

Child Sexual Abuse and Criminal Offending: Gender-Specific Effects and the Role of Abuse Characteristics and Other Adverse Outcomes

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Nina Papalia, James R. P. Ogloff, Margaret Cutajar, ...

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Article information



Abstract

This study sought to enhance knowledge of the link between child sexual abuse (CSA) and long-term criminality by investigating gender-specific effects and the role of index sexual abuse characteristics, revictimization, and serious mental health problems. An Australian sample of 2,759 documented cases of sexual abuse and 2,677 community controls were linked to statewide police records and public mental health service databases, with a follow-up period of 13–44 years. Four key findings emerged from the analysis: (1) CSA victims were more likely than controls to engage in all types of criminal behaviors including violent, sexual, and other offending; (2) gender moderated the relationship between CSA and criminal offending, with stronger associations found among females for general and violent offending, and among males for sexual offending; (3) certain features of the index sexual abuse (i.e., developmental period, number of perpetrators, relation to perpetrator), further victimization experiences, and the development of serious mental health problems were all associated with an increased likelihood of criminal behavior among CSA victims; (4) CSA victims who engaged in criminal offending were more likely to present with cumulative risks than victims not engaging in criminal offending. Implications for future research and clinical practice are discussed.

Keywords [child sexual abuse](#), [adolescent victims](#), [criminal behavior](#), [longitudinal research](#), [repeat victimization](#), [psychopathology](#)

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