Child sexual abuse: the value of children's testimonies and their influence on prosecutions and convictions. Cases of children aged 3½ to 14, referred to Iceland's Children´s House from 1998 to 2012

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Foreword and acknowledgment

This study is a research thesis for a M.Sc. degree in clinical psychology and is an extended project from the following studies: Jónsdóttir and Sveinsdóttir (2001), Sveinsdóttir (2011) and Sigvarðsson and Trosh (2013). The program was carried out over the course of three semesters. In the spring semester of 2015 we had to apply for all necessary permits. In the fall semester of 2015 our task was to gather and log all data related to our study. In the spring semester of 2016 we had to analyse data and write our research thesis. Ethics approval was granted by the National Bioethics Committee in the fall of 2015 and a contract was signed with the Government Agency for Child Protection. In the spring semester of 2016 data was gathered, logged and analysed and the research thesis was written. The research was conducted at the Advocacy Centre, the Children´s House in Iceland.

Data from published research has shown that child sexual abuse is a complex universal problem that occurs in all societies and cultures and at any social levels. In addition child sexual abuse is a criminal offence and an increase in public awareness and reports of child sexual abuse has led to an expectation of criminal prosecution of suspected offenders. However research has shown that most cases concerning child sexual abuse do not lead to prosecution. The process of deciding to prosecute cases of alleged child sexual abuse is without a doubt complex because in most cases, it is a private act without witnesses and physical evidence is rare. The lack of evidence in these cases makes children's testimonies often the most important evidence in court.

The aim of this study was to examine what factors regarding children's testimony have an influence on prosecutions and convictions in child sexual abuse cases. Research has shown that children seem to be expected to disclose very detailed information when giving testimony. It was therefore hypothesised that cases are more likely to be prosecuted when children give a detailed descriptions of the alleged abuse. Furthermore, even though young children (3-5 years) have the basic abilities to give testimony, research has shown that they

have age related communication and language difficulties. These limitations might make their testimonies seem less accurate than those of older children. It was therefore hypothesised that alleged offenders are less likely to be prosecuted for sexually abusing younger children.

The study is based on 542 interviews of children believed to be victims of sexual abuse who were referred to the Children's House in Iceland from 1998-2012. An expert interviewer obtained information regarding children's testimonies by analysing post interview reports. If the reports lacked information video recordings from the investigative interview were analysed in order to collect the data. To obtain information concerning cases that were prosecuted a researcher read through court files which were obtained from the Children's House.

The supervisors of the research are Jón Friðrik Sigurðsson the program director of the M.Sc. in clinical psychology at Reykjavik University and Þorbjörg Sveinsdóttir an expert interviewer at Children's House. They are co-authors of the published article along with Bjarki Þór Sigvarðsson, an employee at Children's House.

I would like to thank the Government Agency for Child Protection in Iceland for allowing me to conduct this study and Jón Friðrik, Þorbjörg and Bjarki Þór for their constructive comments and guidance.

Abstract

The main objective of this study was to examine what factors regarding children's testimony had an influence on the prosecution and conviction of alleged sex offenders. The sample consists of 542 cases from 1998 to 2012 where there was reason to believe a child had been subjected to sexual abuse. The children were interviewed at Children's House in Iceland. Factors regarding the children's testimonies were obtained by an expert interviewer who analysed reports and video recordings of investigative interviews. To obtain information about cases that were prosecuted a researcher read through court files. Results showed that cases are more likely to be prosecuted when a child gives a detailed description of the alleged abuse and when cases involved children that were older than 9 years of age. Cases were three times more likely to be prosecuted when children gave a detailed description of the abuse itself. These finding suggest that when deciding to prosecute cases of alleged sexual abuse children are expected to disclose very detailed information of events when testifying. This may prove problematic for young children since they have age-related communication and language difficulties and are therefore not able to give a detailed description of events the same way older children can. It is therefore important that authority figures in the judicial system take children's abilities into consideration when deciding to prosecute.

Keywords: Childs sexual abuse, investigative interviews, testimony, prosecution, conviction, Child Advocacy Centre, the Children´s House.

Child sexual abuse cases: the value of children´s testimony

Data from published research has shown that child sexual abuse is a complex universal problem that occurs in all societies and cultures and at any social levels (Walker, Bonner, & Kaufman, 1988). In addition, child sexual abuse is a criminal offence in most countries and an increase in public awareness and reports of child sexual abuse has led to an expectation of criminal prosecution of suspected offenders (Stroud, Martens, & Barker, 2000; Feldman et al., 1991). Cross et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of over 20 studies on the prosecution rates of child sexual abuse cases. Their findings suggest that a small number of child sexual abuse cases are prosecuted, but the majority of those cases lead to convictions. Furthermore, Parkinson et al. (2002) analysed over 180 child sexual abuse cases referred to the Child Protection Units in Sydney. A total of 45 (25%) cases reached court and 32 (71%) resulted in convictions. Sveinsdóttir (2011) obtained similar results after analysing 285 forensic interviews of alleged victims of child sexual abuse. All the interviews were conducted at Children's House in Iceland from 1998 to 2003. A total of 95 (33%) cases were prosecuted and 71 (75%) of those cases led to a conviction.

There is no denying that the process of deciding to prosecute child sexual abuse cases is complex. In most cases, sexual abuse is a private act which takes place without witnesses (Walsh, Jones, Cross, & Lippert, 2008). Physical evidence is rare and when such evidence is available it does not necessarily verify an abuse has taken place or can directly link the suspected offender to the crime (Adams, Harper, Knudson, & Revilla, 1994; Lewis, & Klettke, 2012). What it usually comes down to is the victim´s word against that of the suspected offender (Faller, 1984). This private act and the lack of physical evidence in these cases make children's testimonies often the most important evidence in court (Myers, Redlich, Goodman, Prizmich, & Imwinkelreid, 1999).

In past decades there has been an exponential increase in research on what factors contribute to the prosecution of child sexual abuse cases. Brewer, Rowe and Brewer (1997)

examined what factors regarding the suspected offender, alleged victim, situation related to the abuse and case evidence affected the decision to prosecute. They collected reports of 200 child sexual abuse cases during 1989-1990 from an agency in the United States which serves child sexual abuse victims and their families. The results showed that suspected offenders that had been charged with abusing multiple children were more likely to be prosecuted than offenders that were charged with abusing one child. The victim-offender relationship had an impact on prosecution rates; cases were more likely to be prosecuted when the alleged offender was a stranger and least likely for biological immediate family members. Furthermore, the age of the victim had an influence on prosecution rates which were lower when cases involved younger victims.

Stroud, Martens and Barker (2000) explored factors in child sexual abuse cases that investigators referred to the prosecutor. They analysed data from 1043 investigative interviews of alleged victims of child sexual abused from 1993-1996 in Bernalillo County of New Mexico. Their results indicate that cases involving very young children are less likely to be prosecuted unless the child provides consistent and credible details of the abuse. Cases were less likely to be referred to the prosecutor for younger offenders and when the alleged offender was a parent or step-parent of the victim. Alleged offenders were more likely to be prosecuted for sexually abusing girls than boys. Also, disclosure led to more cases being prosecuted which isn't surprising since the child's testimony is usually the only evidence. These findings are similar to those of Sveinsdóttir (2011), which indicated that alleged offenders were more likely to be prosecuted for sexually abusing girls than boys and children older than 12 years of age. Prosecution rates were higher when the alleged offender was an acquaintance of the child, if the abuse was recurring and had lasted for more than a year. Cases where children disclosed sexual abuse were more likely to lead to prosecution and when the offender had rewarded the child with a gift or promised them one. Offenders were

more likely to be convicted if they had abused more than one child, the abuse was recurring and there were witnesses of the abuse. Sveinsdóttir (2011) also explored what factors regarding the child´s testimony had an influence on the prosecution and conviction of alleged sex offenders. Conviction rates were not influenced by any factors but the ones related to prosecutions were: child gave a detailed description of the course of events, an accurate description of the abuse, a description of his/her emotions at the time of the abuse and the child´s testimony was consistent throughout the interview. The results indicate the importance of a detailed description of events when it comes to prosecuting in child sexual abuse cases.

The aim of this study was to examine what factors regarding children's testimony have an influence on prosecutions and convictions in child sexual abuse cases. As research has shown children seem to be expected to disclose very detailed information when giving testimony. It was therefore hypothesised that cases are more likely to be prosecuted when children give a detailed descriptions of the alleged abuse. Furthermore, even though young children (3-5 years) have the ability to provide good testimony, research has shown age related differences in their ability to answer open ended questions about the alleged abuse, understand the purpose of the interview, describe events immediately after the alleged abuse and describe conversations with the alleged offender (Gudjonsson, Sveinsdottir, Sigurdsson, & Jonsdottir, 2010). It was therefore also hypothesised that alleged offenders are less likely to be prosecuted for sexually abusing younger children.

Methods

Sample

The study is based on 542 interviews of children referred to the Children's House in Iceland allegedly being victims of sexual abuse. They were interviewed by expert interviewers during the years from 1998, when Children's House was established, to 2012. A total of 460 (85%) cases belonged to girls (M = 10.6 years, SD =3.4, age range: 3½ -14 years). A total of 82 (15%) cases belong to boys (M = 9.2 years, SD = 3.4, age range 3½ - 14 years).

A law was changed in 2009 making it so that children aged 15-18 are interviewed by the police and have to give testimony in court. Because of that children 15 to 18 years of age that were interviewed at Children's House before 2009 were excluded.

Materials

Researchers previously made a detailed coding frame which is used in Children's House to log information into the database (Jónsdóttir & Sveinsdóttir, 2001). It includes basic background information such as the child's age, gender, relationship to the suspected offender, severity of the abuse, whether the child was threatened, rewarded or forbidden to tell, how often the abuse occurred, time since the abuse occurred and the course of time for which the abuse took place.

A researcher, who also is an expert interviewer at Children's House logged information regarding the children's testimony from post interview reports or video recordings of the interviews on a coding frame containing factor listed in detail in Table 1.

Cases that were prosecuted were analysed using another coding frame developed by the same researchers who developed the coding frame mentioned earlier. These factors are listed in detail in Table 2.

Table 1

Variables Added from Reports and/or Video Recordings of Interviews and their Descriptions, Rated as "yes" or "no"

Variable name	Description
Concept understanding	The child has a good understanding of basic concepts like size, texture and position of objects. The child can also tell time and knows which day of the month it is.
Reason known	The child knows the reason for it being interviewed in Children's House.
Stays focused	The child is focused and doesn't stray off topic, doesn't wander from the chair for the majority of the interview, isn't constantly moving around or tries to leave the room.
Detailed description	The child gives a detailed general description which provides a clear concept of the events.
Events prior and post	The child describes events prior to and after the abuse.
Time concept	The child can time events. If the abuse consists of multiple events the child could disclose when the abuse started or when it ended.
Dialog description	The child describes conversations with the suspected offender during the abuse.
Detailed description of abuse	The child gives a detailed description of the abuse itself which includes details that strengthen the child's testimony.
Consistent testimony	The child is consistent and it's testimony is cohesive and doesn't contradict itself.
Free recall	The child discloses in free speech, meaning the child responds well to open ended questions.
Specific questions	The child is capable of answering specific questions.
Describes feelings	The child describes it's feelings during the abuse, this is defined as the child giving at least two examples of how it felt.

Table 2
Variables Added from Court Files

Variable name	Description
Number of victims	How many victims the suspected offender was charged with abusing.
Charges phrased according to child's testimony	Whether the charges of the abuse were phrased according to the child's testimony, if not whether the charges were phrased as less severe or more severe.
Defendant found guilty of all charges	Whether or not the defendant was found guilty of all charges, part of them or none.
Child considered credible	Child's testimony considered credible by the court. Variable coded as "yes" or "no".
Defendant considered credible	Defendant's testimony considered credible by the court. Variable coded as "yes" or "no".
Defendant's plea	Defendant's plea was logged. It was divided into pleads guilty for all accounts, pleads guilty for some of the charges and pleads not guilty.
Defendant's plea according to child's testimony	The defendant's plea is according to the child's testimony, if not whether the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge or a more severe charge.
Verdict	Whether the defendant was found guilty or innocent. If he was found guilty the type of sentence was logged (prison, parole or a mix of the two).
Compensation	Whether or not the court ordered the defendant to pay compensation due to damages caused by the offense. Variable coded as "yes" or "no".
Appeal	Whether or not the case was appealed to the supreme court. Variable coded as "yes" or "no".

Procedure

All investigative interview conducted in Children's House are recorded for

evidential purposes and after each interview experts write a report about what information

is gathered. To obtain information about factors regarding the children's testimonies that

are listed in Table 1 an expert interviewer carefully gathered information from these

reports and logged it into a coding frame. If the reports lacked information video recordings from the investigative interviews were carefully analyzed in order to collect the data.

To obtain information listed in Table 2 concerning the cases that were prosecuted a researcher read through court files and logged the information into the coding frame. These court files were obtained from the Children's House where the reports from the courts are kept.

Ethics approval was obtained from the National Bioethics Committee (reference number: VSNb201506004/03.03) and a contract was signed with the Government Agency for Child Protection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by using the software SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to show information concerning prosecution and conviction rates.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between background variables and prosecution/conviction rate. Chi-square was also used to examine the relationship between factors regarding the child´s testimony and prosecution/conviction rate. For the purpose of the present study a few background variables were grouped into two categories. Children were separated by age into the groups 3½ to 9 years old and 10 to 14 years old. Relationship to the suspected offender was grouped into "family member" (any blood relatives, foster- or step parents) and "non-family member" (acquaintance of the child or a stranger). The severity of the abuse was recoded so the first three levels were grouped into "minor abuse" and level 4 and 5 were labelled as "severe abuse". An example of abuse categorized as level one, two and three is sexual language, offender masturbates in the presence of a child, groping and masturbating the child. An example of abuse categorized as level four is attempted penetration into the

child's mouth, vagina or anus with a finger, objects or penis and level five is intercourse with a child.

Sequential binomial logistic regression was conducted to evaluate which dependent variables were related to prosecution/conviction rates. Only the dependent variables that were significant at $p < .05$ for chi-square analyses were included in the regression model. Using the chi-square test six variables were found to be significantly correlated with prosecution rates and two variables with conviction rates. Three of the six variables that correlated with prosecution rate were entered into the regression model at step one; gender, age and victim-offender relationship. The other three variables were entered into the regression model at step two; detailed description of the events, dialog description and detailed description of the abuse. The variables significantly correlated with conviction rates were entered into the regression model at different steps. How often the abuse occurred at step 1 and the course of time at step 2.

Results

Figure 1 shows information concerning the number of investigative interviews conducted at the Children's House from 1998 to 2012 where there was a reason to believe a child had been subject to sexual abuse. The figure also shows information about how many cases were prosecuted and the nature of the verdict. In total 542 investigative interview were conducted in the Children's House during these 14 years and in 402 (74%) of those cases children disclosed sexual abuse. Eight (1%) cases were repeated interviews about the same event and the same offender and were therefore excluded from further analysis. A total of 386 (71%) cases were dismissed by the assigned prosecutor and in 257 (67%) of those cases a child disclosed sexual abuse. In 148 (27%) cases prosecution was carried out and of those cases there were seven (5%) cases where the child did not disclose sexual abuse. These cases were analysed specifically and showed a common theme of either there being more than one

victim and/or the offender pleaded guilty. Roughly a fifth (21%) of the prosecuted cases

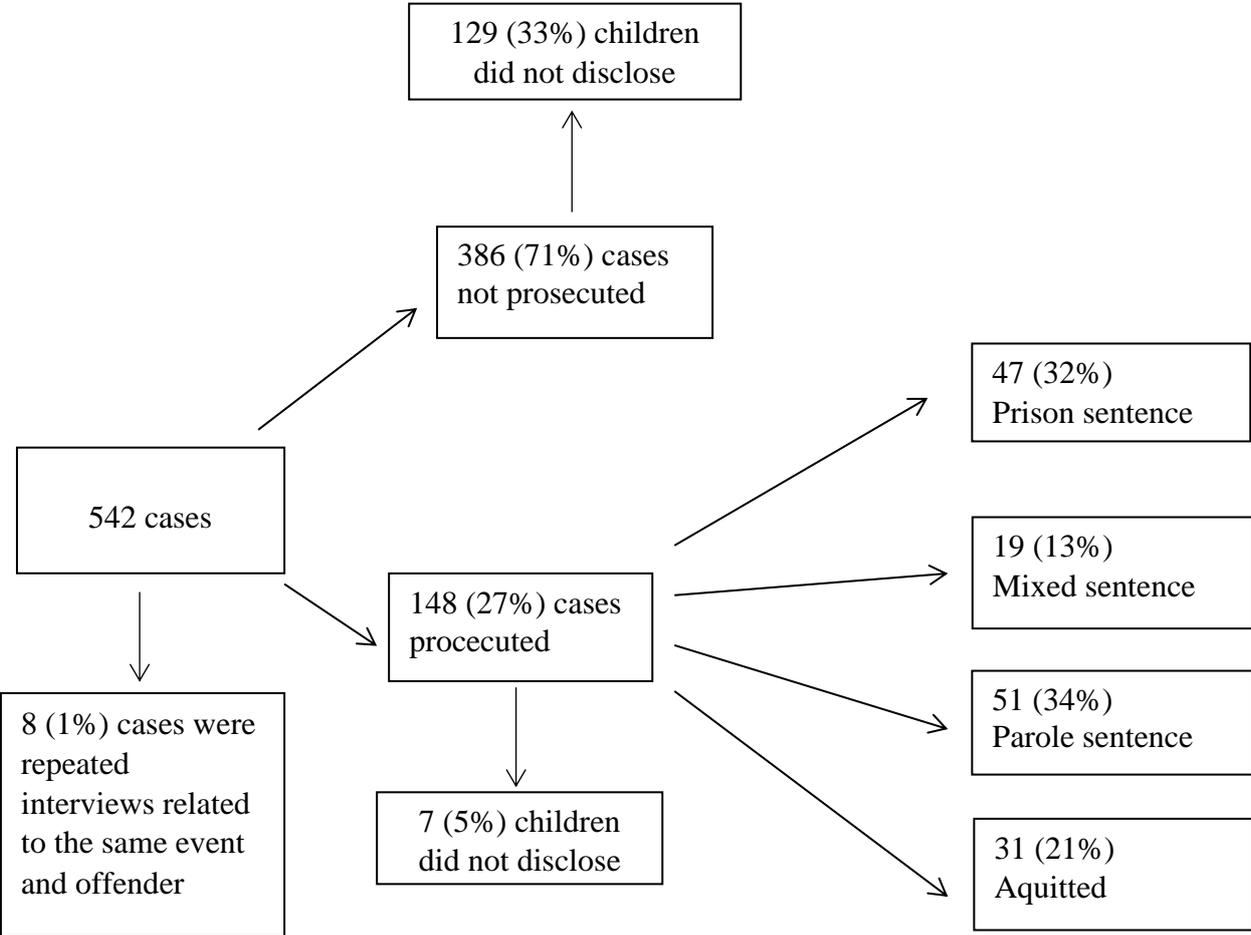resulted in acquittals whereas the rest (79%) resulted in convictions.

Figure 1. Number of investigative interviews conducted at Children's House from 1998 to 2012 and prosecuted and convicted cases.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to exam the relationship between

variables regarding children's testimony and prosecutions and convictions (see Table 3).

Cases were more likely to be prosecuted if the child gave a detailed general description of the

events (37%) than if they didn't (24%) (χ^2 (1, N=414) = 5.185, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more

likely to be prosecuted if the child described conversations with the suspected offender during

the abuse (38%) than if they didn't (27%) (χ^2 (1, N= 414) = 4.840, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more

likely to be prosecuted if children gave a detailed description of the abuse itself (41%) than if they didn't (21%) (χ^2 (1, N=413) = 15.542, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3

Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Children's Testimonies and Prosecutions and Convictions

Variables	Prosecuted		Convicted	
	Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)	Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)
Good concept understanding Bad concept understanding	136 (34) 7 (27)	0.536	109 (80) 5 (71)	0.313
Reason known Reason not known	134 (34) 11 (23)	2.225	107 (80) 9 (81)	0.025
Stays focused Doesn´t stay focused	136 (34) 9 (20)	3.609	110 (81) 6 (67)	1.066
Detailed description No detailed description	121 (37) 22 (24)	5.185*	96 (79) 18 (82)	0.071
Events prior described Events prior not described	127 (36) 16 (25)	3.414	103 (81) 11 (69)	1.341
Post events described Post events not described	101 (36) 42 (31)	1.094	81 (80) 33 (79)	0.049
Time concept No time concept	115 (37) 28 (28)	2.495	93 (81) 21 (75)	0.480
Dialog description No dialog description	107 (38) 36 (27)	4.840*	84 (79) 30 (83)	0.388
Detailed description of abuse No detailed description of abuse	116 (41) 27 (21)	15.542**	94 (81) 20 (74)	0.656
Consistent testimony Not a consistent testimony	139 (35) 4 (22)	1.279	110 (79) 4 (100)	1.047
Free speech disclosure No free speech disclosure	101 (35) 42 (34)	0.012	80 (79) 34 (81)	0.056
Answers specific questions Doesn't answer specific questions	128 (35) 15 (29)	0.853	102 (80) 12 (80)	0.001
Describes feelings Doesn´t describe feelings	110 (37) 33 (28)	3.425	90 (82) 24 (73)	1.298

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

A chi-square test of independence was performed to exam the relationship between basic background variables and prosecutions and convictions (see Table 4). There was a significant association between gender and prosecutions (χ^2 (1, N=534) = 7.932, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more likely to be prosecuted when the victims was a girl (30%) than when the victim was a boy (15%). There was a significant association between age and prosecutions (χ^2 (1, N= 534) = 4.310, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more likely to be prosecuted for children 10 to 14 years old (31%) than children aged 3½ to 9 years (22%). There was also a significant association between victim-offender relationship and prosecutions (χ^2 (1, N=460) = 8.027, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more likely to be prosecuted if the suspected offender was not a family member (36%) than when the suspected offender was a family member (24%).

Table 4
Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Background Variables and Prosecutions and Convictions

Background variables	Prosecuted		Convicted	
	Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)	Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)
Gender				
Boy	12 (15)	7.932*	9 (75)	0.130
Girl	136 (30)		108 (79)	
Age				
3½ to 9 years old	40 (22)	4.310*	30 (75)	0.554
10 to 14 years old	108 (31)		87 (81)	
Victim-offender relationship				
Family member	45 (24)	8.027*	34 (76)	0.754
Non- family member	99 (36)		81 (82)	
Time since the abuse occurred				
Less than a year	24 (26)	0.912	19 (79)	0.013
More than a year	116 (32)		93 (80)	

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

A chi-square test of independence was performed to exam the relationship between background variables concerning the abuse and prosecutions and convictions (see Table 5).

Cases were more likely to lead to a conviction if the abuse occurred multiple times (88%) than when it occurred once (69%) (χ^2 (1, N=121) = 6.460, $p < 0.05$). Cases were more likely to lead to a conviction if the abuse lasted more than a year (96%) than when the abuse lasted less than a year (77%) (χ^2 (1, N= 117) = 4.249, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5

Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Variables Concerning the Abuse and Prosecutions and Convictions

Background variables	Prosecuted Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)	Convicted Yes N (%)	χ^2 (df=1)
Number of victims[1]				
One victim	-	-	50 (74)	2.319
More than one victim	-		67 (84)	
How often the abuse occurred	55 (30)	3.544	38 (69)	6.460*
once	66 (39)		58 (88)	
multiple times				
The course of time				
Less than a year	94 (34)	0.481	72 (77)	4.249*
More than a year	23 (38)		22 (96)	
Severity of the abuse				
Minor abuse	75 (33)	1.118	60 (80)	0.008
Severe abuse	68 (38)		54 (79)	
Child was rewarded	22 (39)	0.362	19 (86)	0.724
Child was not rewarded	111 (34)		87 (78)	
Child was threatened	19 (43)	1.495	13 (68)	1.688
Child was not threatened	113 (34)		92 (81)	
Child was forbidden to tell	44 (42)	2.879	36 (81)	0.183
Child was not forbidden to tell	89 (33)		70 (79)	

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

A sequential binomial logistic regression was conducted to assess the relationship between factors regarding the victim/testimony and prosecutions (see Table 6). The logistic

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[1] The number of victims was logged using the coding frame related to Table 2. Since there was no number of victims variable in the Children's House database it had to be excluded while examining prosecution rates.

regression model at step 1 was non-significant, ($\chi^2(3) = 6.648$, $p > .05$). The model explained

2.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for prosecutions and correctly classified 64.1% of cases.

The second model at step 2 was statistically significant, ($\chi^2(6) = 20.362$, $p < .01$). The model 2

explained 7% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for prosecutions and correctly classified 64.1%

of cases. Cases were 3.2 times more likely to be prosecuted if the child gave a detailed

description of the abuse itself.

Table 6

Sequential Binomial Logistic Regression of the Relationship between Variables Regarding the Victim/Testimony and Prosecutions

	Predictors	B	SE(B)	Walds X^2	df	Odds Ratio	95% CI (odds)
Step 1	Gender	0.485	0.358	1.838	1	1.624	0.806-3.272
	Age	0.186	0.247	0.569	1	1.624	0.743-1.954
	Victim-offender relationship	0.326	0.227	3.344	1	1.624	0.971-2.367
Step 2	Gender	0.439	0.367	1.427	1	1.551	0.755-3.185
	Age	0.191	0.261	0.535	1	1.210	0.726-2.017
	Victim-offender relationship	0.338	0.233	2.097	1	1.402	0.887-2.215
	Detailed description	-0.622	0.430	2.099	1	0.537	0.231-1.246
	Dialog description	0.153	0.277	0.306	1	1.165	0.677-2.005
	Detailed description of abuse	1.162	0.159	9.689**	1	3.197	1.538-6.646

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

A sequential binomial logistic regression was conducted to assess the relationship

between factors regarding the abuse and convictions (see Table 7). The logistic regression

model at step 1 was significant, ($\chi^2(1) = 8.601$ $p < .05$). The model explained 11.4%

(Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for convictions and correctly classified 80 % of cases. The

second model at step 2 was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 10.00$, $p < .01$). The model 2

explained 12.2 % (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for convictions and correctly classified 80%

of cases. Cases were 3 times more likely to be prosecuted if the suspected offender had

abused the child multiple times.

Table 7

Sequential Binomial Logistic Regression of the Relationship between Factors Regarding the Abuse and Convictions

	Predictors	B	SE(B)	Walds X^2	df	Odds Ratio	95% CI (odds)
Step 1	How often the abuse occurred	1.438	0.520	7.638**	1	4.212	1.519-11.677
Step 2	How often the abuse occurred	1.109	0.562	3.893*	1	3.032	1.007-9.129
	The course of time	1.204	1.129	1.136	1	3.333	0.364-30.500

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine what factors regarding testimonies of children interviewed in the Children's House in Iceland influence prosecutions and convictions in child sexual abuse cases. Results of the study support both hypothesis; cases were more likely to be prosecuted if children gave a detailed description of the alleged abuse and alleged offenders were less likely to be prosecuted for sexually abusing younger children.

A difference between prosecutions was found in relation to children's gender. Prosecution rates were higher when the victim of the sexual abuse was a girl. These findings may be explained by a lower discloser rate for boys. Stroud, Martens and Barker (2000) obtained similar findings in their study and concluded that boys may find it more difficult to disclose or may experience more anxiety than girls simply at the thought of making the abuse a public matter.

A difference between prosecutions was found in relation to suspected offender's relationship to the child. Results showed that cases were more likely to be prosecuted when the alleged offender was an acquaintance or stranger of the child. Previous research has shown a similar tendencies, where cases are less likely to be prosecuted when the suspected offender is a family member (Brewer Rowe and Brewer, 1997; Stroud, Martens and Barker, 2000 & Sveinsdóttir, 2011). This may be due to the reason that children are less likely to

disclose when the suspected offender is a family member (Stroud, Martens and Barker, 2000; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2013).

A difference between convictions was found in relation to how often the abuse occurred. Cases were more likely to lead to convictions when the abuse occurred multiple times as opposed to once. Authorities in the judicial system were three times more inclined to convict in cases when the offenders had abused children multiple times. These results are similar to Sveinsdóttir´s (2011) findings. Additionally, a difference between convictions was found in relation to how long the abuse lasted. Cases were more likely to lead to convictions when the abuse lasted for more than a year. These finding were not obtained by Sveinsdóttir (2011), but these findings do not come as a surprise because reoccurring abuse over a long period of time is probably considered more severe by the judicial system.

There was a relationship between prosecutions and certain factors regarding children's testimonies. Prosecution rates were higher when children gave a detailed description of events, an accurate description of the abuse itself and the child described conversations with the suspected offender when interviewed at the Children´s House. Prosecutions were three times more likely to occur in cases where children gave a detailed description of the abuse itself. Sveinsdóttir (2011) reached similar findings where rates of prosecution increased when children gave detailed descriptions of events and an accurate description of the abuse itself. The reasons why the judicial system in Iceland expects such a detailed description from children are unknown. In Sweden there are recommendations that authority figures in the justice system should consider the number of detailed descriptions of events when evaluating the reliability of the child's testimony (Gregow, 1996).

Furthermore, the study showed significant age differences in relation to prosecution. Prosecution rate were lower for younger children than older. Similar results were obtained by Brewer Rowe and Brewer (1997), Stroud, Martens and Barker (2000) and Sveinsdóttir (2011).

Brewer Rowe and Brewer (1997) collected records of closed child sexual abuse cases from an agency in the United States. Their findings showed that prosecution rates were lower when cases involved younger victims. Stroud, Martens and Barker (2000) collected data for children who had completed forensic interviews in Bernalillo County of New Mexico. Their results showed that cases involving very young children were more likely to be dropped unless the child provided consistent and credible details of the abuse. Sveinsdóttir (2011) collected data from forensic interviews at Children's House in Iceland. Findings showed that alleged offenders were more likely to be prosecuted for abusing children older than 12 years of age. These expectations that children disclose very detailed information when testifying may prove problematic for younger children. Even though young children are capable of providing good testimony they have age-related communication and language difficulties (Gudjonsson, Sveinsdottir, Sigurdsson, & Jonsdottir, 2010) which may make it more difficult for them to give detailed descriptions of events. Findings have shown that young children have difficulty understanding the purpose of the interview, answering open ended questions about the alleged abuse, describing conversations with the alleged offender and describing events prior to and after the alleged abuse (Gudjonsson, Sveinsdottir, Sigurdsson, & Jonsdottir, 2010).

The advantages of the study are that interviews in the Children's House are carried out by experts who use an evidenced based protocol when conducting the interviews, a coding frame was used to log information regarding the children's testimony and the information was gathered by a specially trained interviewer at the Children's House. The research also consisted of a vast amount of data gathered from interviews conducted over a 14 year period.

The law in Iceland enables judges to seek the assistance of a specialist when interviewing children but they do not have to seek the assistance of the Children's House. Even though a vast majority of investigative interviews are conducted in the Children's House

not all of them are. This limits the generalizability of the findings to interviews conducted in the Children's House rather than all child sexual abuse cases in Iceland.

The ability of children to provide accurate information is important in child sexual abuse cases, since the child and the suspected offender are typically the only witnesses and physical evidence is rare. However, it seems that children are expected to give a very detailed description of events when a decision to prosecute is made without taking into consideration children's abilities to give such a detailed account. Leander (2010) found that it can be very difficult for some children to provide information about the abuse and they may be hindered in their ability to disclose information due to fear, anxiety, shame and/or guilt. Furthermore, young children face higher obstacles when giving testimony because of their age-related language and communication capabilities. It is therefore important that authorities in the judicial system are aware of children's abilities while not considering them as jeopardizing the value and legitimacy of the testimony.

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