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Relationship between family characteristics and sex offences by young males.

Berenice Guzman Castillo

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THE RELATION OF FAMILY STRUCTURE AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING BETWEEN VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT YOUNG OFFENDERS.

Background and Rationale

Introduction

The influence of an unhealthy family functioning and how a family is structured may impact on the development of a child. Nowadays the cases of children who commit criminal offences are rising and therefore more people try to understand which factors encourage young criminal behaviour.

Some researchers have suggested that the family structure is an important factor on the child growth. Family structure relates to the composition and membership of the family and the organization and patterning of relationships among individual family members (Encyclopedia, 2003). Brown (2004) suggests that children from single mothers or cohabiting households are more likely to exhibit behavioural and emotional problems, with a higher risk for delinquency. They are less likely to be sociable, complete high school, or gain secure employment than children raised in intact married-parent households.

Family functioning is the extent to which family members are emotionally bonded, how they communicate effectively their emotions and concerns, and respond supportively and openly to problems. Family functioning matters for the child's well-being, and if there is not a healthy family functioning the growing of this child could be affected on some many aspects. Evidence suggests that poor levels of family functioning are associated with lower educational attainment and a wide range of child physical and mental health problems, indirect aggression and depression and antisocial behavior (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2013) (Demuth & Brown, 2004).

As mentioned above, the structure of the family, the effects of parental marital status, the family support, the communication within family, etc.; may contribute to the criminal behaviour in children and adolescents. Nowadays, more young people are being imprisoned because of their delinquent behaviour.

According to the UK's Youth Justice System (YJS) , in 2013/14 there were 33,902 young people sentenced in England and Wales. In 2013/14, there were 90,769 proven offences by young people that resulted in a formal disposal (either in or out of court). The main offence types for young people in 2013/14 were (See Figure 1):

Violence against the person (including common assault) (22 per cent)

Theft and handling (18 per cent)

Criminal damage (11 per cent)

There were 1,653 sexual offences for which a young person was convicted in 2013/14, this accounted for two per cent of all offences.

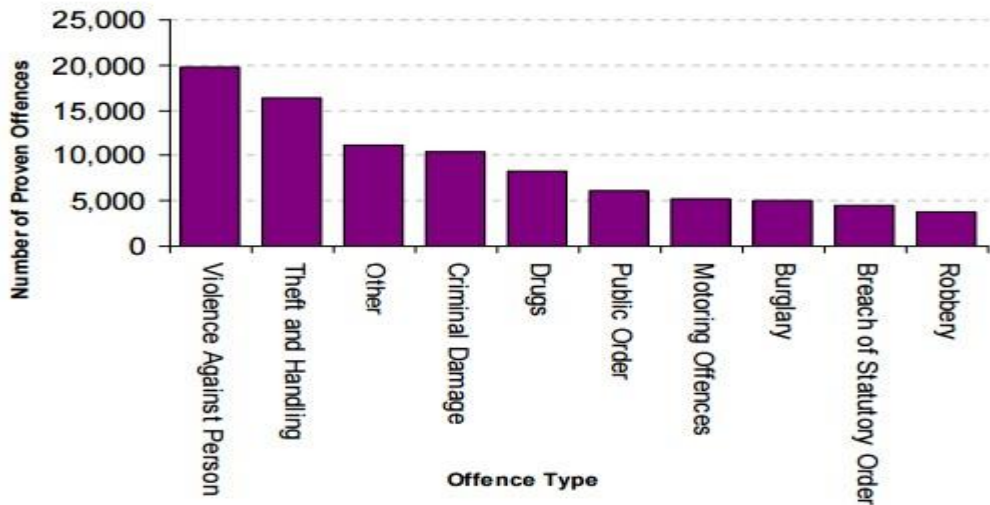


Figure 1: Type of proven offences by young people between 2013-2014.(MinistryofJustice, 2015)

In light of the data from the 2013/2014 study, there is evidence that at least 24 per cent of the offences were violent. According to the general theories of crime, it is said that it is unnecessary to distinguish the causes for the frequency of violent offending from that of nonviolent offending. However, other theories suggest that the prevalence and frequency of violence has a behavioral development that is distinct from that of nonviolent offending (MacDonald, Haviland, & Morral, 2009).

Farrington (1989) identified a number of childhood family characteristics that were associated with convictions for violent offenses. He assessed family factors as well as a number of individual-difference characteristics, among 411 boys between 8 and 10-year of age. He then reported that a number of family factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, discipline, authoritarian child-rearing attitudes, and parental disagreement on discipline) were associated with later violent outcomes. In addition, several individual-difference characteristics (e.g., impulsivity, risk-taking behavior, and lack of concentration) were found to be associated with violent outcomes.

In New Zealand, a study led by Henry, Caspi, Moffitt, and Silva (1996), the relations between family characteristics, childhood temperament and convictions for violent and nonviolent offenses at age 18 (in a representative birth cohort of men who are part of a longitudinal study), were examined. Multivariate analysis of variance and logistic regression analyses indicated that family factors were associated with both types of conviction outcomes, whereas

childhood temperament was associated primarily with convictions for violent offenses. The potentially distinct roles of social and self-regulation in the development of antisocial behavior were discussed.

However, in a study published in 2010, Robertson & Burton probed the differences in childhood maltreatment between violent and non-violent delinquents. The data collected from a sample of 161 males (imprisoned youth) compared the maltreatment histories of violent ($n = 59$) and nonviolent ($n = 78$) offenders. They measured the frequency of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect for both groups. The result was that violent offenders reported significantly greater frequency of physical neglect and sexual abuse and a higher total score on a Childhood Trauma Questionnaire than nonviolent offenders.

This contradicts the Henry et al (1996) study suggesting that there may be more differences in the amount and type of maltreatment experienced by violent and nonviolent offenders than previously thought.

Although it was studied separately and different authors have found different outcomes, the existing available literature does not provide enough evidence to suggest that there is a difference in family structure and family functioning between becoming violent or non-violent offender. This means, taking everything into account, that there is a great potential for research in the impact of family functioning and family structure between violent and non-violent offenders.

Research Question, Aim, Objectives and Hypotheses

The research question of this project would be: Is there any difference on the family structure and family functioning between violent and non-violent young offenders?

The aims of this research are to (i) identify whether there is any difference on the family structure between violent and non-violent young offenders; (ii) identify whether there is any difference on the family functioning between violent and non-violent young offenders.

The objectives of the study would be to (i) assess the influence of the family structure between violent and non-violent young offenders; (ii) assess the influence of the family functioning between violent and non-violent young offenders.

In light of the findings from the analysis and comparison of the database, it is hypothesized that:

(i) There are differences between violent and non-violent young offender's family structure, and that violent young offender's family structure would consistently differ from the family structure of the non-violent young offenders.

(ii) A difference would be found between violent and non-violent young offender's family functioning, and that violent young offender's family functioning would consistently differ from the family functioning of the non-violent young offenders.

Methodology

Sample, Procedure and Analysis

This study will consist on comparing the family functioning and family structure of violent and non-violent young offenders. The data used for this project is already collected and contains information about 166 UK's young offenders in 1999, 40 females and 126 males, between 11 and 17 years old. The statistical summary of all the variables will be prepared using standard statistical software (SPSS), to examine between group differences (violent/non-violent) in terms of family structure and family functioning.

Measurements

Statistical summary of variables

A. General Background

1. Age
2. Gender M / F
3. Offences Violent / Non-Violent

B. Specific questions

Family structure	Family functioning
1. Foster Home	1. Treatment for problems at home
2. Institutional Home	2. Counselling for problems in care
3. Adopted	3. Treatment for educational problems
4. Married-parent house	4. Treatment for psychological problems
5. Separate	5. Education
6. Divorced	6. Sexually abused within family
7. Single parent	7. Physical abused within family
8. Widowed	8. Neglected within family

9. Not know	9. Emotional abused within family
10. Step-mother	10. Domestic violence
11. Step-father	11. Criminality-family
12. Primary caregiver	

Statistical analysis

Exploratory analysis such as chi-square test will be carried out to analyse the relationship between the outcome variables and the other variables in the study.

To test causality between the outcome variables and the other variables in the study whereas taking into account possible confounding, logistic regression will be carried out.

Expected outcomes

This research project is expected to have the following outcomes:

1. Demonstrate the difference of family structure between violent and non-violent young offenders.
2. Demonstrate the difference of family functioning between violent and non-violent young offenders.
3. Analysis of the family factors as a link between violent and non-violent behaviour.

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The University of
Nottingham

Faculty of Medicine and
Health Sciences

Research Ethics Committee
School of Medicine Education Centre
B Floor, Medical School
Queen's Medical Centre Campus
Nottingham University Hospitals
Nottingham
NG7 2UH

Direct line/e-mail

+44 (0) 115 8232561

Louise.Sabir@nottingham.ac.uk

17th March 2016

Berenice Guzman Castillo
MSc Student, Forensic and Criminological Psychology
c/o Professor Kevin Browne
Professor of Forensic Psychology & Child Health/Director
Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology
School of Medicine
B25 YANG Fujia Building
Nottingham University Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road, Nottingham
NG8 1BB

Dear Berenice

Ethics Reference No: K17032016 SoM – please always quote

Study Title: The relation of family structure and family functioning between violent and non-violent young offenders.

Chief Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Kevin Browne, Forensic Psychology and Child Health/Director, Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, School of Medicine.

Lead Investigators/student: Berenice Guzman Castillo, MSc Forensic and Criminological Psychology Psychiatry and Applied Psychology, School of Medicine.

Other Key Investigators: n/a

Type of Study: MSc student project anonymised secondary dataset analysis

Proposed Start Date: 01/2016

Proposed End Date: 30/6/2016 6mths

No of Subjects: 166 anonymised datasets from established database.

Age: 11-17 year olds

Thank you for submitting the above application which has been reviewed by the Committee and the following documents were received:

Short Title: Family Functioning and family structure in violent and non-violent offenders:

FMHS Research Ethics Application form dated 17.03.2016

C84FRP: Research Proposal 17.03.2016

These have been reviewed and are satisfactory and this secondary analysis study of anonymised datasets from an established database has been given a favourable opinion.

Yours sincerely

Professor Ravi Mahajan
Chair, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND SEX OFFENCES BY YOUNG MALES.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between family characteristics and young sex offenders. The analysis used draws upon data from juvenile delinquents in the England's secure Youth Treatment Service in 1999, containing 126 males between 11 and 17 years old. A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the relationship of family factors (i.e., family structure, domestic violence, criminality, alcohol and drugs misuse, and psychiatric illness) on the likelihood that adolescents become sex offenders. Results suggest that all variables used in the logistic regression model were associated with committing a sex offence, except foster care, which reveals that foster placements are a protective factor related to sexual offending behaviours. Additional findings and implications are discussed.

Key words: sex offenders, family characteristics

1. Introduction

A wide range of literature was studied to develop a theoretical framework for the present study. The literature review was focused on the following areas: 1- Sex offenders 2- Family characteristics 3- The influence of how the family structure and family characteristics could impact on the development of a child.

According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, a sexual offence is considered as rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault and causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent. Taking the offence “sexual” as penetration, touching or any other activity is sexual if a reasonable person would consider that:

- (a) Whatever its circumstances or any person’s purpose in relation to it, it is because of its nature sexual, or
- (b) Because of its nature it may be sexual and because of its circumstances or the purpose of any person in relation to it (or both), it is sexual.

Nowadays the cases of sexual offences in the United Kingdom are rising and therefore there is an increasing interest in trying to understand which factors encourage this criminal behaviour. Although it is difficult to obtain reliable information of sexual offences as it is known that reporting rates for these type of offences are relatively low compared with other types of crimes. In June 2015, the Police database recorded an increase of 41% in all sexual

offences compared with the previous year (Flatley, 2015). Additionally, the Youth Justice Annual Statistics for 2014 to 2015 for England and Wales (2016) stated that in March 2015 there were 2,000 sexual offences for which a young person (aged 10-17) was convicted or cautioned.

Over the years, psychologists have identified a variety of factors that are understood to influence future criminal behaviours such as emotional problems, childhood history, family structure and other family characteristics. In a study led by Fisher, Beech, and Browne (1999) where a group of 140 child molesters were compared on a range of psychological measures to a group of 81 non-offenders, it was found that sex offenders are generally regarded as having low self-esteem, which may contribute to their offending. Low self-esteem in sex offenders, among other things, may be a chronic problem from childhood.

Some researchers have identified the childhood history as an important factor in future criminal behaviour. For example, the cycle of violence theory suggests that individuals who were abused or exposed to violence in their childhood have a higher likelihood of repeating this pattern as an adult (Widom, 1992).

Likewise, the family characteristics such as (i) composition and membership of the family; (ii) type of care; (iii) violence within the family; (iv) history of abuse and neglect; (v) alcohol and drugs misused among parents; have been recognised as other risk factors.

Brown (2004) suggests that children from single mothers or cohabiting households are more likely to exhibit behavioural and emotional problems, with a higher risk for delinquency. He believes that they are less likely to be sociable, complete high school, or gain secure employment than children raised in mother-father families. Relatedly, in a survey of 17,337 adult members of the Kaiser Health Plan in San Diego, CA., Dong, Anda, Dube, Giles, and Felitti (2003) found a significantly higher rate of parental divorce among respondents who reported childhood sexual abuse. Moreover, it is believed that the formation of secure attachments may be hindered by removal from one's childhood home or placement in the foster care system. Sexual offenders who were raised by non-biological parents or were removed from their childhood homes due to abuse and neglect appeared to pose a significantly higher risk for sexual offending recidivism than the non sex offenders (O'Toole & Jeglic, 2014).

Newton, Litrownik, and Landsverk (2000) suggest that unstable placement histories contribute to children's aggressive behaviour and that children who experience numerous changes in placement may be at particularly high risk for deleterious effects. Another study found that early sexual behaviour problems (such as aggressive sexual

behaviours) in adolescents were predicted by foster care placement instability and older age upon foster care entry (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008).

Another family characteristic factor that has been assessed in relation to young sexual offending is violence within the family. The American Psychological Association's Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family (2005), defined family violence and abuse as including a range of physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment by one family member against another; according to this definition, the term family includes a variety of relationships beyond those of blood or marriage.

In a sample of 164 subjects (ages 7–19) interviewed in a sexual abuse clinic regarding domestic violence or abusive experiences among family members, Kellogg and Menard (2003) found that sexual abuse was usually concurrent (77%) with family violence when the sexual offender was also the perpetrator of violence and in 86% of homes with partner violence, the children were also physically assaulted. Another study revealed that both the amount of marital violence witnessed as well as mother to children violence were significantly related to child behaviour problems, regardless of the father's status (i.e. whether the mother's partner was the biological father or stepfather/cohabitee) (O'Keefe, 1994). Sibling violence, as another form of abuse, is categorised in three ways: psychological, sexual, and physical. Conflict among siblings has been detected as a normal interaction. However in their research, Button and Gealt (2010) show that sibling abuse (in any three ways) significantly and uniquely affects the odds of delinquency and aggression.

As well as domestic violence, alcohol and drugs misuse play an important role in the risk factors of future offending behaviour. There may be about 8 million family members (children, parents, siblings) in the UK living with the negative consequences of someone else's drug or alcohol misuse and the children of parents with drinking problems are at significant risk for a range of emotional, behavioural, educational and learning problems whilst they are children or adolescents living at home and in contact with a problem drinking parent. Particularly, boys are more likely to experience anti-social behaviours (Velleman & Templeton, 2003).

Although it has been recognised that some childhood experiences affect the likelihood of young criminality and sex offending, there are still many gaps in the literature relating childhood family characteristics to young sexual offending in the United Kingdom.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between young sexual offending and family characteristics. Based on previous research, it was hypothesised that family characteristics of having been raised by single, non-biological

or separate parents, having had history of family violence (especially parents to children) and having had history of childhood abuse (especially sexual abuse) would be strongly correlated with a higher likelihood of aggressive sexual behaviour among adolescents.

2. Method

2.1 Materials and procedure

The historical data used for this project was obtained from the Youth Treatment Centre by Professor Kevin Browne, Director of Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences at The University of Nottingham. It comprises information about (N=166) England's young offenders in 1999, between 11 and 17 years of age, who have committed different crimes. The data contain two hundred and sixty-six variables, where it is specified: gender, education, family structure, family characteristics, psychiatric illness, types of crimes committed, among others. However, for this study, only males (N=126) were taken into account (due to the fact that sex offences were very rare among female subjects). The sample analysed was 126 males aged between 11 and 17 years old who had been residents in the secure Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham in 1998/1999.

SPSS Predictive Analytics Software v.22 (2013) was utilised to analyse the descriptive statistics and conduct the binary logistic regression analyses.

The data were first discarded because of the amount of missing data, the variables that had more than 20% of missing data were thrown out, and the rest of the variables were divided into two groups (outcome and predictor variables).

Those variables corresponding to family characteristics and those with less missing data were selected as predictor variables, as follows: (i) known physical abused within the family; (ii) known neglected within the family; (iii) known severe emotional abuse within family; (iv) alcohol/drug abuse by father; (v) alcohol/drug abuse by mother; (vi) violence by father to mother; (vii) violence by father to children; (viii) violence by mother to children; (ix) violence between brothers & sisters; (x) criminality-mother; (xi) psychiatric illness mother; (xii) step-mother or co-habitee; (xiii) step-father or co-habitee; (xiv) parents together; (xv) parents separated; (xvi) foster placements; (xvii) known sexually abused within the family; (xviii) father violent to others; (xix) mother violent to others; (xx) violence by mother to father. These variables were self-reported which values are Yes=1 and No=0.

The outcome variable used is (i) sexoffence, which value is Yes=1, No=0. This variable specified which young offenders have committed any sex offence (i.e., rape, attempt to rape, sexual misconduct, indecent assault, etc.).

The variables were descriptively analysed by percentage distributions and chi-square, and consequently, by logistic regression.

Specifically, a two-tail Fishers Exact test was used $p < 0.05$ as significant and those results in $p < 0.06$ to $p = 0.10$ as a trend. Variables that become significant and trend in the Fishers Exact test were included in the model. For the binary logistic regression multivariate analysis, the method used was “enter”, a procedure for variable selection in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step, and the probability of stepwise used was: entry: 0.100 and removal: 0.120.

To evaluate the goodness of fit of the logistic regression, the Hosmer & Lemeshow test ($p = >.05$) and the percentage of cases correctly classified (either as sex offenders or not) by the logistic regression model suggest if the model was a good fit to the data.

3. Results

3.1 Data

The next tables contain information about the data analysis of 126 young male offenders between 11 to 17 years of age (mean age 14, $SD = 1.4$), who have committed sex and non-sex offences. Table 1 shows a number of significant associations with young people who commit sex offences. The variables that were significant ($p < 0.05$) in the Fishers Exact test were: (i) known sexually abused within the family; (ii) father violent to others; (iii) mother violent to others; (iv) violence between siblings; and (v) violence by mother to father. The variable that was trend ($p < 0.06$ to $p = 0.10$) was (i) foster placements. These six variables were entered into a logistic regression.

Table.1 Family characteristics by sex and non-sex offenders.

Family characteristics		Sex offender				Total	Fishers Exact test
		No		Yes			
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Known sexually abused within the family	No	71	67	35	33	106	.023
	Yes	7	38.9	11	61.1	18	
Known physical abused within family	No	38	64.4	21	35.6	59	.775
	Yes	39	61.9	24	38.1	63	
Known neglected within family	No	47	61.3	30	39	77	.643
	Yes	30	65.2	16	34.8	46	
Known severe emotional abuse within family	No	52	65.8	27	34.2	79	.323
	Yes	25	56.8	19	43.1	44	

	s						
Alcohol / Drug abuse by father	No	45	64.3	25	35.7	70	.481
	Yes	23	57.5	17	42.5	40	
Alcohol/drug abuse by mother	No	52	61.9	32	38.1	84	.987
	Yes	18	62.0	11	37.9	29	
Violence by father to mother	No	40	67.8	19	32.2	59	.205
	Yes	28	56	22	44	50	
Violence by father to children	No	39	69.6	17	30.4	56	.158
	Yes	33	56.9	25	43.1	58	
Violence by mother to children	No	51	68.9	23	31.1	74	.202
	Yes	24	57.1	18	42.9	42	
Father violent to other	No	63	75	25	28.4	88	.001
	Yes	6	31.6	13	68.4	19	
Mother violent to other	No	68	66.7	34	33.3	102	.010
	Yes	3	27.3	8	72.8	11	
Violence between brothers & sisters	No	53	71.6	21	28.4	74	.009
	Yes	21	47.7	23	52.3	44	
Criminality-mother	No	59	64.8	32	35.2	91	.418
	Yes	14	56	11	44	25	
Psychiatric illness-mother	No	59	64.1	33	35.9	92	.808
	Yes	16	61.5	10	38.5	26	
Step-mother or co-habitee	No	63	64.9	34	35.1	97	.486
	Yes	16	72.7	6	27.3	22	
Step-father or co-habitee	No	36	63.1	21	36.8	57	.599
	Yes	42	67.7	20	32.3	62	
Parents together	No	62	63.2	36	36.7	98	.921
	Yes	18	64.3	10	35.7	28	
Parents separate	No	32	69.6	14	30.4	46	.283
	Yes	48	60	32	40	80	
Foster placements	No	23	53.5	20	51.1	43	.094
	Yes	53	68.8	24	31.2	77	
Violence by mother to father	No	64	66.7	32	33.3	96	.013
	Yes	5	33.3	10	66.7	15	

3.2 Binary logistic regression multivariate analysis

To determine if the family characteristics are predictive of the likelihood that adolescents become young sex offenders, a binary logistic regression multivariate was performed. All variables included in the model are statistically significant or trend ($p < .10$). The model explained $p < .066$ (Hosmer & Lemeshow) of the variance in sex offence. The classification table (See Table 2.) identified how many of the cases of non-sex offence or sex offence respectively have been correctly predicted. In this study, 96,6% were correctly classified as the no sex offence group and 28,6% for the sex offence group. Overall 73% were correctly classified.

Table.2 Classification table of sex and non-sex offenders

Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
	No sex offence	Sex offence	
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	%
No sex offence	63	2	96.9
Sex offence	25	10	28.6
Overall Percentage			73

The results reveal that the variables (i) mother violent to father; (ii) father violent to other; (iii) mother violent to other; (iv) violence between siblings; and (v) known as sexually abused within the family; did not show a statistical significance ($p > 0.05$) in the model but they may be related to sexual offending behaviour. Foster placements, on the contrary, resulted as a protective factor, which means that it is 64% ($(1 - e^{\beta})$, $\beta = -1.029$) less likely to commit a sex offence if an adolescent has been living in one or more foster placements. (See Table. 3).

Table.3 Coefficients of the model predicting the relationship between family characteristics ($p < .100$) and sex offence

Family characteristics	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
				Lower	Upper
Mother violent to father	0,454	0,641	1,575	0,233	10,644
Father violent to other	0,315	0,683	1,37	0,303	6,196
Mother violent to other	1,659	0,282	5,255	0,256	107,701
Violence between siblings	0,42	0,411	1,522	0,56	4,136

Known as sexually abused within the family	1,103	0,163	3,014	0,64	14,195
Foster placements	-1,029	0,044	0,357	0,132	0,971

4. Discussion

Findings from this study suggest that the predictor variables (i) mother violent to father; (ii) father violent to others; (iii) mother violent to others; (iv) violence between siblings; and (v) known as sexually abused within the family; did not show significance ($p > .05$) in the statistical model. However, regardless of the logistic regression result, the two-tail Fishers Exact test shows that these variables, in particular, may be associated to an aggressive sexual behaviour. Meaning that the result concurs with our hypothesis, since it is believed that variables related to family structure, violence within the family and sexual abused, would be strongly associated with the sexual offending behaviour among young offenders. As well as other researchers' opinion (Skuse et al.), our result is consistent with the belief that adolescents that have been sexually abused and have been exposed to a climate of interfamilial violence are at a high risk of developing a sexually abusive behaviour.

Furthermore, results also indicate that young sex offenders who have lived in one or more foster placements were less likely to commit any sex offences in comparison with those who have not. This last result reinforces the importance of the foster cares, since removing the child from their homes as a consequence of the abuse and neglect lived, could prevent future aggressive sexual behaviours. However, our findings did not support the commonly reported belief that the greater number of foster placements an individual experiences, the greater the risk of deleterious effects (Newton et al., 2000). Yet, the variable foster placement is recorded in such a manner that it is not possible to differentiate individuals with just one foster placement or more than seven (55% of the individuals have lived in one to six foster placements and 9% have lived in more than 7). In addition, there are other factors in relation to foster care that might also modify the effect on our outcome variable and they are not being recorded in our dataset such as type of placement, reason for admission, age at placement and discharge, number of placements, time in care and contact and closeness with biological and foster families.

Our study has a couple of strengths: first we included a completed list of variables to measure family characteristics that haven been previously recognised in the literature. Second, our logistic model was very good at predicting cases (73% accuracy), strengthening our results.

However, the study has also some limitations. The data were collected 20 years ago, the study was limited because of the small sample size and the amount of missing data. Consequently, some variables lacked enough observations to make adequate comparisons and, therefore, were excluded from analysis. The limited sample might have reduced the power of analyses to identify a significant interaction between the variables. Most of the variables are self-reported which might lead to underreporting of violence within the family. Also because data was collected in 1999 some definitions might have changed since then, for example according to the UK law the definition of sexual offence (e.g. sexual misconduct or indecent assault) has considerably changed in the last decades. The data were collected in Birmingham so it is not possible to make inferences on the British population. Further studies need to collect or obtain a database from more recent years and take into consideration that the size of the sample is really important for the accuracy of the model.

In conclusion, the present study indicates that the combination of risk factors such as having experienced violence within the family and having suffered from sexual abuse, increases the chances of developing a sexually abusive behaviour. By the contrast, a foster placement could be a protective factor. For this reason, we suggest to implement interventions for the treatment of abusive sexual behaviour, based on the specific risk factors such as history of family violence and history of childhood abuse (especially sexual abuse), in order to reduce the risk of reoffending; and support the development of interventions that promote placement stability as a means to improve outcomes among youth entering care.

5. Acknowledgments

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Word count: 3257

Executive summary

This research examine the relationship between family characteristics and sex offending among teenagers between 11 and 17 years old. The research draws attention to the influence of an unhealthy family functioning and how a family is structured, as it may impact on the development of a child.

Around the world, the cases of children who commit criminal offences are rising and therefore more people are trying to understand which factors encourage young criminal behaviour.

In order to understand this problem, it is important to clarify some terminology. As for family structure, it is related to the composition and membership of the family and the organisation and patterning of relationships among individual family members. Family functioning is the extent to which family members are emotionally bonded, how they communicate effectively their emotions and concerns, and respond supportively and openly to problems. Finally, a sexual offence (According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003) is considered as rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault and causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent. Taking the offence "sexual" as penetration, touching or any other activity is sexual if a reasonable person would consider that:

- (a) Whatever its circumstances or any person's purpose in relation to it, it is because of its nature sexual, or
- (b) Because of its nature it may be sexual and because of its circumstances or the purpose of any person in relation to it (or both), it is sexual.

Although it has been recognised that some childhood experiences affect the likelihood of young criminality and sex offending, there are still many gaps in the literature relating childhood family characteristics to young sexual offending in the United Kingdom.

Thereby, in order to provide support and guidance to the appropriate authorities on violence prevention and child protection, it is important to understand the causes of the sex and criminal behaviours in our children.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between young sexual offending and family characteristics. Based on previous research, it was hypothesised that family characteristics of having been raised by single, non-biological or separate parents, having had history of family violence (especially parents to children) and having had history of childhood abuse (especially sexual abuse) would be strongly correlated with a higher likelihood of aggressive sexual behaviour among adolescents.

The historical data used for this project was obtained from the Youth Treatment Centre by Professor Kevin Browne, Director of Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences at The University of Nottingham. It comprises information about (N=166) England's young offenders in 1999, between 11 and 17 years of age, who have committed different crimes. The data contain two hundred and sixty-six variables, where it is specified: gender, education, family structure, family characteristics, psychiatric illness, types of crimes committed, among others. However, for this study, only males (N=126) were taken into account (due to the fact that sex offences were very rare among female subjects). The sample analysed was 126 males aged between 11 and 17 years old who had been residents in the secure Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham in 1998/1999.

SPSS Predictive Analytics Software v.22 (2013) was utilised to analyse the descriptive statistics and conduct the binary logistic regression analyses.

The data were first discarded because of the amount of missing data, the variables that had more than 20% of missing data were thrown out, and the rest of the variables were divided into two groups (outcome and predictor variables). Those variables corresponding to family characteristics and those with less missing data were selected as predictor variables.

The variables were descriptively analysed by percentage distributions and chi-square, and consequently, by logistic regression.

Specifically, a two-tail Fishers Exact test was used $p < 0.05$ as significant and those results in $p < 0.06$ to $p = 0.10$ as a trend. Variables that become significant and trend in the Fishers Exact test were included in the model. For the binary logistic regression multivariate analysis, the method

used was "enter", a procedure for variable selection in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step, and the probability of stepwise used was: entry: 0.100 and removal: 0.120.

To evaluate the goodness of fit of the logistic regression, the Hosmer & Lemeshow test ($p = >.05$) and the percentage of cases correctly classified (either as sex offenders or not) by the logistic regression model suggest if the model was a good fit to the data.

Findings from this study suggest that the predictor variables (i) mother violent to father; (ii) father violent to others; (iii) mother violent to others; (iv) violence between siblings; and (v) known as sexually abused within the family; did not show significance ($p >.05$) in the statistical model. However, regardless of the logistic regression result, the two-tail Fishers Exact test shows that these variables, in particular, may be associated to an aggressive sexual behaviour. Meaning that the result concurs with our hypothesis, since it is believed that variables related to family structure, violence within the family and sexual abused, would be strongly associated with the sexual offending behaviour among young offenders.

Furthermore, results also indicated that young sex offenders who have lived in one or more foster placements were less likely to commit any sex offences in comparison with those who have not. This last result reinforces the importance of the foster cares, since removing the child from their homes as a consequence of the abuse and neglect lived, could prevent future aggressive sexual behaviours.

This results, suggest that the combination of risk factors such as have experienced violence within the family and have suffered from sexual abuse, increases the chances of developing a sexually abusive behaviour. By the contrast, a foster placement could be a protective factor.

For this reason, we suggest to implement interventions for the treatment of abusive sexual behaviour, based on the specific risk factors such as history of family violence and history of childhood abuse (especially sexual abuse), in order to reduce the risk of reoffending; and support the development of interventions that promote placement stability as a means to improve outcomes among youth entering care.

In case of further studies, we recommend to collect or obtain a database from more recent years and take into consideration that the size of the sample is really important for the accuracy of the model.

Word count: 1053

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION SLIDES



Relationship between family characteristics and sex offences by young males.

Berenice Guzman Castillo

Email contact: msxbga@nottingham.ac.uk

Aims and rationale

- The present study aims to explore the relationship between young sexual offending and family characteristics.
- Although it has been recognised that some childhood experiences affect the likelihood of young criminality and sex offending, there are still many gaps in the literature relating childhood family characteristics to young sexual offending in the United Kingdom.

Methodology

- The sample analysed was 126 males aged between 11 and 17 years old who had been residents in the secure Glentworth Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham in 1998/1999.
- SPSS Predictive Analytics Software v.22 (2013) was utilised to analyse the descriptive statistics and conduct the binary logistic regression analyses.
- The data were first discarded because of the amount of missing data, the variables that had more than 20% of missing data were thrown out, and the rest of the variables were divided into two groups (outcome and predictor variables).
- The variables were descriptively analysed by percentage distributions and chi-square, and consequently, by logistic regression.

Results

- The results reveal that the variables (i) mother violent to father; (ii) father violent to other; (iii) mother violent to other; (iv) violence between siblings; and (v) known as sexually abused within the family; did not show a statistical significance ($p > 0.05$) in the model but they may be related to sexual offending behaviour.
- Foster placements, on the contrary, resulted as a protective factor, which means that it is 64% less likely to commit a sex offence if an adolescent has been living in one or more foster placements.

Implications

- The findings from the research concur with the hypothesis that the combination of risk factors such as having experienced violence within the family and having suffered from sexual abuse, increases the chances of developing a sexually abusive behaviour.
- By the contrast, the results of this study identified the foster care as a protective factor.
- For this reason, we suggest to implement interventions for the treatment of abusive sexual behaviour, based on the specific risk factors such as history of family violence and history of childhood abuse (especially sexual abuse), in order to reduce the risk of reoffending; and support the development of interventions that promote placement stability as a means to improve outcomes among youth entering care.

Suggestions for future research

- Future researchers should keep into consideration that :
 1. It is preferable to work with a database of recent years.
 2. Size of the sample is really important for the accuracy of the model
 3. The list of variables to measure has to be recognised in the literature review and its definition needs to be from recent years.

REFLECTIVE REPORT OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

When I started the Masters course, I already had a predetermined idea of what I wanted to do for my research project. My main objective was to conduct a researched focused on youth violence and I only needed to find a supervisor that shared the same interest. The Department of Applied Psychology gave us a list of the names of potential academic staff with their respective areas of interest. Among my options were Professor Kevin Browne and Dr. Vincent Egan.

On October 19th, 2015, I received an email from the Director of the Masters course, Shihning Chou, assigning me with my supervisors, according to the next scheme: 90% of responsibility to Professor Kevin Browne and the rest to Ruth Tully.

My first meeting with Professor Browne was on November 10th, 2015; at his office in the Applied Psychology building. In this meeting, we discussed my research topic and we agreed that study about the relationship between the family characteristics and youth violence was an excellent topic for the research project of the course.

On November 20th, 2015; my supervisor showed me a database of one hundred and sixty-six young offenders between 11 and 17 years old who had been residents in the secure Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham in 1998/1999. We agreed that such database could be used for my project since gathering that kind of information nowadays requires a lot of bureaucratic steps and paperwork.

From that moment on, I got started with the literature review, focusing on topics such as interfamilial violence, alcohol and drug misuse within the family and family structure (non-biological parent, single parent, primary care given, among others). Also, I searched for topics about violent and non-violent young offenders, its risk factors and recidivism. All this information helped me to start putting together my

research proposal.

On December 19th, 2015, I sent via email the first draft of my research proposal and I also booked an appointment with my supervisor to discuss my progress. By the end of January 2016, I sent Dr. Kevin the definitive research proposal and the ethics approval format.

Our first meeting of the present year was on February 2nd. In this meeting my supervisor and I talked about my strengths and limitations since one of the issues which I faced was that I had never written a scientific paper in a language that was not my native one. Also, the structure of the research proposal was not suitable for the academic level of the Masters course. Thanks to this meeting, I understood that I had to put more effort into the future pieces of work that I had to deliver.

On March 16th, 2016, Dr. Kevin and I checked the database and based on various analysis that we made with the Fisher exact test, we found potential findings for my project. On that same day, he explained to me that an approval from the Ethics Department was not necessary since I was not going to work directly with people but rather with a database that had previously been collected, however, it was required that I got a letter from them giving me permission to start conducting my research. The next day, I received the letter from the Ethics Department.

From that moment on, I started a more extensive literature review which gave an indication of which variables I needed to use for my research. After collecting the necessary information, I began to play with the database with the purpose of identifying the outcome and predictor variables.

On May 5th, 2016 I met with my supervisor again to discuss the progress of my project and I told him about the problems that I was having because of the missing data. However, we thought that these problems were not going to be very important.

On that same day, I sent a notification to the Postgraduate Student Centre telling them that I intended to submit my dissertation on August 1st, 2016.

On July 14th, 2016, I received a confirmation email from the Postgraduate Student Centre about the notification that I had previously sent to them.

The next meeting with Dr. Kevin was on July 14th via Skype. In this meeting I gave him the abstract, introduction, methodology and results so that he can comment on them. In that moment, he told me about his concern regarding my results since the interaction between variables was reducing the accuracy of my findings. This is why he asked me to perform a new analysis with different variables with the objective of getting more accurate results. We finished our video call with the agreement that I would send him the results of the new analysis and he would get back to me as soon as possible. That same day, I did the new analysis in SPSS so I could give him some results right away.

On July 20th, 2016, I asked for the assistance from Lindsey Air to book a meeting on the same day. However, this was not possible so we decided to move the appointment for the next day at 2 pm.

On July 21st, my supervisor and I had another video call via Skype in which for 3 hours we discussed about the difficulties that I was having with the database due to the sample size and the amount of missing data. Dr. Kevin insisted that the best option to obtain a favourable result was to change the outcome variable from violent offender to sex offender. I was refusing to accept that this was the best choice, since that meant changing the whole of the literature review and most of what I had already written at the time. It was like starting a new project. I was very concerned about this so I wrote an email to my second supervisor Ruth Tully, Dr. Vincent Egan and Dr. Shihning Chou to ask for a second opinion. The situation was complicated by

now and I did not get the requested assistance. However, Dr. Kevin realised that having asked me such a big change in my research required an extension to my submission deadline. Thanks to this, on July 25th, I had a meeting with Dr. Shihning Chou in which we talked about my concerns on my supervisor's decision of changing my dependent variable since although he believed that the change was not going to be a major one, I knew that it would require additional time and effort. Dr. Chou very kindly agreed that I would need more time to successfully finish my project so she approved that my submission deadline be delayed, setting the new deadline on August 15th, 2016. On that same day, I informed Dr. Kevin that I agreed to his change and about the new submission deadline.

On July 28th, I sent an email to Dr. Kevin with the first draft of my new project. He replied on August 2nd with his comments and corrections. After this, I started to write the final version of my dissertation.

On August 11th, having been finished with my project, I submitted it for proof reading. Finally, on August 15th, before 4 pm, I submitted two hard copies of the dissertation to the Postgraduate Student Centre.

During this project I felt many times stressed and low, I often thought that I would not be able to finish the master because of several problems that were emerging on the way. But for me, one of the biggest challenges I faced, was to change my dependent variable in my project, since the time when my supervisor asked me to change it, was less than one week before submission. In that moment I just thought that all my effort and dedication were throw away. However, thanks to the submission extension, I could start all over again and put all my effort in this project. There are many things that I think I would change if I could start again, and I think that the principal change would be the topic of my research. I realised that working

with an old database had been a great mistake and that whichever the results obtained, no one would be interested in reproducing my project. And at the same time obtaining a database with this kind of information is a little bit tricky if you do not have the necessary support or good contacts in institutions.

Another thing I would do different would be to better organise my time, so if again I have any unexpected problem, as I had this time, I would have the time to fix it and avoid extra stress.

It is true that this experience has helped me to realise about my limitations but more than everything it has helped me to understand that I have the knowledge and skills that I did not believe I had at the beginning of the master and more importantly that I am able to write an entire paper in record time.

Word count: 1511