

Typological characterization of child sexual abusers from court records

Caracterización tipológica de abusadores sexuales infantiles a partir de expedientes judiciales

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SUMMARY

Objective: To characterize the typologies of child sexual abusers based on judicial files registered in a center of attention to victims of sexual abuse in Sincelejo.

Method: Quantitative with a descriptive scope, as an instrument an analysis guide validated by experts was used to analyze the 112 judicial files registered between 2016-2020 in the center.

Results: It was found that the sexual abuser shows a preference for the crime of sexual acts with children under 14 years of age, and for people in the age range of 10 to 14 years, likewise the place where they perpetrate the crime is at the home of the abused or abuser, the victim is known by the abuser and used strategies such as deception, blackmail and threat to commit the act of abuse.

Conclusion: Child sexual abusers are generally older individuals who are not in control of their sexual behavior and manipulators who integrate into society and harm the most vulnerable in a silent way.

Keywords: Sexual abuse, sexual abusers, infants, judicial records.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Caracterizar las tipologías de abusadores sexuales infantiles a partir de expedientes judiciales registrados en un centro de atención a víctimas de abuso sexual en Sincelejo.

Método: Cuantitativo con un alcance descriptivo, como instrumento se usó una guía de análisis validada por expertos para analizar los 112 expedientes judiciales registrados entre los años 2016-2020 en el centro.

Resultados: Se encontró que el abusador sexual muestra preferencia por el delito de actos sexuales con

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menor de 14 años, y por personas en el rango de edad de los 10 a 14 años, así mismo el lugar donde perpetraron el delito es en casa del abusado o abusador, la víctima es conocida por el abusador y usaba estrategias como el engaño, el chantaje y la amenaza para cometer el acto de abuso.

Conclusión: *Los abusadores sexuales infantiles son individuos generalmente mayores de edad que no controlan su comportamiento sexual y manipuladores que se integran en la sociedad y dañan a los más vulnerables de forma silenciosa.*

Palabras clave: *Abuso sexual, abusadores sexuales, infantiles, expedientes judiciales.*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse is a phenomenon that mainly affects children since they are more vulnerable and fragile subjects due to the stage of evolutionary development in which they are, therefore the abuser exercises his superiority over them and perceives them as inferior (1); in Colombia, for example, in the period from January to June 2021, 8,048 medico-legal examinations have been performed on minors between 0 and 17 years of age for alleged sexual offenses (2).

Based on what has been said, studies on child sexual abuse focus more on the victim and to a lesser extent the investigations focus on the victimizer or person who commits the crime (3); however, with this work, we intend to make a characterization of typologies of child sexual abusers from court records of an abuse detention center in the city of Sincelejo between 2016 - 2020. The interest in the sexual abuser arises because they are heterogeneous subjects, i.e. they do not have a unique profile, but they have similarities in personality traits, life background, a form of execution of abuse, and similar intentions, among other characteristics such as atypical sexual behavior, a deficit of social skills, low self-esteem, alcohol and drug consumption (4,5); likewise, abusers often have an antisocial personality, cognitive distortions, little empathy and attribute mental states to others (3).

Sexual offenders of adults commonly use violence for the commission of the sexual crime, and much more when the victim is unknown, but

in the case of sexual offenders of minors, there is no violence in the commission of the crime, because the selection of the victim is made based on the relationship of trust or family ties that the offender has with the victim (6). However, there are three types of sexual abusers, the infantilized/manipulators who show attraction for minors and point out that they are subjects with deficits in interpersonal relationships, low self-esteem, and infantilism; the second typology is called mediatic/circumstantial, who adapt to social norms, but in hostile situations resort to alcohol, drugs and perform sexual behavior and the third typology is called psychopathic/antisocial, who perform the crime when the context allows it and have the possibility of dominance (4).

The sexual abuser gives importance to the planning of the crime, because it allows him to have a sense of tranquility and control of the situation, exercising his power in the selection, stalking, planning, attack, and verbal and physical control when he acts (7). Due to the way the process is structured, abusers have general sexual characteristics such as exclusivity, for this reason, exclusive pedophiles can be found who are only attracted to children, and non-exclusive pedophiles, who are attracted to adults and children (3).

The socioeconomic stratum makes children vulnerable depending on the context and the economic social condition in which they find themselves, therefore, a common characteristic of the abuser is that the choice of the victim (8), is made taking into account that the child is in economically vulnerable conditions to meet their needs with deception and bribery. In addition to the above, it is also a dangerous fact that abusers are constantly living with minors (9).

Sexual abuse is a complex subject to study since a person of any age and gender can be a victim of this crime in their daily life since the abuser can carry out the sexual aggression without the need for physical contact (10). In this sense, investigating sexual abuse in minors, from the perspective of the abuser, allows observing this scourge from the perception of the victimizer, given that studies generally focus on the victim; in this way, the study of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse would have a more comprehensive approach (11).

However, it is recognized that sexual abuse of minors is a topic studied in advance by other authors, but it is still a relevant issue because it is a social and public health problem, therefore, it is necessary to investigate for a more complex discussion of the phenomenon (11). Hence, this research questions the typological characteristics of child sexual abusers based on the judicial files registered in a center of attention to victims of sexual abuse in Sincelejo, between the years 2016 to 2020.

METHOD

Type of research: This research is framed within a quantitative approach with descriptive scope, because it studies the phenomenon using statistics and numerical data, to identify the behavior of the problem under investigation; also because it allows characterizing, specifying, and profiling groups, individuals and communities under analysis, since the descriptive scope seeks to collect information on the variable studied to make descriptions of it (12).

Participants: The population under investigation were 112 judicial files of cases on child sexual abuse, that occurred between the years 2016-2020 from a center of attention to victims of sexual abuse in the city of Sincelejo; this center granted consent for the use of the information exclusively for research purposes, without revealing any type of name only the information of the crime.

The selection of the sample of cases that were part of the study was made taking into account that they were only cases of sexual abuse in children, that was between the period 2016-2020, and that also recorded all the information needed to achieve the objectives set. Therefore, all those files where the abuse was towards the adult population, not outside the period covered, and the information was incomplete were excluded.

Instruments: The instruments used for this research are the judicial files themselves, which contain information on the social, personal, and environmental characteristics of child sexual abusers. The other instrument used is an analysis guide elaborated to organize the information found in the judicial files according to the objectives of the investigation.

At the beginning of the guide, there are aspects related to sociodemographic characteristics, with items related to age, sex, and place of residence of both the abused child and the sexual aggressor. In reference to the affiliation, which is the second aspect, there are items of information about the environment in which the crime was committed, with the options of a home, open space, school, or other, and whether there is any type of relationship between the abuser and his victim, indicating whether it is a family member, authority figure, partner, friend, neighbor or other.

The third aspect of the guide is about the type of aggression or type of abuse committed by the aggressor, having the alternatives of primary or secondary, depending on how the abuse was carried out; the fourth aspect refers to strategies used by the victimizer to commit the sexual abuse, indicating choices such as the use of force, threats, blackmail, deception or use of the substance.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic characteristics of the abused

Table 1 shows that the abuser prefers victims between 10 and 14 years of age (67 %) and that they are female (81 %). Similarly, in relation to the place of residence of the abused, it is evident that in the urban area there is a greater predominance of abuse (89 %), however, this may be due to a greater social risk in the urban area and schemes with fewer social prejudices, therefore there are more reports, while in the rural area traditions, customs and taboos have an impact on a lower number of reports.

As for the sociodemographic characteristics of the abuser, Table 2 shows that, according to the judicial records, the abusers are of legal age (96 %), that is, in the case of Colombia, all were over 18 years of age, 99 % of the abuses are committed by men who reside mostly in urban areas (86 %).

Table 3 refers to the characteristics of the commission of the crime, where it is evident that 40 % of the crimes are associated with sexual acts and 41 % with abusive carnal access with a minor under fourteen years of age, where the place where the abuse takes place is in the home of the

Tabla 1
Sociodemographic characteristics abused

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Age of abused	0 – 5	3	3
	6 – 9	15	13
	10 -14	75	67
	15 – 17	19	17
Sex of the abused	Male	21	19
	Female	91	81
Abused's residence	Rural Zone	12	11
	Urban Zone	100	89

Tabla 2
Sociodemographic characteristics of the abuser

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Age of abuser	Senior of age	108	96
	Under age	4	4
Sex of abuser	Male	111	99
	Female	1	1
Abuser's residence	Rural Zone	11	10
	Urban Zone	97	86
	No record	4	4

abuser (38 %) and the abused (33 %). Similarly, it is evident that there was an annual increase in the crimes of child sexual abuse, as well as the abuses were planned in advance, since 95 % are considered a primary type of abuse; in relation to the strategy used by the abuser to commit the crime, it is shown that deception, blackmail, and threat are the most used.

Affiliation of the abuser with the abused

The sexual abusers are 36 % family of the abused or victim, however, 30 % correspond to people close to the family or home of the child such as neighbors, and another considerable percentage of people who committed the crime is called “Others” because they are people who are close to the victim, but with whom there is no affective or filial bond, among this category were people who daily or occasionally transported the children to school. For more information (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to perform a characterization of the typologies of child sexual abusers based on judicial files from a sexual abuse victim care center in Sincelejo, between the years 2016 to 2020. Child sexual abuse is a widely researched topic because it has become a social problem, despite the enormous effort made to prevent it and decrease the high rates of abuse, which are increasing annually. After all, the abuser is a person who has no control over their sexual impulses and is a manipulator silently integrated into society.

Based on the fact an abuser is a person who tries to satisfy his sexual needs and for this purpose, he uses the most vulnerable, fragile, and physically inferior subjects in the exercise of power, a situation that allows them to perpetuate the crime; this study found that abusers show a preference for boys and girls between 10 and 14

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Tabla 3
Characteristics on the commission of the crime

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percentage	
Crime	Abusive carnal access with a minor under 14 years of age.	41	36.6	
	Sexual acts with a minor under 14 years of age.	45	40.2	
	Sexual exploitation of a minor under 14 years of age	2	1.8	
	Violent carnal sexual intercourse (from 15 to 17 years old)	11	9.8	
	Carnal intercourse with a person incapable of resisting	6	5.4	
	Violent sexual act	4	3.6	
	Child pornography	3	2.7	
	Location of abuse	Home of abuser	43	38.4
		Home of the abused	38	33.9
		Open space	14	12.5
School space		2	1.8	
Other		15	13.4	
Year in which the crime was committed	2016	10	8.9	
	2017	25	22.3	
	2018	29	25.9	
	2019	34	30.4	
	2020	14	12.5	
Type of abuse	Primary	106	95	
	Secondary	6	5	
Strategy	Use of force	24	21	
	Threat	28	25	
	Blackmail	29	26	
	Deception	30	27	
	Use of substances	1	1	

Tabla 4
Abuser's affiliation with abused

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Affiliation (victim-victimizer relationship)	Family member	36	32.1
	Authority figure	5	4.5
	Companion	3	2.7
	Friend	11	9.8
	Neighbor	34	30.4
	Other	23	20.5

years of age and the female sex. These data are congruent with a study on the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse, where it was found that between 10 and 13 years of age (63 %) boys are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and that 81 % of girls are the most affected by this scourge (13).

In relation to the average age of the abuser, the majority of perpetrators are around 26 years of age, but the most common age range is between 18 and 36 years of age. This finding confirms the result of this research where the abuse is committed by people who have reached the age of majority, being then subjects who are in the capacity to act fully, the fact that the abuser is mostly an adult may be due to multiple factors, such as socio-environmental, family, the existence of emotional incongruences and psychic pathologies.

The perpetrators study their potential victims to know what type of personality they have if they can be easily deceived and if they stay alone in their homes, that is to say, they want to know if they are much more vulnerable to gaining access to him. Therefore, the place where the abuses are committed is inside the homes of the victims or the abuser (76 %), in 60 %; in these places the children are not forewarned or on the defensive, because they are considered a safe place and their main caregivers as protective subjects who would not harm them, likewise, the abuser perpetrates the act in these places because they exercise dominion over him, which facilitates the execution of the crime (14-16). This result is similar to that found in this research since 72 % of the sexual abuse crimes were committed in these places.

The relationship or link between the abuser and the victim is another characteristic that facilitates the perpetrator to commit the crime; in this study, the abuses were committed by family and neighbors (62 %). When there is a close relationship with the victim, i.e. family or acquaintances, the percentage of abuse is higher (90.9 %) and when the abuser resides in the same house as the victim, the percentage of abuse cases decreases (13). In another study on people who commit abuse, it was found that 80 % of the people who commit abuse are close to the child, such as neighbors, uncles, aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents (17). Another

investigation with the same finding showed that 80 % of the sexual aggressors were acquaintances of the victim (14-16).

Child sexual abusers are primary abusers (95 %) because they show sexual interest in minors and little in adults, they plan the perpetration of the act in advance and the situation is seen by the aggressor as appropriate behavior and a way to sexually educate the child, without experiencing any feeling of guilt or shame (18). Primary sexual abusers are subjects who have difficulty in establishing a relationship with adults (70 %) according to this research, one reason being that the abuser has feelings of rejection towards the physical changes of the individual, also because children do not demand conditions of erection and potentiality within sexual relations; in the same way, sexual abusers when they were children were exposed to pornography to satisfy the sexual interest of their aggressor (19).

In this research it was found that the most used strategies were deception (27 %), blackmail (26 %), threats (25 %), and the use of force (21 %), however, the latter is used when the aggressor does not use the previous strategies or when he does not know the victim, he uses his strength to dominate the situation and commit the abuse (1).

CONCLUSION

Child sexual abuse is an act that the aggressor does not do impulsively because he plans and formulates hypothetical situations to commit the act, with which he seeks to satisfy his needs; for this reason, it is considered that families and children should receive sexual education, so that families have sufficient knowledge that allows them to recognize behavioral patterns, psychosocial characteristics of abusers, as well as when an adult prefers to be intimate with children or when he has problems of abuse of psychoactive substances, which are some of the common characteristics of abusers. However, this work shows that sexual abuse is a complex issue because there is no single pattern or profile of the sexual aggressor (16), so it is necessary to continue working on the prevention and protection of child sexual abuse.

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions

First author: Conceived the research, assisted in writing the article and analyzed the data.

Second author: Conceived the research, assisted in writing the article and analyzed the data.

Third author: Conceived the research, assisted in writing the article and analyzed the data.

Fourth author: Performed the search for bibliographic information and assisted in editing the paper.

Fifth Author: Performed the search for bibliographic information, assisted in writing the article y in editing the paper.

Sixth author: Assisted in writing the article.

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