

## Testing the sexual abuse – sexual offending hypothesis

### A Queensland birth cohort study

Stephen Smallbone  
School of Criminology & Criminal Justice  
Griffith University  
S.Smallbone@griffith.edu.au



## Background

30%-40% (up to 75%) of sexual offenders in treatment programs report childhood sexual abuse

- Hanson & Slater 1988 review: 33% of adult sex offenders
- GYFS: 39.4% of adolescent sex offenders

Seto & Lalumiere (2010) meta-analysis (adolescent offenders)

- Sexual offenders (46%) more likely than nonsexual offenders (16%) to report sexual abuse (32% vs 8% with measures other than self report)

Widom & Ames (1994; also Widom & Maxfield, 2001) prospective study

- 908 substantiated maltreatment cases; matched non-maltreated sample
- Maltreatment predicted general offending
- All types of maltreatment predicted sexual offending
- No specific association between sexual abuse and sexual offending
  - Included females (more likely to be sexually abused; much less likely to be sex offenders)
  - Included prostitution etc as sex offences

## Background

### Ogloff, et al. (2012)

- Prospective study of 2759 sexually abused children (558 [20%] males)
  - Forensic medical examination records 1964-1995
- Matched general population sample
- Followed for 13-44 years
- 77% had no convictions
- 31 of 2759 CSA cases (1.1%) convicted of a sexual offence
- No link between sexual abuse and sexual offending for females
- 5% of sexually abused males convicted of a sexual offence
  - 0.6% of non-abused males convicted of a sexual offence
  - Sexually abused males 8.2 times more likely to be convicted of a sexual offence
- 9.2% of males sexually abused > 12 yrs convicted of sexual offence
  - 3.3 times more likely than males sexually abused before 12

## Present study

### Administrative birth cohort study

- All children born in Queensland in 1983 and 1984 who:
  - Were the subject of a child protection notification, and/or
  - Received a police caution, and/or
  - Had an offence finalised in the Children's Court, and/or
  - Had an offence finalised in the adult Court system (before 2006, aged 22-23 years)

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## Maltreatment

82,531 children born in Qld in 1983 and 1984

- 42,573 boys

4464 boys with child protection (CP) history (10.5% of cohort population)

- 615 sexual abuse (13.8% of maltreated boys; 1.4% of male birth cohort)
- 1929 physical abuse (43.2% / 4.5%)
- 1609 emotional abuse or neglect (36.0% / 3.8%)

## Offending

108,352 22-23 year olds in Qld in 2006

- 50,729 males

8,993 males received police caution

- 18% of male cohort population
- 128 sexual offences (0.8% of all cautioned offences)

3,840 males had finalised Children's Court matter

- 7.7% of population
- 97 sexual offences (0.7% of all finalised offences)

25,020 males with finalised adult Court matter

- 49% of population
- 221 sexual offences (0.31% of all finalised offences)

## Offending

36,028 males with either caution, or YJ or adult court record

- 393 sexual offenders
  - 1.1% of all offenders
  - 0.78%, or one in 128, of male population

38,282 males with CP and/or offending history

- 2264 (5.9%) with CP history but no offending history
- 33,842 (88.4%) with offending history but no CP history
- 2186 (5.7%) both CP history and offending history

## Sexual abuse and sexual offending

of 615 sexually abused boys, 19 (3%) convicted of sex offence

of 1928 physically abused boys, 35 (1.8%) convicted of sex offence

of 1608 emotionally abused/neglected boys, 15 (0.9%) convicted of sex offence

- sexually abused boys 2.7 times more likely than other maltreated boys to be convicted of sex offences

of 38,109 boys with no CP history, 324 (0.85%) convicted of sex offences

- sexually abused boys 3.5 times more likely than non-maltreated boys to commit sex offences
- However, sexually abused boys 32 times more likely **NOT** to commit a sexual offence than they are to do so

324 of the 393 sexual offenders (82%) had no CP history

374 (95.2%) had no sexual abuse history

## What does it all mean?

There is a general relationship between child maltreatment and later offending

- Some contact with criminal justice system is common (more than half in the present study)
  - But this is significantly increased for those with CP history
- Sexual offences are uncommon (in the present study, 1.1% of all offences, and < 1% of cohort population)

There is a specific, statistically reliable association between sexual abuse and sexual offending (in males)

- However, a large majority of sexually abused males (97% in the present study) are not later convicted of sexual offences
- And most sexual offenders are not sexually abused as children (95% in the present study; 60%-70% in retrospective studies)

## How can a specific link be explained?

Males only: males much more likely to engage in sexual violence and abuse

- Evolutionary/biological + socialisation effects

Sexual abuse provides concrete model of sexual offending (abstract concept only for non-abused boys)

- Vicarious learning? Participant modelling?

Sexual abuse triggers sexual anxieties / pre-occupations?

- May increase susceptibility to age-inappropriate/nonconsensual sex

Clearly, however, sexual abuse is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for sexual offending

Proximal causes of sexual offending almost certainly the most relevant

- Opportunity structures; precipitating conditions
- Offenders must be prepared to cross significant threshold (rule-breaking; exploitation; aggression; deception/trickery etc)

## What is to be done?

### Reduce boys' exposure to sexual abuse

- Research needed on where, when, how, to whom and by whom sexual abuse of boys occurs
- Knowledge needed to inform primary & secondary prevention strategies

### Reduce negative outcomes for those who are abused

- Wide variations in effects of sexual abuse need to be better understood
- Array of factors contributing to –ve outcomes (pre-abuse; abuse; post-abuse factors) need to be disentangled
- Effects of various responses / interventions need to be properly evaluated
- Sounding the alarm may reduce prevalence of abuse (by increasing perceived risk and decreasing permissibility for would-be abusers), but may increase harms for victims

Preventing sexual abuse / ameliorating associated harms for boys/men is one aspect of a wider prevention agenda