

Victimization in Childhood of Male Sex Offenders: Relationship between Violence Experienced and Subsequent Offenses through Discourse Analysis

Milena Abbiati, Belinda Mezzo, and Jessica Waeny-Desponds

Service of Correctional Medicine and Psychiatry (SMPP) and Legal Psychiatry Institute, Lausanne University Hospital, Switzerland

Joseph Minervini

Outpatient Consultation and Care Unit (UCSA), Maison d'arrêt de Besançon, France

Christian Mormont

Clinical Psychology Department, University of Liège, Belgium

Bruno Gravier

Service of Correctional Medicine and Psychiatry (SMPP) and Legal Psychiatry Institute, Lausanne University Hospital, Switzerland

Abstract: This study aims at better understanding how the form of childhood violence experienced and the type of offense subsequently committed affect how sex offenders recall punishments and difficult events. Fifty-four male perpetrators convicted of sexual offenses against children (SOCs) or against adults (SOAs) were interviewed in France, Belgium, and Switzerland using the Lausanne Clinical Interview (*Entretien Clinique de Lausanne* or LCI). Almost three-quarters of the sex offenders reported having been victimized during childhood. The correspondence analysis identified several factors that differentiated them. Their appraisal of the distressing event, method of coping with and distancing themselves from it, and how they dealt with emotions varied markedly depending on whether they recognized having experienced various

Address correspondence to Milena Abbiati, Legal Psychiatry Institute, Service of Correctional Medicine and Psychiatry, Lausanne University Hospital, Céry, 1008 Prilly, Switzerland. E-mail: Milena.Abbiati@chuv.ch

forms of violence during childhood and on what type of offense they subsequently committed. Victimization can be identified as much by the events experienced as by their effect on the sex offender's discourse. Identification of these discursive indicators may lead to an improved therapeutic approach for potentially traumatic childhood experiences.

Keywords: sex offenders, childhood victimization, emotions, psychodynamic approaches

INTRODUCTION

Experiencing violence during childhood appears to be central to the psychological issues of sex offenders. People who experience violence in childhood are more likely to become sex abusers themselves (Lee, Jackson, Pattison, & Ward, 2002; Starzyk & Marshall, 2003; Widom & Ames, 1994), and sex offenders are at least as likely to have a history of physical violence and neglect as of sexual violence (Collin-Vézina & Cyr, 2003; English, Graham, Litrownik, Everson, & Bangdiwala, 2005; Graham, 1996; Whitaker et al., 2008). Offenders have also reported other harmful factors—e.g., parents with a criminal record or a substance abuse problem (Craissati, McClurg, & Browne, 2002; Stanley & Goddard, 2004). Our aim is to analyze how the experience of childhood violence manifests itself in the discourse of sex offenders after they offend and how that discourse can be analyzed. We are not concerned with whether the experience constitutes true maltreatment but will rather analyze how the experience can be identified and how it relates to other factors in these subjects' histories. We aim to describe the experience of violence in childhood through a psychodynamic framework to get better indicators of what underlies the discourse of sex offenders that can be used in treatment practice. Thus we attribute great importance to the manner in which sex offenders express themselves regarding the violence they experienced and to their choice of words.

Studies on Abuse and Maltreatment

Studies on abuse and maltreatment generally make little distinction among the types of violence to which their subjects were exposed in childhood. Their concepts are ambiguous and they use the terms *abuse* and *maltreatment* interchangeably. In our work, we use the broader expression "violence experienced in childhood" and differentiate between types of violence.

The Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998) assess the violence experienced by children and divides it into four categories: nonviolent discipline, psychological aggression, physical assault, and neglect. Two other studies used roughly the same categories (Stanley & Goddard, 2004; World Health Organization, 2006). Stanley and Goddard also identified indicators for experiencing violence: living in

a “violent environment,” witnessing violence, and having a friend or family member involved in criminal activities.

Research has shown that sex offenders are more likely to have experienced physical or psychological violence as children and/or teens than the rest of the general population (Graham, 1996; World Health Organization, 2006). For some authors, the same holds true for other offenders as well (Edwards, Holden, Felitti, & Anda, 2003; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003). Compared with non-violent offenders, those committing sexual offenses against adults (SOAs) were found to have experienced more violence in their family environment (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987; Leonard, 1993; Simons, Wurtele, & Durham, 2008). However, other studies found no difference between sex offenders and offenders with no history of sexual crimes (McCormack, Hudson, & Ward, 2002; Weeks & Widom, 1998).

In addition, some studies have found that sex offenders’ relationship with their fathers was marked early on by rejection and neglect, while the maternal relationship seemed kindly, but with vague boundaries (Craissati et al., 2002; McCormack et al., 2002). These findings echo the results of studies on attachment style (Alexander, 1992; W. L. Marshall, 1989; W. L. Marshall & Marshall, 2010; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995). Because of their problematic family history—in particular the parent-child relationship—sex offenders appear to be unable to form a secure attachment in childhood. Thus they develop an insecure adult attachment style, which has been found to be associated with loneliness, difficulty managing negative emotions (notably anger), having an external locus of control, and powerlessness. Attachment style has been central to the etiology of sex offending for Marshall since his early studies. He defined it as a distorted way of reaching interpersonal intimacy and closeness (W. L. Marshall, 1993). Further results also suggest that both maternal and paternal attachment relationships play important roles in sex offending behavior (Marsa et al., 2004; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998).

In general, poly-victimization experiences in childhood have been proven to have a major negative impact on later psychological and social development (Finkelhor, 2008; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, a history of sexual abuse has also been found to be a major risk factor in the emergence of sexual deviance (Maniglio, 2011; Van Wijk et al., 2006).

Evidence has been found to support the victim-to-victimizer hypothesis of sexual aggression (also referred to as the sexually abused–sexual abuser hypothesis). That evidence also showed that subjects who later commit sexual offenses are more likely to have been sexually abused but not more likely to have been physically abused in childhood (Burton, 2003; Burton, Miller, & Shill, 2002; Jespersen, Lalumière, & Seto, 2009). Other research has shown that other family members of the sex offender were often also sexually abused (Craissati et al., 2002).

In the early literature, however, the percentage of sex offenders who experienced sexual abuse during their own childhood pointed to a significant

dispersion, ranging from 0% to 67%, with an average of 28%. Moreover, the incidence is higher than that of community samples, which is around 10%, but is similar to the incidence among other offenders with no history of sexual crime (Hanson & Slater, 1988). This variation may reflect, irrespective of methodological issues, the subjects' difficulty in recalling their history and the fact that the violence experienced took on multiple forms.

A history of sexual abuse was found to be more prevalent among those committing sexual offenses against children (SOCs) than among SOAs, while a history of physical abuse was found to be more prevalent among SOAs in a recent meta-analysis (Jespersen et al., 2009), as well as in certain previous studies (Cohen et al., 2002; Simons et al., 2008; Widom & Ames, 1994). These results run counter to those of another meta-analysis examining risk factors for perpetration of child abuse, which show that child sexual abuse does not appear to be more relevant for future child sexual offenders than other forms of child abuse. Moreover, the only difference found between SOCs and SOAs was that the latter showed more externalizing behaviors (Whitaker et al., 2008). Both meta-analyses show that sex offenders who were sexually abused as children report more concomitant emotional and physical neglect than non-sex offenders.

With respect to attachment style, the SOCs mainly showed a preoccupied or fearful style of attachment, whereas rapists showed a dismissing-avoidant attachment style (L. E. Marshall & Marshall, 2002; McKillop, Smallbone, Wortley, & Andjic, 2012). Some results show that rapists of strangers had experienced particularly problematic relationships with their fathers, being more likely than any other group of offenders to recall their fathers as having been uncaring, unsympathetic, violent, and abusive toward them (Stirpe & Stermac, 2003).

Clinical Reports

Psychoanalytical clinical experience has shown another constant: many sex offenders present a lack of elaboration in their psychic functioning that results in an empty or superficial discourse accompanied by hostility (Ciavaldini, 1999). In clinical practice, sex offenders often respond inappropriately concerning the violence they experienced such as by minimizing the negative emotional impact or even totally denying any suffering. Thus this violence is often reported without any particular emotion. Moreover, the violence is not viewed as such by the offender. Although the context of the investigation (e.g., forensic) and the investigator's own subjectivity may influence these responses, other explanations may be considered.

The sex offender's tendency to rationalize/minimize violence experienced in childhood stems from the inability to process affects and is associated with the inability to identify with others. Repression of affect would therefore be a preponderant mechanism, leaving little potential for emotional expression (Balier & Ciavaldini, 2000). This mechanism may be deemed a manifestation of

identification with the aggressor, which is a classic, well-known psychoanalytic concept introduced by Ferenczi and A. Freud in the 1930s (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Thus, rationalization/minimization would be central to the sex offender's discourse and would account for the fact that the reported violence appears lacking in emotional charge (Balier, 1996). Furthermore, Nickel and Egle draw attention to the connection between memories of physical and/or sexual mistreatment in childhood, immature defenses, and the psychopathology manifested in adulthood (Nickel & Egle, 2006).

Other authors believe that the history of violence and the various forms of victimization that sex offenders experienced in their youth lead to a condition described as chronic post-traumatic stress, one feature of which would be "emotional incongruence" (Negrao, Bonanno, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2005). These subjects lived in a world of veiled psychological violence concealed behind a veneer of normality, making it harder to identify the violence they experienced as children and teens. Likewise, it is a challenge to differentiate between violent maltreatment and punitive behavior that is part of child-raising. Hence, there is a need to delve more deeply into what these subjects actually experienced. Obviously, substantial confusion surrounds these behaviors, and that confusion makes the subjects disinclined to even find out what happened to them.

Aims and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to explore the representation that sex offenders have of the punishments and difficult events they experienced in childhood. It seeks to examine in greater depth the relationships between how the field of these representations is organized and the type of offense subsequently committed. It also draws connections between representations of punishment and difficult events, the type of offense, and the psychological and physical violence or sexual abuse reported in their past. Those connections could be used by therapists during treatment to more effectively address and explore the victimization.

Our hypothesis is that the distinct psychological functioning of sex offenders who report violence experienced in childhood leads them to describe punishment and difficult events in their own terms, terms that differ from those used by sex-offender subjects who claim not to have experienced violence. Moreover, there is a link between the type of offense subsequently committed (against children or against adults) and the subject's discourse.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The sample comprised 54 men aged 18 to 77 (average age = 41) who had been convicted of sexual offenses against minors ($n = 42$) (for France and

Belgium, minors <15 years old; for Switzerland, minors <16 years old) or against adults (n = 12) and who were incarcerated or participating in post-correctional outpatient consultations in France (n = 22), Belgium (n = 18), or Switzerland (n = 14). Data on offenses were corroborated by judgments and expert assessments.

Research was conducted jointly by three units—in Switzerland, Belgium, and France—and resulted in a first, general report (Mormont, Corneille, & Coco, 2002). The three research teams worked together to develop the methods for conducting the clinical interview. All subjects signed a written informed consent form.

The general research approach was approved by the Canton of Vaud University Hospital (CHUV) Psychiatry Ethics Board. The subjects' decision whether or not to fill out the questionnaire had no effect on their correctional situation. Most of the subjects' answers were noted verbatim by the investigators; a few were retranscribed in the third person. Interviews lasted four hours on average.

Material and Design

The Lausanne Clinical Interview (*Entretien Clinique de Lausanne* or LCI) is a semistructured interview (Appendix I) used by French-speaking clinicians with sex offenders in Swiss, French, and Belgian prisons. It is adapted to the medical, social, and legal specificities of each of these three countries and supplements existing instruments that investigate the psychological functioning of sex offenders—i.e., the Clinical Investigation Questionnaire for Sexual Abusers (*Questionnaire d'Investigation Clinique pour les Auteurs d'Agressions Sexuelles*) (Balier, 1996) and the Evaluation Guide for Sexual Abusers (*Guide d'Evaluation des Agresseurs Sexuels*) (Aubut, 1993). The research presented in this article analyzes responses to five open-ended questions (Table 1) on punishments and difficult events as well as on the physical, psychological, and sexual violence experienced.

Table 1: Questions selected to explore the violence experienced (from part B history, Lausanne Clinical Interview).

Questions:

1. Were you **hit** or beaten as a child or teen? If so, under what circumstances and why?
2. Did you feel **humiliated** as a child or teen? If so, under what circumstances and why?
3. Did you experience **sexual contact** as a child or teen other than that mentioned in the previous questions? If so, under what circumstances and why?
4. Were you **punished** as a child or teen? If so, how were you punished? How did you feel about these punishments?
5. Did you experience **personal events that you found difficult** as a child or teen? If so, what were they? How did you feel when these events happened?

First, a descriptive analysis of the answers was conducted through conventional tests (Kruskall-Wallis, in particular) using SPSS software, version 15. A textual analysis was then carried out on the answers about punishments and difficult events. Only those subjects who replied in the affirmative to the two questions regarding these topics were retained. The size of the sample did not allow us to identify differences between the profile of these subjects and those of subjects who replied in the negative. The analysis was performed using SPAD software (Lebart, Morineau, & Piron, 2004), which runs correspondence factor analyses.

Textual Data Analysis

From all the words used in the responses about punishment and difficult events, a reduced lexicon was created and a word list was selected. The word list was established according to the usual data preparation procedure for textual analysis (Lebart, Morineau & Piron, 2004) and was based on categories defined by the semantic and etymological similarity of the words used. The SPAD software can create basic and derivative lexicons and simplify them by identifying equivalent word forms or removing words irrelevant to the analysis of the reduced lexicon.

Accordingly, the correspondence analysis was carried out on the reduced lexicon, based on the two modalities of our four variables: physical violence (PHY YES/NO), psychological violence (PSY YES/NO), sexual abuse (SEX YES/NO), and type of offense (against children SOCs, against adults SOAs). The sum of factor loading (FL) for a factor is 100; therefore, if each modality involved in the analysis contributed equally to the factor, the average contribution of each would be $100/\text{number of variable modalities}$. It follows that, in our study, variable modalities with a contribution greater than 12.5% ($100/8 = 12.5$) are those that constitute the factors. Below this threshold, the factor's contribution to explaining the data is negligible. Similarly, for the elements observed (the signifiers), only those with a FL greater than $100/n$ signifiers were retained. Moreover, the quality of representation for the studied variables/signifiers was verified by means of squared loadings (\cos^2). This indicator shows whether a point far from center is properly represented (in which case it will have a \cos^2 of 1). We chose a standard threshold of $\cos^2 > 0.70$ (Child, 2006).

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Over half of all subjects indicated that they experienced psychological (63%) and/or physical (61%) violence as children and more than one-third of all

subjects reported having suffered sexual violence. Of subjects, 18% said they were not subjected to any violence. Of the 54 subjects, 45 (83%) claimed to have suffered at least one type of violence, of whom 28 (62%) cited at least two different forms of violence. Of those 28, half were victims of all three types of violence (Table 2).

The experience of humiliation, which was an indicator of psychological violence in our study, was present in 34 cases. Three different aspects could be identified in 25 cases: deprivation, physical appearance as a source of denigration, and difficulty with authority figures.

The context (circumstances, locations, and perpetrators) of the violence was mentioned by 26 interviewees. Commonly, that context was the family environment or school, or even other education-related relationships. In a minority of cases, the perpetrators of violence were peers (classmates, for example).

As regards physical violence, 17 subjects specified the type of blows received; 12 said they were hit with an object (belt, strap, etc.) and 24 subjects mentioned the context—most commonly the family environment, then as part of peer relationships, and finally in other education-related situations. Only 9 subjects reported what, in their view, may have led to the blows—for example, “mischievous” and “rebelliousness.”

When study subjects stated that they experienced sexual contact as children, this refers solely to blatant sexual abuse (for the vast majority, rape or other sexual acts between an adult and a minor).

Table 2: Summary of violence, punishment, and difficult events.

Type of Violence	Aggregate		SOAs	SOCs	
	N	%	n	n	
Psychological violence	34	63	8	26	<i>ns</i>
Physical violence	33	61	9	24	<i>ns</i>
Sexual abuse	20	37	7	13	$p < .05$
No type of violence	9	18	1	8	
Psychological violence only	8		1	7	
Physical violence only	8		0	8	
Sexual abuse only	1		0	1	
Total for one form of violence	17	31	1	16	
Psychological and physical violence	9		3	6	
Psychological violence and sexual abuse	2		1	1	
Physical violence and sexual abuse	3		1	2	
Total for two forms of violence	14	26	4	10	
Total for three forms of violence	14	26	5	9	
Total abuse	54	100%	12	42	
Punishment	49	91%	11	38	<i>ns</i>
Difficult events	46	85%	10	36	<i>ns</i>

The perpetrators of this sexual abuse varied: strangers, close relatives, peers, educators, older children, friends of the family, etc. A minority (3 out of 20 subjects) said they were abused several times or over a long period. Subjects committing SOAs reported significantly more sexual abuse than those committing SOC's ($p < .05$). This was the only significant difference found between offenders committing SOAs and SOC's (Table 2).

With respect to punishment, 49 of the 54 subjects said they were punished as children and 41 of them described the punishment. The accounts of these punishments were categorized based on the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales and the corroborating assessment of researchers. The punishments most frequently described were deprivation, confinement, slaps, and blows.

Difficult events were mentioned by 46 of the 54 subjects. A great many of these events could be rated on the Holmes and Masuda stress evaluation scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Frequently cited events included separations, violence, illness, death, and alcoholism of individuals close to the subject.

Punishment, Violence Experienced, and Type of Offense

Study subjects used 1,981 different words to answer the question on punishments. The reduced lexicon consisted of 35 different signifiers representing a total occurrence of 530 words. Thus about 30% of all words used were taken into account ($530/1981 = .27$). The 15 most frequent signifiers (frequency > 14) concern five themes: conveying a direct connection with the subject, evoking the general theme of punishment, specifying the frequency and/or the intensity of punishment, and identifying the perpetrator.

The first two factors are mapped in Figure 1, using the variable modalities and the terms used by the subjects. Factor 1 (regular font on the graph) is read on the horizontal axis. Factor 2 (italicized font on the graph) is read on the vertical axis.

Variables for the type of violence (psychological, physical, sexual) and type of offense (SOC's/SOA's) are illustrated with triangles. The most relevant words used by the subjects are noted in regular font for the horizontal axis and in italics for the vertical axis.

Together, the first two factors accounted for 68% of the total variance, which is why only those two factors are presented as part of this study. The first factor (assent-rationalization) accounted for 42% (eigenvalue = 0.04) of the variance, while the second factor (submission-resistance) accounted for 26% (eigenvalue = 0.03).

Assent-Rationalization

The first underlying factor can be understood as the subjects' expression of their appraisal of the punishment. It sets apart subjects who say they experienced violence and whose words convey a legitimization and an experience

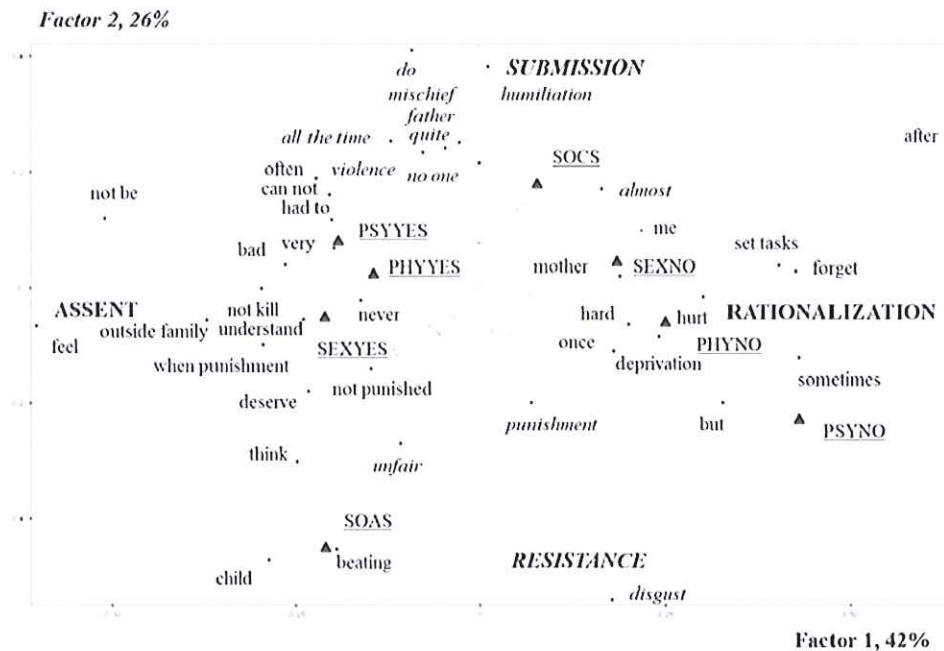


Figure 1: Correspondence analysis on punishment.

of assent to the punishment from subjects who say they did not experience violence and whose words convey a kind of rationalization of the punishment received.

This factor compared the responses of subjects who said they experienced psychological violence ($FL = 0.31$) and physical violence ($FL = 0.25$) with the responses of subjects who claimed they did not experience psychological violence ($FL = 0.15$).

Subjects who experienced psychological and physical violence are on the left side of Figure 1, whereas those who did not experience psychological violence are on the right side. The contribution of the sexual-abuse and type-of-offense variables to this first factor was negligible.

Subjects who said they experienced violence (psychological and physical) used specific words that contributed greatly to this factor (assent). The words suggested that the subjects were focused on the time and the context of the punishment (*when punishment*). The subjects indicated that they were frequently (*often*) punished both inside and outside the family environment; they also recalled difficult feelings (*very, bad, felt*) and feelings of powerlessness (*could not, was not, had to*), while appearing to rationalize them (*understand, corporal punishment, deserved*).

Subjects who claimed they did not experience psychological violence recounted in detail the type of punishment (*deprivation, recopying notebooks*).

It was described as rare (*once/sometimes*) and was subsequently forgotten (*after; forgot*); however, they recall having been “hurt” and having found it “hard.”

Submission–Resistance

The second factor may be understood as the subject’s method for coping with the distressing event. It opposes subjects who used words indicating an experience of resistance to punishment and an active attitude (SOAs) with subjects who experienced the event passively (SOCs who report psychological violence).

This factor contrasts responses by SOA subjects (FL = 0.54) (lower part of Figure 1) with responses by SOC subjects (FL = 0.23) who said they experienced psychological violence (FL = 0.14). The words used most often by SOA subjects referred to unfair corporal punishment or indicated that they were reflecting on it (*think*), opposed to it (*against*), or felt disgusted by it.

The words used most by SOC subjects who reported being victims of psychological violence describe a violent environment (*violence, all the time*) and fall within the domain of action. They described feelings of humiliation and abandonment (*have no one*) while justifying the punishment based on their mischief. Further, these subjects frequently mentioned their father.

Difficult Events, Violence, and Type of Offenses

The subjects used 1,995 different words to answer this question. The reduced lexicon consisted of 38 different signifiers representing a total occurrence of 568 words. Thus, about 30% of the corpus was processed ($1995/568 = .28$). The 20 most frequent signifiers (frequency > 15) concerned six themes: words expressing a direct connection with the subject, the family context, persons outside the immediate circle, intensity, temporality, and emotions.

Figure 2 illustrates the variable modalities and the terms used by subjects. The first factor (minimization–withdrawal) accounted for 53% of the variance (eigenvalue = 0.05), the second (repressing anger–expressing shame) for 19% (eigenvalue = 0.02), and the two combined for 72% of the total variance, which is why only two factors are presented as part of this study.

Minimization–Withdrawal

We understand this underlying factor as a way of subjects distancing themselves from the event. It compares the first subjects, whose words indicate that they recognized the difficult events and their consequences but experienced them in a contradictory manner—namely by underestimating the suffering and effects of long-term violence—with subjects whose words indicated a withdrawal and an experience of anxiety or fear that signaled intensity while being unable to specifically name the events they describe as difficult.

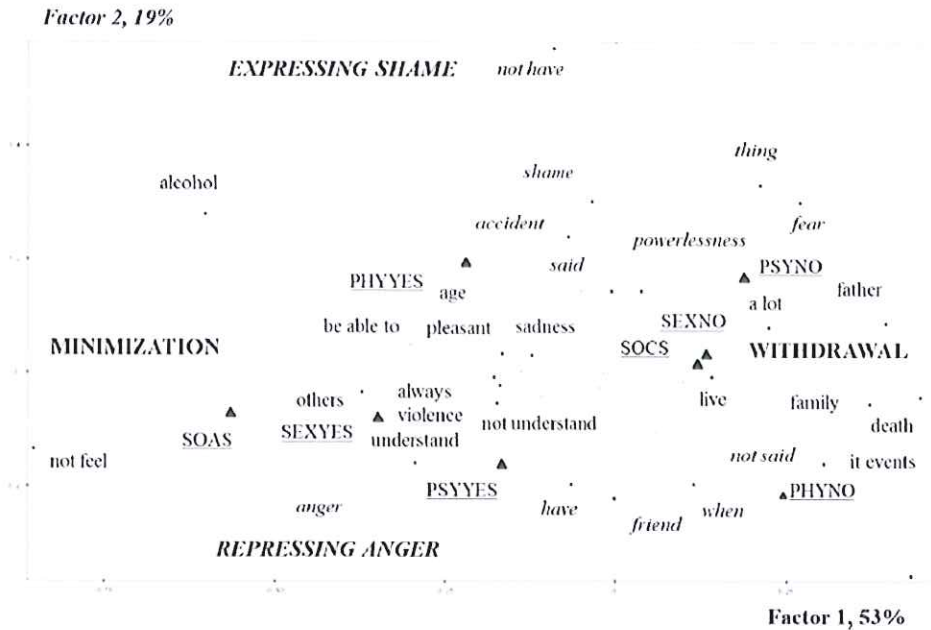


Figure 2: Correspondence analysis on difficult event.

This factor (Figure 2) compared the responses of SOA subjects ($FL = 0.28$) who said they experienced sexual abuse ($FL = 0.17$) and physical violence ($FL = 0.13$) to those of SOC subjects ($FL = 0.35$) who said they did not experience physical violence ($FL = 0.14$). The contribution of the psychological-violence variable to this first factor was negligible.

For SOAs who said they experienced sexual abuse and physical violence, the signifiers that contributed greatly to this factor (minimization) evoke painful emotions (*grief, sadness*), but also insensitivity (*not feel*). They also mentioned alcohol and continuous ambient violence (*violence, others, always*). The events were, however, a source of confusion in terms of their meaning (*understand, not understand*). Some described the period as pleasant, an element that may indicate their confusion regarding what they experienced at that time and led them to minimize the impact of what they experienced.

On the other hand, among SOC subjects who said they did not experience physical violence, the words that contributed most to the factor were words such as *fear*, *life (live)*, and *death (die)*. These subjects cited these difficult events using the terms “*that*” or “*thing*” and frequently appended the expression *a lot*; they remained focused on the family, their home, and their father.

Repressing Anger–Expressing Shame

We understand this underlying factor as representing a particular relationship with the emotions arising from the violence. It contrasts subjects

constrained by the unspoken and by fear (“repressing anger”) with subjects who used words to describe an experience of shame and even powerlessness (“expressing shame”).

This factor compared the responses of subjects who said they experienced psychological violence (FL = 0.19) but no physical violence (FL = 0.30), shown in the lower part of Figure 2, with those who said they experienced physical violence (FL = 0.28) but no psychological violence (FL = 0.18), shown in the upper part of Figure 2.

The former used words such as *anger*, *have*, and *not say* the most; what’s more, they often spoke of friends. The latter more typically used words such as *shame*, *not have*, and *powerless*. They fell within the scope of expression and indicated that several incidents had occurred.

DISCUSSION

In this study, sex offenders described violence experienced in the three forms investigated (physical, psychological, sexual). There is a rather high rate of sexual violence, and that violence was almost always concomitant with physical and psychological violence. Our findings were in line with those of earlier, more general research (Graham, 1996; Jespersen et al., 2009; World Health Organization, 2006).

Unlike the findings of other works (Cohen et al., 2002; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003; Van Wijk et al., 2006), there were no significant differences between the rate of physical and psychological violence for SOAs and SOC. This could be due to the small size of our SOA group ($n = 12$). Unlike some other studies, sexual violence was more frequent among SOAs than SOC.

Not surprisingly, the father was often the perpetrator of the punishment. Many other authors have found this as well, describing the father as absent, cold, hostile, or violent with his children (Graham, 1996; Lisak, 1994; Milcent, 1999).

The difficult events cited by our subjects corroborated the data in the literature (Ainsworth, 1983; Balier, 1993; Ciavaldini, 1999; Starzyk & Marshall, 2003). For example, an epidemiological study (Gravier et al., 2001) that examined records on sex offenders (the judgment and expert assessment in particular) found that the following salient experiences were the most often cited: death of one or more loved ones, suicide of a loved one, separation within the family or divorce, placement, violence, sexual abuse, parental alcoholism, or abandonment.

Results support the hypothesis that these early experiences, with respect to the quality of the object relationship, prevented subjects from developing a secure attachment (Cornet & Mormont, 2005; Craissati et al., 2002; W. L. Marshall, 1993; Simons et al., 2008), which later resulted in difficulty forging and maintaining emotional bonds. The narrative of our offenders attests

to their high external locus of control and thus a general lack of power over events, which is consistent with previous studies on attachment styles (Marsa et al., 2004). The violence experienced, however, was not generally recognized as a difficult event. Only a few subjects mentioned blows, punishment, sexual abuse, or humiliation as difficult personal events. Moreover, despite this report of poly-victimization, the sex offenders did not present themselves as victims of childhood maltreatment when answering questions about punishment and difficult events.

The experience of assent that goes hand in hand with the use of contradictory emotional words, as shown by factor analysis, may suggest identification with the aggressor as described among child victims of violence (Ciavaldini, 1999). According to this theory, in order to survive the shock resulting from the violence, children identify with their abuser and internalize some of the abuser's characteristics. In the case at hand, identification with the abuser may show up in the terms that the subject uses that are characteristic of his profile. The contradictory feelings experienced at the time of punishment could thus translate, in retrospect, to a form of assent, illustrating the confusion that persists much later.

On the other hand, rationalization seems to characterize sex offenders who do not report violence recognized as such or identify with a particular experience when recalling punishment. The frequency and intensity of and reason for the punishment seem forgotten; the little affect expressed is hazy and ill-defined.

Yet all these subjects chose words that indicated a painful experience: although they suffered from the punishment, their description of the suffering was vague and/or trivialized. Affect appears to not be inverted as it is when there is identification with the abuser, but remains diffuse, making it difficult to place in the subject's psychological history.

In general, emotions, when expressed, were appropriate but often minimized. They were essentially primary emotions (Ekman, 1999) such as sadness, anger, fear, shame, disgust, and—to a lesser degree—surprise. Affect was more expressed regarding difficult events, although punishments seemed to have been experienced more through a kind of indifference or distancing. We suggest that the difficult events appear to concern the subjects less directly, at least in terms of their feelings, which—paradoxically—allows them to express their emotions to a greater degree (Stanley & Goddard, 2004). Beyond the events experienced and reported, these emotions sketch a picture of the subjects' day-to-day reality, marked by violence (alcohol, deprivation, blows) and difficult life circumstances (abandonment, separation, death, illness).

The presence of psychological violence recognized as such by subjects appears to play a particular role in how these subjects reacted. More specifically, subjects committing SOCs who reported being victims of psychological violence differed from SOAs. They presented with an experience of submission

but also anger, unlike subjects committing SOAs, whose experience tended to be one of resistance and who felt the punishment was unfair and fought it.

This finding echoes other studies which found that humiliation may be a source of shame and depressive affect (Miller, 1988) and further emotional dissociation and lack of empathy (Lee et al., 2002; Simons, Wurtele, & Heil, 2002). This is consistent with Marsa as well as Marshall and Barbaree's findings that child sex offenders experience more anger than nonoffenders but suppress the expression of anger. In contrast with violent offenders, their cognitive anger reactions—but not their behavioral reactions—were more abnormal than those of community controls (Marsa et al., 2004; W. L. Marshall & Barbaree, 1990).

The finding is also consistent with the clinical profile of subjects committing SOC versus SOAs identified in an epidemiological survey prior to this study, conducted with a cohort of 352 sex offenders (Gravier et al., 2001), and with a recent meta-analysis comparing these two groups, in which SOAs are described as more externalizing and more aggressive than SOC (Whitaker et al., 2008).

The difficult events described also gave rise to a range of feelings based on the type of offense subsequently committed, corresponding with the above-mentioned SOA and SOC subject profiles. Subjects committing SOAs who said they experienced violence and lived in a violent environment tended to describe a feeling of sadness and pain. Subjects committing SOC who said they did not experience sexual abuse or physical violence described a generalized feeling of fear. They also referred more often to their family, their close environment, and their father, while stating that they experienced difficult events. Thus subjects committing SOC appear to be more fearful and withdrawn, while expressing a kind of attachment to their family. These observations are consistent with the attachment style typology of subjects committing SOAs (preoccupied or fearful) and those committing SOC (dismissing or avoidant) (L. E. Marshall & Marshall, 2002; Stirpe & Stermac, 2003). For both sex offender groups, the violence experienced induced a specific relationship to the family circle and affected a private sphere that appeared disturbed and difficult for these subjects to describe.

Of course, these elements fall short of giving us an exact idea of the family environment in which the sex offenders lived. Other studies have found a high degree of violence among the family members of sex offenders, as well as among sex offenders' family members and the outside community—and that both are positively correlated (Seghorn, Prenky, & Boucher, 1987; Simons, Wurtele, & Durham, 2008; Stanley & Goddard, 2004; Whitaker et al., 2008). This climate of family turmoil is also described as “perverse violence,” which affects subjects by preventing them from seeing the causal relationship between their feelings and the events, with the major effect of limiting their introspective abilities (Hirigoyen, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

Studying the sex offenders' discourse on the violence experienced in childhood revealed the difficulty they have in placing events in their context when these events involved significant emotional content and were likely to generate affect. Other scholars with psychoanalytic backgrounds have worked on the difficulty of recognizing the victimization experienced and of identifying it as traumatic (Balier, 1996; Ciavaldini, 1999). Our observations provide a few clues on how sex offenders distance, minimize, and recreate early experiences in their current discourse.

Results are consistent with our own clinical observation of the mentalization difficulties that these subjects experience. Mentalization is defined as development that participates in secondary thought processes and mitigates the impact of excitation by giving it meaning (Doron, 1991). It is not so much memory recall that is involved, but rather everything that allows such memories to survive in the psyche other than as hard facts. All that is experienced in the private sphere has a specific effect on these mentalization capabilities.

Whether the victims go on to abuse adults or to abuse children may originate from the manner in which the future abuser internalized the experience of victimization and positions himself relative to that experience. Our study indicates, in particular, that subjects committing SOAs are better able to express feelings, while subjects committing SOC are more fearful and withdrawn. This finding sketches two very different emotional pictures that are widely found in the clinical setting and that can also be related to the way in which these individuals metabolize early experiences.

The team members who conducted the interviews were often struck by the discrepancy between the power of the potentially traumatic experiences recounted by the subjects and their lack of emotional participation in recounting them. This finding supports the hypothesis that the subjects were unable to metabolize this early experience and are unable to connect with it emotionally. Conversely, the team members themselves often experienced contradictory and strong emotions when conducting the semistructured interviews. In that incongruence we can see the recounting of experiences and the unrecognized emotions as stemming from the violence experienced by the subjects interviewed.

These elements allow the therapist to construct a representation of what the subject experienced and to provide the appropriate support. Victimization is to be found in the subject's verbalizations and positioning, not in a binary manner (happened/did not happen) but as a constellation of attitudes that may initially seem insignificant but that become imbued with meaning when the subject's experience is considered.

Limitation and Future Directions

Although our results are clearly limited by the sample size and the non-longitudinal setting, their alignment with data in the literature supports a continuation of this work. The data collected during interviews from a reduced population specify how and why the link between the violence experienced and the sexual abuse committed may be investigated in future research. This process is important to improving the management of sex offenders and the prevention of such behavior.

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that access to the emotional world of sex offenders, in particular related to the violence they experienced, can be improved by the manner in which questions are formulated, posed, and grouped. More specifically, semistructured clinical interviews with open questions and a further qualitative discourse analysis may be complementary to quantitative “yes or no” questionnaires. Our findings do not mean that the experience has completely severed access to emotions. Rather, emotions appear to be reorganized in such a way that they are difficult to access through the associative methods of psychotherapeutic processes. By focusing on verbalizations, we hope that our study will lead to a more effective manner of addressing and exploring the victimization buried in the subject’s inner world.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. (1983). L'attachement mère-enfant. [Infant-mother attachment.] *Enfance*, 1(2), 7–18.
- Alexander, P. C. (1992). Application of attachment theory to the study of sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60(2), 185–195.
- Aubut, J. (1993). *Les agresseurs sexuels: Théorie, évaluation et traitement*. [Sexual offenders: Theory, assessment and treatment.] Montréal, Paris: Les Editions de la Chenelière, Maloine.
- Balier, C. (1993). Viols et incestes: Auteurs et victimes. [Rapes and incest: Victims and offenders.] In A. Fine, A. Le Guen, & A. Oppenheimer (Eds.), *Les troubles de la sexualité [Sexual troubles]* (pp. 159–198). Paris: Monographies de la Société Psychanalytique de Paris.
- Balier, C. (1996). *Psychanalyse des comportements sexuels violents*. [Sexual violent behavior psychoanalysis.] Paris: PUF.
- Balier, C., & Ciavaldini, A. (2000). *Agressions sexuelles: Pathologies, suivis thérapeutiques et cadre judiciaire*. [Sexual offenses: pathology, treatment and justice.] Paris: Masson.
- Burton, D. L. (2003). Male adolescents: Sexual victimization and subsequent sexual abuse. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 20(4), 277–296.

- Burton, D. L., Miller, D. L., & Shill, C. T. (2002). A social learning theory comparison of the sexual victimization of adolescent sexual offenders and nonsexual offending male delinquents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(9), 893–907.
- Child, J.-P. (2006). *The essential of factor analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Ciavaldini, A. (1999). *Psychopathologie des agresseurs sexuels. [Psychopathology of sexual offenders.]* Paris: Masson.
- Cohen, L. J., McGeoch, P. G., Gans, S. W., Nikiforov, K., Cullen, K., & Galynker, I. I. (2002). Childhood sexual history of 20 male pedophiles vs 24 male healthy control subjects. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 190, 757–766.
- Collin-Vézina, D., & Cyr, M. (2003). La transmission de la violence sexuelle: Description du phénomène et pistes de compréhension. [How sexual violence can be transmitted: A portrait of such phenomenon and an attempt to its comprehension.] *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27(5), 489–507.
- Cornet, J.-P., & Mormont, C. (2005). Représentations parentales et styles d'attachement dans une population de sujets délinquants sexuels. [Parents representations and attachment styles in a sexual offenders sample.] *Forensic*, 21, 9–28.
- Craissati, J., McClurg, G., & Browne, K. (2002). Characteristics of perpetrators of child sexual abuse who have been sexually victimized as children. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 3, 225–238.
- Davis, G. E., & Leitenberg, H. (1987). Adolescent sex offenders. *Psychological Bulletin*, 101(3), 417–427.
- Doron, R. (1991). Mentalisation. In R. Doron & F. Parot (Eds.), *Dictionnaire de psychologie* (p. 394). Paris: PUF.
- Edwards, V. J., Holden, G. W., Felitti, V. J., & Anda, R. F. (2003). Relationship between multiple forms of childhood maltreatment and adult mental health in community respondents: Results from the adverse childhood experiences study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 160, 1453–1460.
- Ekman, P. (1999). Basic emotions. In P. Dalglish T., M. (Ed.), *Handbook of cognition and emotions* (p. 32). Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- English, D. J., Graham, J. C., Litrownik, A. J., Everson, M., & Bangdiwala, S. I. (2005). Defining maltreatment chronicity: Are there differences in child outcomes? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(5), 575–595.
- Finkelhor, D. (2008). *Childhood victimization: Violence, crime and abuse in the lives of young people*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R. K., & Turner, H. A. (2007). Poly-victimization: A neglected component in child victimization. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(1), 7–26.
- Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R. K., & Turner, H. A. (2009). Lifetime assessment of poly-victimization in a national sample of children and youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33(7), 403–411.
- Graham, K. R. (1996). The childhood victimisation of sex offenders: An underestimated issue. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 40(3), 192–203.
- Gravier, B., Mezzo, B., Stankovic, M., Knecht, L., Boichat, F., & Perret, M. J. (2001). *Prise en charge thérapeutique des délinquants sexuels dans le système pénal vaudois*. [Treatment and therapy of sexual offenders in Vaud penal system.] Berne: Fond National de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Hanson, R. K., & Slater, S. (1988). Sexual victimization in the history of sexual abusers: A review. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 1(4), 485–499.

- Hirigoyen, M.-F. (1998). *Le Harcèlement moral: La violence perverse au quotidien*. [Psychological harassment: A daily pervert violence.] Paris: Editions la Découverte & Syros.
- Holmes, T. H., & Rahe, R. H. (1967). The Social Readjustment Rating Scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 11(2), 213–218.
- Jespersen, A. F., Lalumière, M. L., & Seto, M. C. (2009). Sexual abuse history among adult sex offenders and non-sex offenders: A meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33(3), 179–192.
- Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J.-B. (1973). *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*. [The dictionary of psychoanalysis.] Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lebart, L., Morineau, A., & Piron, M. (2004). *Statistique exploratoire multidimensionnelle*. [Exploratory multidimensional statistic.] Paris: Dunod.
- Lee, J. K. P., Jackson, H. J., Pattison, P., & Ward, T. (2002). Developmental risk factors for sexual offending. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(1), 73–92.
- Leonard, R. A. (1993). The family backgrounds of serial rapists. *Criminological and Legal Psychology*, 19, 9–18.
- Lisak, D. (1994). The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 525–548.
- Maniglio, R. (2011). The role of childhood trauma, psychological problems, and coping in the development of deviant sexual fantasies in sexual offenders. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(5), 748–756.
- Marsa, F., O'Reilly, G., Carr, A., Murphy, P., O'Sullivan, M., Cotter, A. et al. (2004). Attachment styles and psychological profiles of child sex offenders in Ireland. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(2), 228–251.
- Marshall, L. E., & Marshall, W. L. (Eds.). (2002). *The role of attachment in sexual offending: An examination of preoccupied-attachment-style offending behavior*. Kingston, New Jersey: Civic Research Institute.
- Marshall, W. L. (1989). Intimacy, loneliness and sexual offenders. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 27(5), 491–504.
- Marshall, W. L. (1993). The role of attachment, intimacy, and loneliness in the etiology and maintenance of sexual offending. *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, 8(2), 109–121.
- Marshall, W. L., & Barbaree, H. (Eds.). (1990). *An integrated theory of the aetiology of sexual offending*. New York: Plenum.
- Marshall, W. L., & Marshall, L. E. (2010). Attachment and intimacy in sexual offenders: An update. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 25(1), 86–90.
- McCormack, J., Hudson, S. M., & Ward, T. (2002). Sexual offenders' perceptions of their early interpersonal relationships: An attachment perspective. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 39(2), 85–93.
- McKillop, N., Smallbone, S., Wortley, R., & Andjic, I. (2012). Offenders' attachment and sexual abuse onset: A test of theoretical propositions. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 24(6), 591–610.
- Milcent, M.-P. (1999). Quand les garçons abusés sexuellement deviennent des pères incestueux: Connaissances et controverses. [When sexual abused boys become incestuous fathers: Agreements and disagreements.] *Handicap: Revue de sciences humaines et sociales*, 83, 45–61.
- Miller, S. B. (1988). Humiliation and shame: Comparing two affect states as indicators of narcissistic stress. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, 52, 40–51.

- Mormont, C., Corneille, S., & Coco, G. (2002). *Elaboration et passation d'une grille d'entretien clinique destinée à l'évaluation des auteurs d'infractions à caractère sexuel. [Development and practice of a clinical guide for sexual offenders.]* Bruxelles: Commission Européenne.
- Negrao, C., Bonanno, G. A., Noll, J. G., Putnam, F. W., & Trickett, P. K. (2005). Shame, humiliation, and childhood sexual abuse: Distinct contributions and emotional coherence. *Child Maltreatment, 10*, 350–363.
- Nickel, R., & Egle, U. T. (2006). Psychological defense styles, childhood adversities and psychopathology in adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 30*(2), 157–170.
- Seghorn, T. K., Prentky, R. A., & Boucher, R. J. (1987). Childhood sexual abuse in the lives of sexually aggressive offenders, *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 3*(26), 2, 261–267.
- Simons, D. A., Wurtele, S. K., & Durham, R. L. (2008). Developmental experiences of child sexual abusers and rapists. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 32*(5), 549–560.
- Simons, D. A., Wurtele, S. K., & Heil, P. (2002). Childhood victimization and lack of empathy as predictors of sexual offending against women and children. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 17*(12), 1291–1307.
- Smallbone, S. W., & Dadds, M. R. (1998). Childhood attachment and adult attachment in incarcerated adult male sex offenders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 13*(5), 555–573.
- Stanley, J., & Goddard, C. (2004). Multiple forms of violence and other criminal activities as an indicator of severe child maltreatment. *Child Abuse Review, 13*, 246–262.
- Starzyk, K. B., & Marshall, W. L. (2003). Childhood family and personological risk factors for sexual offending. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 8*, 93–105.
- Stirpe, T. S., & Stermac, L. E. (2003). An exploration of childhood victimization and family-of-origin characteristics of sexual offenders against children. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 47*(5), 542–555.
- Straus, M. A., Hamby, S. L., Finkelhor, D., Moore, D. W., & Runyan, D. (1998). Identification of child maltreatment with the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales: Development and psychometric data for a national sample of American parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 22*(4), 249–270.
- Van Wijk, A., Vermeiren, R., Loeber, R., Hart-Kerkhoffs, L., Doreleijers T., & Bullens, R. (2006). Juvenile sex offenders compared to non-sex offenders: A review of the literature 1995–2005. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 7*(4), 227–243.
- Ward, T., Hudson, S. M., Marshall, W. L., & Siegert, R. (1995). Attachment style and intimacy deficits in sexual offenders: A theoretical framework. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 7*(4), 317–335.
- Weeks, R., & Widom, C. S. (1998). Self-reports of early childhood victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 13*, 346–361.
- Whitaker, D. J., Le, B., Karl Hanson, R., Baker, C. K., McMahon, P. M., Ryan, G. et al. (2008). Risk factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse: A review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 32*(5), 529–548.
- World Health Organization. (2006). Child abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers: Violence and injury prevention. Geneva: Author.
- Widom, C. S., & Ames, M. A. (1994). Criminal consequences of childhood sexual victimization. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 18*(4), 303–318.

APPENDIX I: LAUSANNE CLINICAL INTERVIEW PLAN

A. Identification (pp. 7–11)

Demographic Data (12 questions)

Legal and Correctional Data (8 questions)

B. History (pp. 12–39)

Family History (5 questions)

Relationship with Parents and Siblings (13 questions)

Schooling (6 questions)

Alcohol and Drug Use (9 questions)

Emotional Life (9 questions)

Sexual History (47 questions)

Traumatic Experiences (5 questions)

Work History (5 questions)

Military Service (3 questions)

Recreation and Social Life (3 questions)

Psychosocial Interventions (14 questions)

C. Subjective Elements Related to the Offense (pp. 40–55)

Responses for Comparison with the Judgment or Expert Assessment
(30 questions)

Subjective Experience Surrounding the Offense (28 questions)

D. Case Management and Prospects for Change (pp. 56–58)

Therapeutic Framework (3 questions)

Perception of Treatment (6 questions)

Self-Evaluation (8 questions)

Identification of Risk Factors (2 questions)

E. Questionnaire Evaluation (pp. 59–60)

Person Investigated (7 questions)

Investigator (9 questions)

Total Number of Questions: 232 Questions over 61 Pages