that speaking the truth will inflict pain on their parents, and they may choose to protect their families from the emotional upheaval” (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d., para. 5). Even though many adults believe that they can handle the truth; sadly, this childish fear is well-founded. For example, one young lady who was raped by her stepfather on the nights her mother worked night shift recounted the tragic event that unfolded when her mother discovered the truth, “hearing the heartbreaking news [Mom] collapsed and never woke up again” (Adinew, et al., 2018, p. 4). Anger, fear, anxiety, shock, sadness, threat to parental identity, confusion, and wondering why their child did not tell them sooner – these are other common feelings experienced by parents who discover the harrowing truth that their child has been molested (McElvaney & Nixon, 2019; Rainn, 2021). Among the emotions experienced by parents, the one children are most afraid of is “disbelief” (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d.). Survivors of childhood sexual abuse allege that “the failure of a parent to believe them is a wound that never truly heals” (O’Grady & Matthews-Creech, n.d., para. 11).

From Victim to Abuser

Social learning theory

For centuries, researchers have been endeavoring to discover what causes an individual to rape and abuse vulnerable individuals. Many researchers have linked this detestable behavior to the *Social Learning Theory* (Siegel, 2019). According to this theory, “people are not born with the ability to act violently; rather, they learn to be aggressive through their life experiences” (Siegel, 2019, p. 5-4B). For example, children who have had “prolonged exposure to violence” rehearse the violent actions and become desensitized by these violent outbursts

and view them as normal (Siegel, 2019, p. 5-4c). Pedophile behavior has been linked to “errors in cognition and information processing” and has resulted in pedophiles identifying children as “being able to and wanting to engage in sexual activity with adults” (Siegel, 2019, p. 5-4c).

Behavioral theory

Similarly (to the Social Learning Theory), the Behavioral Theory “maintains that human actions are developed through learning experiences” (Siegel, 2019, p. 5-4b). For example, a man who had been sexually molested by his babysitter when he was a tweenager “developed a sexual fetish that caused him to associate an object—a woman’s old sneaker—with sexual arousal;” sadly, this young man ended up killing 17 women and executing countless date rapes (Siegel, 2019, chapter 9 introduction). “Experiencing sexual trauma has been linked with the desire to inflict sexual trauma on others” (Siegel, 2019, 10-2e).

Parental Deviance

Another influence on how a child develops into an adult is the behavior of their parent, this ideology is known as parental deviance (Siegel, 2019). This phenomenon is demonstrated at the Elmira Correctional Facility in New York; inside of this facility, Bernard Peters and his son Scott share a cell for crimes they committed in 1995 (Siegel, 2019). In the case of pedophiles, it is commonly believed “that pedophilia is heritable and that genetic factors are responsible for the development of pedophilia” (Siegel, 2019, p. 452).

Breaking the Cycle

Although it is common for children of sexual abuse to go from victim to abuser, this is not the case for all victims. Those who manage to turn their lives around are often said to have “broken the cycle.” Elizabeth Smart, Jaycee Dugard, and David Pelzer are prime examples of individuals who have broken the cycle of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse. Elizabeth Smart, who was held captive for nine months and “repeatedly raped, starved and forced to drink alcohol and view pornography” chose to use the horrors of her teenage years to help others (Biography, 2021, para. 1). Smart once said, “how will I integrate what's happened into who I choose to become in the future?” (Good Reads, 2021). She answered this question when she established the Elizabeth Smart Foundation based on her motto “I believe” (she aspires to make a safe place for victims to divulge their traumatic experiences) (Elizabeth Smart Foundation, 2021).

Similarly, Jaycee Dugard was also kidnapped and subjected to molestation; however, she remained in captivity for eighteen years and birthed two daughters by her rapist (Biography, 2021). Dugard once said, “I don't believe

in hate. To me it wastes too much time. People who hate waste so much of their life hating that they miss out on all the other stuff out here” (Good Reads, 2021). Rather than follow the cycle “victim to abuser,” Dugard chose to forgive her perpetrators.

Lastly, David Pelzer was a victim of his mother’s abuse and was not considered a human being but rather an “it” (Famous Author, 2020). The abuse he experienced is the “most horrendous and gruesome of all such cases reported by that time in California” (Famous Author, 2020, para. 2). Pelzer once said that “it is important for people to know that no matter what lies in their past, they can overcome the dark side and press on to a brighter world” (Good reads, 2021). Instead of transforming from victim to abuser, Pelzer chose to join the bright world rather than engage in a dark one.

Conclusion

While recent evidence supports the premise of victim to abuser, more research needs to be conducted before this ideology is considered fact, especially since, certain individuals break this cycle of abuse and go on to become model citizens. For instance, research needs to be conducted to discover what causes victims of abuse to break this cycle – Religion? If researchers could discover what ends this cycle, then perhaps sexual abuse could become nonexistent. Lastly, the most pressing concern is the fact that children silently endure these horrors. Methods need to be developed to expose abuse before it becomes detrimental and life-altering. Psalms 82:4 says, “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (English Standard Version, 2001).

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