BSc in Psychology

The Association between Childhood Trauma and Social Support among Icelandic Adolescent Sexual Perpetration

June 2017
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
The fact that an adolescent can violate another child sexually is often overlooked. However, studies have indicated that a large portion of sexual perpetrators are under the age of 18 years old and at least 20% of reported rapes and molestations have been related to adolescent sexual offenders. This study was based on archival data from The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA), *Youth in Iceland 2006*. The sample used in this study consisted of 7,430 participants in 9th and 10th grades in secondary school in Iceland, with the gender ratio 49.9% male and 50.1% female. A logistic regression was performed to examine predictors of sexual perpetration. The main results in the study showed that those who were male, reported a history of sexual abuse, reported a history of physical abuse, had weaker parental support and weaker peer support were more likely to report sexual perpetration. Finally, by looking at an interaction effect between variables, for those who reported experiencing physical abuse, parental support was a weaker predictor for reporting sexual perpetration than for those that did not report physical abuse. Furthermore, peer support was a stronger predictor of answering the sexual perpetration question with a yes, for those that had experienced sexual abuse than those that had not.

*Keywords*: adolescent perpetrator, peer support, parental support, sexual abuse, physical abuse

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**Abstract – Icelandic**

Sú staðreynd að börn undir lögaldi geti brotið á öðru barni kynferðislega á það til að gleymast. Hinsvegar hafa rannsóknir sýnt að í 20% kynferðísbrotamála séu gerendur yngri en 18 ára. Í þessari rannsókn var notast við gögn frá Rannsóknnum og greiningu þar sem börn í 9. og 10. bekk í grunnskóla á Íslandi svöruðu spurningum úr könnuninni *Ungt fólk 2006*. Þýðið samanstendur af 7,430 einstaklingum og þar af voru 49,9% karlkyn og 50,1% kvennkyn. Aðhvarfsgreining var notuð til þess að kanna forspárþætti um gerendur kynferðisofbeldis. Helstu niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar sýndu að þeir þáttakendur sem voru karlkyns og tilkynntu sögu um kynferðisofbeldi, tilkynntu sögu um likamlegt ofbeldi, áttu lakari föreldrastuðning og lakari vina stuðning, voru liklegri til þess að játa sig sem gerendur kynferðisofbeldis. Með því að líta á samvirki milli breyta mätt sjá að förældrestuðningur er veikari forspárþattur þess að hafa verið gerandi kynferðisofbeldis fyrir þa sem hafa orðið fyrir heimilisofbeldi en fyrir þa sem hafa það ekki. Þá má einnig sjá að vinastuðningur er sterkari forspárþattur þess að hafa verið gerandi kynferðisofbeldis fyrir þa sem hafa orðið fyrir kynferðisofbeldi en fyrir þa sem hafa það ekki.

*Lykilorð:* ungir gerendur kynferðisofbeldis, vina stuðningur, föreldra stuðningur, kynferðislegt ofbeldi, likamlegt ofbeldi.
The Association between Childhood Trauma and Social Support among Icelandic Adolescent Sexual Perpetrators.

Sexual offenses, defined as a sexual act performed without the will of another party (Erooga & Masson, 1999), are crimes that can have serious impact on the life and mental health of the victims (Kilpatrick et al., 2003). In addition of examining the impact and consequences of these offenses on the victims, studies have also considered what causes this behaviour among the perpetrators. After years of research to understand the adult sexual offender, there is a noticeable growing interest in sexual abusive behaviour of adolescents (Erooga & Masson, 1999). While the fact that an adolescent can violate another adolescent sexually is often overlooked, studies have indicated that a large portion of perpetrators are under the age of 18 years old (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006). To emphasize the scale of the problem, the numbers show at least 20% of reported rapes and molestations of children in the United States have been related to adolescent sexual offenders (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995), and that up to half of sexual offenders admit to begin showing this particular behaviour before the age of 12 (Abel, Osborn, & Twigg, 1993; Burton, 2000). This highlights the importance of identifying early and comprehending the possible risk factors that increase the odds of adolescence sexually abusive behaviour.

**Gender differences in sexual perpetration**

Numerous studies suggest that adolescent males are the majority of those who have reported sexual perpetration (Borowsky, Hogan, & Ireland, 1997; Sigurdsson, Gudjonsson, Asgeirsdottir, & Sigfusdottir, 2010). Another study states that male adolescent were much more likely to report sexual perpetration with history of sexual abuse then females (Borowsky et al., 1997). At the same time, very little is known about female sex offending and few studies have looked at female adolescent perpetration. The proportion female sex offenders are quite low, less than 3% (Cortoni, Hanson, & Coache, 2010). However, this
statistic could be low due to the lack of research. Some studies even indicate that female perpetration is often not reported and could potentially be greater than male abuse (Fehrenbach & Monastersky, 1988; Slotboom, Hendriks, & Verbruggen, 2011; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2014). Multiple studies that have considered both genders have indicated that the risk factors and characteristics for adolescent sex offenders is the same for both genders (Burton, 2000; Sigurdsson et al., 2010; Wijkman et al., 2014).

**Victimization as a risk factor for sexual perpetration**

One of the common risk factors of sexual perpetration is the history of sexual abuse. Number of studies suggests a cycle of child sexual abuse, meaning that those that have been abused are more likely to go on to abuse (Hanson & Slater, 1988; Lee, Jackson, Pattison, & Ward, 2002; Vizard, 2007). This indicates that a history of sexual abuse is a powerful predictor for becoming a sexually abusive youth for both male and female adolescence (Sigurdsson et al., 2010). As described by social learning theory, the theoretical exploration could simply be a learned behaviour by observing (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Burton, Nesmith, & Badten, 1997). Sexual abuse history is frequently analysed when trying to explain adolescent and adult sexual offending (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006). According to Mathews, Hunter, & Vuz (1997), about 77% of females that abuse sexually report having been victims themselves. Another research states that the frequency of adolescence who report sexual abuse and become sexual perpetrators is somewhere between 65% - 100% (Burton et al., 1997). However, not all victims of sexual abuse become sexual perpetrators (Salter et al., 2003). A study among adolescents who saw a specialist due to showing harmful sexual behaviours indicated that about 30% of those children had never been sexually abused themselves. However, most of them seemed to have experienced other types of childhood traumas (Vizard, Hickey, French, & McCrory, 2007).

However, sexual abuse has not been the only discussed risk factor. Physical abuse has
also been in the discussion. A meta-analysis of 59 independent studies compared male adolescent sex offenders \((n = 3,855)\) and non-sex offenders \((n = 13,393)\) showed that factors such as exposure to violence and witnessing family violence were high risk factors of sexual perpetration (Chan, 2011; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Sigurdsson et al., 2010). A study that looked at 1,600 adolescents who reported sexual perpetration revealed that 63% of those had witnessed physical abuse at home and 42% had experienced physical abuse (Ryan, Miyoshi, Metzner, Krugman, & Fryer, 1996). Finally, a study that looked at risk factors among 71,594 adolescents in the 9th - 12th grade showed 4.8% of males and 1.3% of females reporting sexual perpetration. The results indicated that males and females that had history of sexual abuse and physical abuse were at high risk of sexual perpetration (Borowsky et al., 1997).

**Lack of social support can be a risk factor**

A lack of bonding to one’s family has been associated with an increased likelihood of showing offense behaviour (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). Lack of supervision seems to be a common risk factor and a predicting factor for adolescent sexual offending behaviour (Salter et al., 2003), as well as lack of support from the family (Bentovim, 2002; Lee et al., 2002). Studies that have compared family relations among non-offenders to family relations among adolescent sexual offenders to shows high rates of conflict and low rates of positive communications in their families (Fagan & Wexler, 1988; Ronis & Borduin, 2007). Furthermore, Marshall and Barbaree (1990) have proposed that violent parenting and other poor socialization experiences could be the cause of resentment and hostility. These elements are at the core of sexual offending behaviours (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). Furthermore, a study indicated that sexual offenders are more likely to have experienced sexual abuse and are more likely to have negative relationships with fathers, poor family support and disturbed family backgrounds (Lee et al., 2002).
Adolescent sexual perpetrators showed relatively low levels of emotional bonding with peers (Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, & Mann, 1989; Ronis & Borduin, 2007). The studies that examine peer relations among adolescents involved with sexual perpetration indicate disturbed relations. This suggests poor socialization being a developmental risk factor (Blaske et al., 1989; Lee et al., 2002). Finally, peer directed violence seems to be an indicator of sexual perpetration for male adolescents (Ozer, Tschann, Pasch, & Flores, 2004).

Studies indicated that few friends, being bullied and having friends who have become sexual perpetrators are all risk factors (Borowsky et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 1996; Tharp et al., 2013; Vizard et al., 2007). Few studies have looked at peer support as a protective factor when predicting sexual perpetration. At the same time, various social support has been studied and found to be a strong protective factor for youth offenders, i.e. spending time with parents and communicating with them can generally decrease the likelihood of becoming a delinquent (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). It has even been shown that parental support serves as a protective factor for sexual offending (Tharp et al., 2013). One study has however suggested that male adolescent who were connected with their peers were less likely to report sexual perpetration (Borowsky et al., 1997).

It is important to understand the risk and protective factors of sexual abusive behaviour. Furthermore, to understand how the effect of trauma could impact the adolescent population. Identifying and comprehending the possible risk and protective factors that increase or decrease the odds of adolescence sexually abusive behaviour, could allow more accurate proactive and reactive measures for those adolescence at risk. As stated previously, many studies look at sexual- and physical abuse as risk factors. Few studies have focus on parental support and almost no studies on peer support among adolescent sexual perpetration. The purpose of this study is to investigate risk (sexual abuse and physical abuse) and protective factors (parental support and peer support) of sexual perpetration among a large
sample of Icelandic adolescent, males and females.

Based on previous studies the following hypotheses were put forward:

1. Males are significantly more likely to report sexual perpetration.
2. Sexual abuse and physical abuse in childhood increases the odds of sexual perpetration.
3. Parental support and friends support decreases the odds of sexual perpetration.
4. Parental support and peer support buffers the effect of physical- and/or sexual abuse on sexual perpetration (interaction effect).

**Method**

**Participants**

The study was based on archival data from the population-wide cross-sectional survey *Youth in Iceland 2006*, which is an anonymous self-report national survey conducted by The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) (Álfgeir Logi Kristjánsson, Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir, & Jón Sigfússon, 2006). The sample consisted of 7,430 adolescents in 9th and 10th grade (14 to 16 years old) in Icelandic high schools in 2006. The gender ratio was 49.9% male ($n = 3,612$) and 50.1% female ($n = 3,620$), but 2.7% ($n = 198$) participants did not report their gender. The participants were all students who attended class the day that the questionnaire was conducted and the total response rate was 80.1%. No payment or rewards was given for participation. The study followed the regulations of Privacy and Data Protection Authority in Iceland and by the National Bioethics Committee in Iceland.

**Instruments and measures**

The instrument used in the study was a comprehensive and reliable questionnaire from ICSRA, addressing various aspects of the adolescents’ lives. The questionnaire contained 105 questions on 36 pages. Six questions were used from the original study regarding sexual perpetrating, gender, sexual abuse, physical abuse, peer support and family
support (see description of variables below). Six variables were used in the study. The dependent variable was sexual perpetration and five independent variables were, gender, sexual abuse, physical abuse, peer support and parental support.

**Gender.** To measure gender participants were asked if they were “male” = 1 or “female” = 2.

**Sexual offending.** To measure sexual perpetrators two questions were asked: “How often (if ever) have you persuaded, pressured or forced someone to engage into sexual acts last 12 months?” and “How often (if ever) have you persuaded, pressured or forced someone into intercourse last 12 months?” The questions were assessed with 0 if participants answered no and 1 if participants answered yes, once more or often.

**Sexual abuse.** To measure if participants had been victims of sexual abuse, responses from three questions were used and computed into one variable. The questions were: “Have you ever been sexually abused?”, “Have you ever been sexually abused by an adult family member?”, “Have you ever been sexually abused by a non-family member?”. The questions were assessed with 0 if participants answered no to all questions and 1 if participants answered yes to one or more question.

**Physical abuse.** To measure whether participants had suffered physical abuse, responses from two questions were used and computed into one variable. The questions were: “Have you ever witnessed physical violence in your home involving adult?” and “Have you ever been physically abused by an adult in your home?” The questions were assessed with 0 if participants answered no to both questions and 1 if participants answered yes to one or more question.

**Peer support.** Participants’ peer support was assessed by asking the following question “How easy or how hard it is to get the following from your friends?” on a 4-point Likert scale from “very hard” (1) to “very easy” (4): “comfort and warmth”, “personal
discussion”, “advice regarding education”, “advice regarding other task” and “assistance on various other tasks”. The scores on the scale ranged from 1 (low peer support) to 4 (high peer support). The scale was found to have a good reliability (4 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

**Parental support.** Participants parental support was assessed by asking the following question “How easy or how hard it is to get the following from your parents?” on a 4-point Likert scale from “very hard” (1) to “very easy” (4): “comfort and warmth”, “personal discussion”, “advice regarding education”, “advice regarding other task” and “assistance on various other tasks.” The scores on the scale ranged from 1 (low parental support) to 4 (high parental support). The scale was found to have a good reliability (4 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

**Procedure**

In March 2006, the questionnaire was sent to every 9th and 10th graders in Icelandic secondary schools. Prior to the survey ISCRA sent letters to parents containing a form of consent. ISCRA distributed the questionnaire to teachers that then supervised the completion. Those students who were in class on the day that the survey was conducted participated. Students were informed that the survey was anonymous, they were not to write any identifying information, so their answers were not traceable. Participants were informed that answering all questions was not obligatory, but were kindly asked to answer them all to their best ability and as honest as possible. The participants were informed that some of the questions might include sensitive topics and they could stop participating at any time. Furthermore, teachers informed participants that they could receive assistance if needed. The participants would then put their questionnaire in an unmarked envelope and return it sealed to the teacher.

Participants did not sign a written consent however because they were underage, their parents were send a letter from ISCRA where the survey was explained. If a student was not
to participate in the study, parents were to contact the school and notify. Permission from the ICSRA was obtained for the use of the data in this study.

**Research Design and data analysis**

Data was analysed in the statistical program SPSS. First, descriptive data analysis was conducted. Independent sample $t$-tests and Chi-square tests of independence were performed to see if there was a relationship between the five independent variables and the dependent variable. First, an independent $t$-test was conducted to test if there was significant difference in the mean of scales (i.e. parental support and peer support) for perpetrators compared to non-perpetrators. Second, chi-square test of independence was calculated to examine the relationship between the three categorical independent variables (gender, sexual abuse and physical abuse) and the dependent variable (sexual perpetration). Finally, a logistic regression analysis was performed to examine what variables significantly and independently predicted the dependent variable and whether physical and/or sexual abuse interacted with peer and/or parental support.

**Results**

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the categorical variables, proportion of gender and of those who reported sexual abuse or physical abuse. Furthermore, the table shows the proportion of those who reported sexual perpetration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3612</td>
<td>(49.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>(50.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of physical abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6677</td>
<td>(89.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>(10.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of sexual abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6829</td>
<td>(92.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>(8.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual perpetrator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6990</td>
<td>(98.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicated that 98.4% of the participants \((n = 6,990)\) had never forced another to sexual activities or forced another to intercourse in the last 12 months, while the other 1.6% \((n = 111)\) of participants confirmed sexual perpetrations. Of the sample were 49.9% \((n = 3,612)\) males and 50.1% \((n = 3,620)\) females. Of the sample, 10.1% \((n = 749)\) reported having physical abuse while 89.9% \((n=6,677)\) did not. Finally, 8% \((n=597)\) were victims of sexual abuse while 91.9% \((n=6,829)\) had no experience of sexual abuse. In total, 10.1% \((n=749)\) of the sample reported physical abuse. Sexual abuse was reported by 8.0% \((n=597)\) of the sample. The results show that males were more likely to have reported having violated others sexually in the last 12 months, \(\chi^2(1) = 46.813, p < .001\), thereof 83% \((n=85)\) males and 17.4 % \((n=18)\) females.

Descriptive statistic for social support scales for all participants can be seen in Table 2, with minimum and maximum values as well as the mean score and standard deviation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental support scored higher than peer support (high scores indicating higher support). In total parental support \((M = 3.4, SD = 0.60)\) was higher than peer support \((M = 3.15, SD = 0.67)\). When comparing the groups with non-sexual perpetration with sexual perpetration, similar results were found as can be seen in Table 3. Parental support \((M = 3.42, SD = 0.60)\) scores higher than peers support \((M = 3.15, SD = 0.67)\) for both groups (non-sex perpetrators
PREDICTORS OF ADOLESCENT SEXUAL PERPETRATION

Table 3

Minimum and Maximum Value, Mean and Standard Deviation for the Social support variables and the test variable comparing non-sex perpetration and sex perpetration with a t-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Peer support     | 1   | 4   | 3.16  | 0.67| 2.82  | 0.79| $t(111) = 4.46, p < .001$
| Parental support | 1   | 4   | 3.44  | 0.59| 3.10  | 0.80| $t(112) = 4.36, p < .001$

and sex perpetrators), $t(7321) = 31.640, p < .001$. Those who reported being sexual perpetrators also reported higher parental support ($M = 3.10, SD = 0.80$), than peer support ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.79$), $t(6941) = 31.050, p < .001$. Similarly, non-sexual perpetrators reported higher parent support ($M = 3.44, SD = 0.59$) than peers support ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.67$), $t(109) = 3.219, p = .002$.

A chi-square test of independence showed that males were more likely than females to say yes to the sexual perpetration question, $\chi^2(1, N = 6,953) = 46.81, p < .001$, this can be seen in Table 4. Furthermore, those who said they had experienced physical abuse were more likely to answer yes to the sexual perpetration question, $\chi^2(1, N = 7101) = 76.21, p < .001$. 6% of those that had experienced physical abuse reported sexual perpetration based on the sample. While only 1.2% reported the sexual perpetration of those who did not report physical abuse. The relationship between sexual abuse and sexual perpetration was also significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 7101) = 115.46, p < .001$. Of those who were victims of sexual abuse, 8% became sexual perpetrators while only 1.1% of those that did not reported sexual abuse reported sexual perpetration.
Table 4

Sexual Perpetration by Gender, Sexual abuse and Physical abuse tested with Chi-square test of independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Non-sexual perpetrators</th>
<th>Sexual perpetrators</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3327 (97.5)</td>
<td>85 (2.5)</td>
<td>46.81*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3,523 (99.5)</td>
<td>18 (0.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of physical abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6,390 (98.8)</td>
<td>75 (1.2)</td>
<td>76.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>600 (94.3)</td>
<td>36 (5.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of sexual abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6,539 (98.9)</td>
<td>75 (1.1)</td>
<td>115.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>451 (92.6)</td>
<td>36 (7.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < 0.001 \)

The results from a binary logistic regression with all study variables examined are presented in Table 5. The logistic regression model explained 2.3% (according to Cox & Shell R square) and 16.3% (according to Nagelkerke’s adjusted value) of the variance of the dependent variable, sexual perpetration. This revealed that by looking at the main effect, there was a negative and significant relationship between gender and sexual perpetration. Males were more likely to report being sexual perpetrators. The results also indicated that sexual abuse and physical abuse were significantly and independently related to sexual
perpetration. The odds ratio for being a sexual perpetrator increased by 7.2 units if an individual has experienced sexual abuse. Similarly, the odds ratio for being a sexual perpetrator increases by 2.7 units if an individual has experienced physical abuse. When looking at social support, parental support was negatively related to sexual perpetration, while peer support did not significantly predict sexual perpetration, meaning that those who received good parental support were less likely to report sexual perpetration. The strongest predictor of sexual perpetration was sexual abuse.

Finally, interaction terms were added to the model to test whether sexual abuse and/or physical abuse interacted with parental support and/or peer support when predicting sexual perpetration. To test this interaction, four interaction terms were added to the model (not demonstrated in Table 5). The results showed two significant interactions, one between parental support and being a victim of physical abuse ($B = .834, p < .05$) and the other between peer support and being a victim of sexual abuse ($B = -.764, p < .05$). In other words, for those who reported experiencing physical abuse, parental support was a weaker predictor for reporting sexual perpetration than for those that did not report physical abuse. Furthermore, peer support was a stronger predictor of answering the sexual perpetration question with a yes, for those that had experienced sexual abuse than those that had not.

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify risk and protective factors for sexual perpetration amongst adolescents. The findings of the study support the first hypothesis that males are significantly more likely to report sexual perpetration. This hypothesis was confirmed with 83% of those reporting perpetrations being male and 17% being female. This is consistent with previous findings that males are more likely to have reported sexual perpetration (Borowsky et al., 1997; Sigurdsson et al., 2010). It was also
noted that proportion of females reported sexual perpetration was 0.5% which was consistent with previous findings (Fehrenbach & Monastersky, 1988; Wijkman et al., 2014).

The findings also supported the second hypothesis, that sexual abuse and physical abuse in childhood increase the odds of sexual perpetration. Those that were victims of sexual abuse were 6.7 times more likely than those that had no experience of sexual abuse to report sexual perpetration. Previous studies have also shown that sexual abuse is a strong predictor of sexual perpetration (Sigurdsson et al., 2010) and that those children who reported sexual abuse are more likely to sexually violate other children (Hanson & Slater, 1988; Lee et al., 2002; Vizard, 2007). However, not all sexual abuse victim became sexual perpetration as can be seen in this study and results from other similar studies (Salter et al., 2003; Vizard et al., 2007). For physical abuse, 5.7% of those reporting abuse reported sexual perpetration while only 1.2% of those that did not report experience physical abuse reported sexual perpetration. These results were consistent with previous studies that indicate that exposure to physical violence at home increase the likelihood of adolescent sexual perpetrator behaviour (Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Sigurdsson et al., 2010). Furthermore previous studies have showed that sexual abuse and physical abuse are high risk factors that increase the odds of sexual offending behaviour substantially (Chan, 2011; Salter et al., 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2010), which is consistent with the results from the current study.

The third hypothesis stated that parental support and peer support decreases the odds of sexual perpetration. The findings in the study also supported this statement, indicating that parental support and peer support decrease the odds of answering yes on the question of sexual perpetration. This is consistent with other studies stating the importance of parental support and that it could be considered as a general protective factor (Tharp et al., 2013) as well as a potential protective factor for adolescent sexual perpetration (Bentovim, 2002; Tharp et al., 2013). As previously stated, the lack of parental support has also been
considered as a risk factor for general adolescent offending (Elliott et al., 1985). Furthermore, as stated previously, peer support was significant. This was consistent with another study suggesting that for male adolescent, positive peer support could be seen as a protective factor (Borowsky et al., 1997).

Finally, the fourth hypothesis stated that parental support and peer support buffers the effect of physical- and/or sexual abuse on sexual perpetration. The results showed that for those that answered yes on the sexual perpetration question, parental support was a weaker predictor for those that had experienced physical abuse than those that had not. Furthermore, peer support was a stronger predictor of answering the sexual perpetration question with a yes, for those that had experienced sexual abuse than those that had not.

The main strengths of the study were the size of the sample, using data from 7,430 participants, both male and female. The study had a well-balanced gender ratio in the sample. Furthermore, the study is anonymous and executed in a setting familiar to the participants.

There were some limitations to the research, the main limitation is it being a cross-sectional study, meaning that a cause and effect relationship cannot be established. 198 individuals did not mention their sex. Furthermore, 329 individuals did not answer the question regarding having engaged in sexual perpetration in the last 12 months, which was 4.4% of the sample. This study made no question or distinctions between those participants answering yes to the sexual perpetration question, such as when the perpetration took place, the type of sexual perpetration, age of victim etc. It furthermore only asked about the last twelve months regarding the question resulting in not knowing when the act happened, its severity, count or misinterpretations on the participant’s half. This was a self-reported evaluation receptive to various interpretations by those reporting and the possibility of response bias and how truthfully the participants were. Finally, one must keep in mind that
while some parts of the study showed independent predictors for sexual perpetration, the sample size of participants matching those variables was a small number.

For future research on this topic, a longitudinal study could assist with better confirming a possible causal relationship between participants and some of the variables. This study could better answer for example if sexual abuse and physical abuse predict the act of sexual perpetration if they precede the act of sexual perpetration rather than follow it. Furthermore, this could allow for controlled variables such as preventive measures and the measuring their effects. Finally, understanding the age and frequency of variables and those implications both for the victims and offenders.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of looking at risk factors for adolescent sexual perpetrations. The results indicated that males are more likely to report sexual perpetration than females. History of victimization such as sexual abuse and physical abuse independently predicts reporting sexual perpetration. However, a minority that experiences this abuse answer yes regarding sexual perpetration. Furthermore, the study suggests that parental support is a weaker predicting factor of those who reported sexual perpetration and had suffered physical abuse. While peer support was a stronger predictor for those that had experienced sexual abuse, and reported sexual perpetration. This indicates that further study is required to understand social support as a protective factor against sexual perpetration. Future research in this field could yield better results in assisting and preventing potential sexual perpetrators.
References


