

A Brief Note on Child Sexual Grooming Behaviour

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Abstract

Over the course of several decades, a variety of definitions of sexual grooming have been proposed (see Bennett & O'Donohue, 2014 and Winters et al., The process by which a person seeking to commit a sexual offense creates a situation in which the CSA can be more easily enacted and remain undetected is what the term generally refers to. Winters and colleagues (2021) proposed the following definition of sexual grooming to bring consensus to the field and facilitate empirical analysis of the construct the deceptive method that sexual abusers use to make it easier for them to have sex with a minor while avoiding detection at the same time. The would-be sexual abuser may choose a victim, gain access to and isolate the minor, establish trust with the minor and frequently their guardians, community organizations, and youth-serving institutions, and desensitize the minor to sexual content and physical contact before committing the act.

Keywords: Sexual grooming behaviour

Introduction

Based on the Sexual Grooming Model (SGM), a content-validated model of sexual grooming; Winters and other, 2020), this procedure consists of five phases: 1) choosing a child who is at risk to be abused; 2) gaining access to the child and excluding them from other people; 3) creating false trust with the child and those around him or her; 4) gradually making the child less sensitive to sexual content and physical contact; and 5) following the occurrence of abuse, engaging in post-abuse maintenance behaviors to either make it more likely that the abuse will continue or to make it less likely that it will be discovered and disclosed. The SGM also includes 42 distinct behaviors that can be observed within each of these five stages, as identified by experts in the field (see Winters et al., 2020 for a comprehensive evaluation of the model's creation and validation).

According to Bennett & O'Donohue (2014), sexual grooming is thought to be a very complicated and nuanced process that varies from person to person. In general, studies have shown that sexual grooming practices are fairly common in CSA cases. Utilizing the Sexual Grooming Scale-Victim Version (SGS-V;) more recent data a scale for self-report that is based on the 42 behaviors that were found in the SGM; According to Winters & Jeglic (2021), an average of 15 out of 42 possible sexual grooming behaviors were reported by each participant, indicating that 99 percent of adults who reported experiencing CSA had experienced at least one such behaviour [1-5].

Discussion

Identifying sexual grooming behaviors importantly, it has been hypothesized that, despite their prevalence in cases of CSA, sexual grooming behaviors are difficult to identify and are more easily identified retrospectively after the abuse has already been discovered. In cases of CSA involving sexual grooming, one experimental study investigated whether there was a hindsight bias (the tendency to overestimate one's ability to have foreseen an outcome). Winters and Jeglic (2016) found that participants who did not receive outcome information (i.e., that sexual abuse occurred) overestimated the likelihood they would have predicted that the individual would have sexually abused the child using a sample of 525 undergraduate students who were randomly assigned to read a vignette containing sexual grooming behaviors. They also found that people who read vignettes about sexual grooming were significantly more likely to say that the person would go on to commit CSA (30% vs. 20%, out of a possible 100 percent), indicating that there

was some ability to detect potentially predatory behaviors, though the percentages were closer to the "definitely not true" anchor of the scale. Last but not least, the authors looked into the kinds of sexual grooming behaviors that participants were most concerned about, and they found that they were most concerned about those that involved physically touching and isolating the child. Spenard and Cash (2022) used a sample of 156 undergraduate students to replicate the findings of Winters and Jeglic (2016). Both same-sex and opposite-sex cases of CSA showed signs of hindsight bias, and participants were able to identify sexual grooming.

Winters and Jeglic (2017) randomly assigned 393 undergraduate participants to read one vignette (one vignette contained no sexual grooming behaviors, while the remaining five vignettes contained behaviors from one or all of the first four stages of the SGM stages) and respond to outcome questions about the likelihood that the individual in the vignette committed CSA. This was a follow-up study to Winters and Jeglic (2016). When compared to those who read a vignette that contained sexual grooming strategies, there was no difference in how respondents responded to the outcome questions. This demonstrated, in contrast to the findings of Winters and Jeglic (2016) and Spenard and Cash (2022), that individuals have difficulty recognizing sexual grooming behaviors throughout the SGM process. Overall, these studies demonstrated that people may have difficulty recognizing certain potentially predatory behaviors and that sexual grooming is more easily identified retrospectively. It is important to note these studies only on the recognition of the SGM's various stages rather than on specific behaviors.

It has been suggested that many sexual grooming tactics, especially those that have nothing to do with sexual content or touch, are hard to spot at first because they appear to be harmless. Many of the behaviors that are thought to be sexual grooming can also be signs of a normal,

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healthy adult-child relationship. Craven et al. Sexual grooming is “not dissimilar to innocent behavior intended to broaden a young person’s experiences,” as stated in 2006 The motivation behind the behavior may be the only difference. p. 292). In point of fact, according to Bennett & O’Donohue (2014), a person who intends to commit a sexual offense will probably want to appear to be engaging in typical behavior in order to avoid detection. For instance, it is not necessarily alarming for an adult to give a child a present or play games with them that are similar to those of a child, but these actions are also regarded as sexual grooming strategies.

It is essential for the detection and prevention of CSA to be able to differentiate between harmless caring behaviors and sexual abuse-inflected behaviors and strategies. Winters and co. (2020) hypothesized that there may be a number of ways to distinguish between sexual grooming behaviors and adult-child interactions. First, there might be some behaviors that are more concerning and, as a result, more indicative of sexual grooming (i.e., behaviors that are more severe or “red flags”). This probably includes things like showing child pornography, undressing around a child, or using inappropriate sexual language with a child during the desensitization to sexual content and physical contact stag. Second, the child may engage in the behaviors frequently. Using a variety of sexual grooming techniques (high number of behaviors) or specific techniques (high occurrence), such as frequently engaging in activities with a child away from other adults, giving a child numerous gifts or compliments, or texting or communicating with a minor frequently, are examples of high frequency behaviors. Thirdly, there may be certain clusters of behaviors that end up being more troubling, such as engaging in a variety of behaviors throughout each of the five stages of SGM [6-8].

Conclusion

Importantly, none of the aforementioned hypotheses have

been empirically tested. Therefore, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of how these sexual grooming behaviors may differ from typical adult interactions with children in order to develop prevention methods that can identify sexual grooming before abuse occurs. Using the SGS-V, we aimed to determine if there are any red flag behaviors that are more common in cases of CSA compared to Non-CSA (severe or red flag behaviors) and if these vary depending on relationship to the child (family, non-family, or community member); and if there are more sexual grooming behaviors used in cases of CSA compared to Non-CSA (high number of behaviors).

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