Child sexual abuse: offender’s modus operandi aspects in intra-agressional period

I. Fulga1*, L.C. Musat1, R. Crassas2, N. Ceavdari3

Abstract: There is no question that public awareness and concern about child sexual abuse has increased in Romania in recent years. There is no clear evidence, however, that the incidence of child sexual abuse itself is increasing; rather, increased reporting rates appear partly to reflect a greater willingness by victims and others to report allegations of child sexual abuse. Indeed, many alleged child sexual offences are not reported until long after they have occurred. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that child sexual abuse is a major social problem. This paper suggests that developmental and early intervention programs that are known to reduce rates of general crime may be equally effective in the reduction of sexual crime.

Key words: child sexual abuse, rape, violence

The consequences of child sexual abuse have great medical, criminologic and social impact. Nowadays, due to their high frequency and gravity, they do not belong to the field of the morality exclusively any longer but they also represent the basis of the sanogenesis state of the victim and the community, since these aggressions have tremendous consequences on the victim’s psychological profile due to the tendency of „internalization” of the external traumas. A major aspect to consider is the fact that the consequences of the sexual aggressions should be seen as „vital”, since all the following difficulties in the adult life of a victim will have impact on his or her own children, who will „pay” for their parents misfortune.

The child sexual abuse has consequences of high gravity: risk of suicide, psychic disease, sensation of being guilty, sexual bulimia; the risk the aggressivity in adult years is important: „today’s victims are potential offenders in the future”. [Scirpcaru, Astarastoae, 4].

This paper is based on Quadri-Factorial Model offered by Finkelhor, [Araji, Finkelhor, 2] the model which makes a correlation between offender and his behaviour. Finkelhor sustained that for the sexual abuse act against a child to occur, it is necessary to be present each of all factors and all factors to be hierarchically subordinated to only one. According this model, the offender should:

- find emotional satisfaction in relations with children (emotional congruency),
- sexual attraction towards children (sexual arousal),

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to feel that developing a long-term, deep relationship with an adult partner is impossible (blockage),

to repress the restriction mechanism in order to perform sexual intercourse with children (disinhibition).

The present study aimed to gather both official demoFig. and offence history data, and confidential self-report data, from a large sample of men currently serving sentences in South Eastern Romania and Republic of Moldova for sexual offences against children. In particular, the study aimed to investigate a number of features that were considered to be of theoretical and practical significance, and which might inform preventative, investigative and corrective efforts, namely: the offenders’ modus operandi in intra-aggressional period.

**Materials and methods**

A number of 238 adult males convicted for children sexual abuse were separately and individually interviewed by the authors and invited to take part in the study. The members of our study were informed that all data obtained is strictly confidential and anonymous while personal data will be made public for a post-study control contact (follow-up) only with offender’s approval.

Data related to the following themes was selected:

- Differences between the official unofficial rate of children sexual abuses;
- Offender’s modus operandi during sexual intercourse.

All data obtained from offenders was registered in questionnaires for each individual. The circumstances of the sexual abuse against children were noted down in all cases, and in some cases the personal antecedents were also analyzed.

The 51 items of each questionnaire were statistically processed, because many of the questions had multiple choices and the subject could select more than one answer.

The statistical analysis made using Microsoft Office EXCELL 2003 and Microsoft Office ACCESS 2003 was followed by the elaboration of a database completed by an electronic system for personal data filing.

**Results and discussions**

The demoFig. data was not obtained from all the 238 offenders, because only 118 (49.6 %) agreed to complete the 52 items of the questionnaire. Based on informal data obtained from the perpetrators in respect to their sexual-offensive activity, the 118 cases were divided into four groups: intrafamily offenders or offenders who sexually abuse children that belong to the offender’s family environment, extrafamily offenders or offenders who only abuse children outside the family environment, mixed-type offenders or offenders who abuse victims who belong or not to the family environment and the group of offenders who deny perpetration of child sexual abuse. In the end, there were 41 intrafamily offenders (IFO), 54 extrafamily offenders (EFO), 6 mixed-type offenders and 17 and offenders who denied perpetration of child sexual abuse.

As a rule, the offenders had known the child, sometimes even long before committing sexual abuse. For example, 59.3% of the intrafamily offenders and 50.0% mixed-type offenders had known the child for more than one year before the sexual intercourse. (Fig. 1).
Mixed-type offenders (16.66%) and extrafamily offenders (24.07%) usually had the tendency to keep away from committing the aggressions at home.

On the contrary, approximately ¾ (75.60%) of intra-family offenders reported to prefer the residence as a place for committing children sexual aggressions (Fig. 2). Mixed-type offenders (83.33%) had the tendency to commit the sexual aggressions in isolated places, as opposed to the intrafamily offenders (21.95%) and the extrafamily offenders (35.19%).

The duration of one sexual contact with the child varied from less than 3 minutes to 90 minutes. Almost 2/3 of the contacts (61.02 %) lasted less than 10-15 minutes (Fig. 3).
More than half of the offenders (52.5%) reported repeated abuse against one child and less than 7% reported abuse against more than 10 children.

The number of sexual intercourses with one child varied from 1 to more than 50, with significant variations between the three kinds of offenders. 89% of those who answered reported 1 to 30 sexual intercourses with the same child, one third of them had 10-20 contacts with one child (Fig. 4).
The duration of the offender-victim relationship with the same child varied from less than 24 hours up to 1 year. More than half of the intrafamily offenders (51.22%) and 50% of mixed-type offenders reported repeated aggressions for more than 1 year compared to the extrafamily offenders (only 1.85%). Extrafamily offenders had short time relationships with victims: 46.29% – less than 24h and 22.22% - less than one week (table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>OIF</th>
<th>EEF</th>
<th>Type mixt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;24 hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46.29%</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-7 days</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 weeks</td>
<td>4.87%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-12 month</td>
<td>43.90%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 12 month</td>
<td>51.22%</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Duration of the offender-victim relationship

Table 6 Data regarding the patterns of the intra-agresional behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour Pattern</th>
<th>OIF</th>
<th>EEF</th>
<th>Type mixt</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Touching of the child’s intimate areas with the hands</td>
<td>73.17%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>68.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching of the child’s intimate areas with the tongue and lips</td>
<td>46.34%</td>
<td>31.48%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual masturbation</td>
<td>43.90%</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>40.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis intromission into vagina or anus</td>
<td>24.39%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>23.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral penis intromission</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>13.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most frequent behaviour patterns used by offenders during sexual act were: touching of the behind, breasts or genital organs of children (68.31%), mutual masturbation (40.59%) and touching the victims genital organs with the lips and the tongue (37.62%) (Fig. 6). Vaginal or anal intromission were reported by less than a quarter of offenders (23.76%). The aggression patterns were almost similar for all 3 groups, however extrafamily offenders resorted to oral-genital contact a lot more frequently (22.22) than the others – 2.44% of the intrafamily offenders and 16.7% of the mixed-types offenders.

The mixed-types offenders preferred more frequently vaginal/anal intromission (33.33%). The behaviour pattern that consists of touching the victim’s genital area with lips and tongue was not reported.

Fig. 7 Evaluation of the parental reaction given by the offenders
More than a quarter of offenders declared that victim’s parents knew that they were spending time alone with the child (27.72%). A percent of 18.81 considered they were liked by the victim’s parents. Of great concern is the fact that 8.91% of the offenders considered that the parents knew about the sexual intercourse, but did not declare them (Fig. 7).

**Conclusions**
1. The most frequent behaviour patterns of the offenders during the sexual contact with their victims were touching with the hand the behind, breasts and genital organs of the children, mutual masturbation and touching the victims’ genital organs with the mouth. Anal or vaginal penis intromission was reported by less than a quarter of responders.
2. The duration of one sexual contact with the victim varied between less 3 minutes to more than 90 minutes. Two thirds of them reported the duration of a sexual contact with the child of not more than 10-15 minutes.
3. The duration of the victim-aggressor relationship varied from less 24 hours to more than 1 year. More than half of intra-family offenders (51.22%) and 50% of myxed-types offenders had relationships longer than 1 year with their victims.
4. Serial sexual aggressions against children were relatively rare. Over half of the responders reported relationships with only one child, less than 7% of the offenders reported more than 10 different children as victims.
5. In most of the cases the parents knew their children was spending time with the offender.
6. Prevention methods that target sexually active offenders, both intra or extrafamilial, should be considered a priority. Extrafamily offenders usually abuse more victims, but the actions of the intra-family aggressors have deeper consequences because they tend to repeat the aggression upon only one victim and the security measures within the family environment are scarce and difficult to impose.
7. The data on the offenders’ modus operandi should be analysed with prudence as some typical patterns overlap positive elements of parental behaviour. Sometimes these alarm signs are very difficult to be noticed by victim’s family. However parents should be aware of the most common tactics used by the intrafamily offenders in order to spend time alone with the victim or the tactics used by extrafamily offenders who usually seek to gain the parents’ trust. Children must also be very well informed about the most usual tactics and dispose of means of self-defence.
8. The evolution of the factors related to sexual abuse against children may change from time to time and the characteristics are not always the same, as they depend also on the elements involved in the maintenance of the aggressional patterns at different stages of development.

**References**