

## **Alleged Sex Abuse Victims' Accounts of Their Abusers' Modus Operandi**

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*One hundred four alleged sexual victims aged between 3 and 13 years described the modus operandi of their reported assailants. Younger children were more likely than older children to report repeated incidents of abuse by family members. Abuse tended to be more severe when there were multiple incidents. Older victims were more likely to report resisting the offenders' strategies, which involved either persuasion (i.e., offering rewards, verbally convincing or provoking the victim) or coercion (i.e., verbal or physical threats). Adult suspects were reportedly more likely than young suspects to use persuasion, but there were no age of suspect differences in the reported occurrence of coercion.*

There is compelling evidence that child sexual abuse (CSA) can have severe immediate (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases) and long-term (e.g., psychological disorders) effects on the victims' development and well being (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Felitti, 1991; Johnson, 2004; Springs & Friedrich, 1992). However, there has been surprisingly little research on sex offenders' behaviours or strategies—their *modus operandi*—“where offenders find and have time alone with their victims; how offenders gain their victims' trust; bribes and coercion used by offenders to obtain cooperation in sexual activity; and offenders' attempts to maintain victim silence” (Kaufman, Hilliker, Lathrop, Daleiden, & Ruby, 1996, p. 20)—even though this information may help in the design of effective prevention programs. This study focused closely on the offenders' behaviour in both the pre- and postoffense (concealment) phases, using accounts provided by the children in the initial investigative interviews as the central sources of information.

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To date, limited research on perpetrators' preparatory tactics has focused on the "grooming" strategies used by prospective abusers (hereinafter called *abusers*) to establish trusting relationships with potential victims (hereinafter called *victims*; Singer, Hussey, & Strom, 1992), sometimes by engaging socially with the victims' caregivers because friendships with parents may create opportunities for access and abuse (Elliott, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988). "In the grooming process adults learn the children's likes and dislikes, concerns and fears, and use this knowledge to entice children into sexual contact" (Singer et al., 1992, p. 880). During the grooming process, potential offenders may test the receptiveness and sensitivity of their targets by associating ordinary physical contact (e.g., wrestling, cleaning) with inappropriate touches, sexually tinged comments and behaviors, and disregard for the children's privacy (Elliott et al., 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Thus victims may be repeatedly abused in increasingly intrusive ways, whose impropriety may not be recognized initially. The desensitization of victims by normalizing the offenders' touches and sexualized conversation has received little attention from researchers.

Most previous researchers have used suspects or perpetrators, rather than victims, as informants (e.g., Elliott et al., 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988; Leclerc, Wortley, & Smallbone, 2011; Proulx et al., 1997). These studies have shown that sex abusers frequently adopt complex strategies planned in advance, but of course they may provide misleading and incomplete accounts of the processes involved, withholding some information (Ahlmeyer, Heil, McKee, & English, 2000; Marshall, 1994; Proulx, Perreault, & Quimet, 1999; Schlank & Shaw, 1996; van Hasselt & Hersen, 1996) or misrepresenting their tactics (Abel et al., 1987; Dickey & Rogers, 1991). Accordingly, the authors adopted a child-centered approach in this study, examining the perceptions and accounts of alleged victims.

Many sexual offences involving children are not disclosed or reported to the authorities because the children anticipate negative consequences (e.g., reprisals by the suspects, feelings of shame) or do not fully understand social norms and thus the inappropriateness of their treatment (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Research by Malloy and her colleagues (2011) showed that, in the course of investigative interviews, many victims spontaneously mentioned the possible negative consequences of disclosure for themselves, including punishment, physical harm, and negative emotions (Malloy et al., 2011), perhaps because they had been threatened into secrecy by the alleged offenders. Indeed, Sjöberg and Lindblad (2002) and Cederborg, Lamb, and Laurell (2007) reported that some very young victims appeared unwilling to disclose abuse because they were embarrassed or afraid of possible consequences.

In an earlier study, focused specifically on offenders' strategies, Berliner and Conte (1990) conducted semi-structured interviews of twenty-three 10- to 18-year-old victims who had experienced multiple incidents of abuse.

According to the victims, the offenders had treated the children in age-inappropriate ways (e.g., by giving gifts, money, clothes or by telling the children that they were special), tried to persuade them verbally, often using threats (e.g., by saying "It's normal, everyone does it," or "Keep it secret," or "They will murder me") and were physically coercive before and after the abuse. The strategies appeared quite heterogeneous, however (Berliner & Conte, 1990).

Kaufman, Wallace, Johnson, and Reeder (1995) reported that female perpetrators were often repeat offenders, and that male perpetrators offered the victims more material gifts although "male and female offenders did not differ in their use of pornography, threats, and coercion during the sexual abuse" (Kaufman et al., 1995, p. 327). The present study differed from those of Kaufman et al. (1995) and Berliner and Conte (1990) in three ways. First, the present study focused on both preabuse and postoffence concealment strategies, whereas they had focused solely on preabuse strategies. Second, abuse reported by a variety of perpetrators, including peers, family members, and nonfamily members were considered in this study. Third, accounts reported by victims from Britain were analyzed, whereas the earlier studies were conducted in the United States. Studies in which offenders were the primary sources of information found that playing games, offering bribes (e.g., promising victims to take them on outings, presenting children with gifts, special privileges or money), giving love, and attention were common components of grooming (Budin & Johnson, 1989; Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989; Elliott et al., 1995; Leclerc, Proulx, & McKibben, 2005; Proulx et al., 1999; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). Many offenders offered to babysit so as to obtain access to the children. Further, offering children psychoactive substances and exposing them to pornographic material were often reported methods of disinhibiting and normalizing sexual behaviour with children (Proulx et al., 1999; Smallbone & Wortley; 2000).

Aspects of the alleged offenders' strategies, including the use of physical violence, physical force, threats, bribes (material), and rewards were examined in the present study. Possible offender strategies were compiled from the literature. Few researchers have linked offenders' modus operandi to victim, offender (e.g., age, gender) or abuse characteristics (e.g., location of the abuse, presence of others). Such characteristics, however, can determine how offenders approach and manipulate children; for instance, in comparison to adult sex offenders, young offenders tend to use a greater variety of strategies and behave more violently in the grooming and post-offence phases (Kaufman et al., 1998). The present study was designed to examine links between the offenders' modus operandi and the children's familiarity with the suspects, the frequency with which the alleged abuse incidents occurred, the suspects' ages, children's ages, the location where abuse took place, the severity of the abuse and the extent to which the children resisted (e.g., victim crying, telling offender to stop, or injuring the alleged perpetrator) on the basis of information provided during

police interviews with the alleged victims. Notably, the police interviewers did not question alleged victims specifically about the offenders' strategies but the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Investigative Interviewing Protocol that the officers used was designed to obtain as much detail as possible about the abuse and the offenders' behaviors. Also we sought to distinguish between elements of the offenders' behavior prior to and after the abuse.

It was hypothesized that, unlike extrafamilial perpetrators, intrafamilial offenders would avoid physical violence against family members so as not to cause injuries, thereby making reabuse easier (Fischer & McDonald, 1998; Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Few researchers have asked whether there are differences between offenders who abuse children once as opposed to multiple times but Robertiello and Terry (2007) suggested that preferential perpetrators generally commit multiple offenses. Older alleged offenders were expected to use more complex strategies than younger alleged perpetrators, because they are more experienced (Proulx et al., 1997). It was also expected that there would be differences associated with the children's ages. Lang and Frenzel (1998) concluded that "children go along with their father's suggestions because many believe that if daddy says it's ok, it must be" (p. 314) but older children might be less amenable to such manipulation. More generally, offenders may find it easier to manipulate and abuse younger children because they are more obedient and compliant. Offenders thus need to adapt more and more varied strategies with older children (Kaufman, Hilliker, & Daleiden, 1996). Offenders overcome resistance by using coercion or persuasion (Berliner & Conte, 1990; Elliott et al., 1995), and the authors sought to explore the implications of resistance further. Although the association between offenders' modus operandi and the severity of abuse has not been addressed previously, it was expected that severe abuse was likely to involve more intensive persuasive and coercive behavior on the part of the offenders. Finally, the offenders' modus operandi in relation to the abuse location was studied, because this has not been explored previously. It was predicted that offenders might be more persuasive and less (physically) coercive in public areas where bystanders might observe and interfere with aggressive behavior toward possible victims.

Further, associations between the abuse, victim, and offender characteristics were tested. It was expected that older children would report resisting the offenders more, because they understood better that behavior was inappropriate and because they were more capable of resisting (e.g., calling for help or physically fighting back). Because they are more independent, it was expected that older children would report more abuse in public spaces than in their own homes. It was further hypothesized that victims of intrafamilial abuse would report less resistance to the offenders' behavior because they were more likely to obey, rather than defy, their family members. Intrafamilial abuse is also more likely to happen inside the children's or offenders' homes

than in schools and public areas. There has been little research on the association between the number of incidents of sexual abuse and other victim, offender or abuse characteristics, but it was hypothesized that multiple sexual abuse incidents were more likely to include severe forms of child abuse, because severity was likely to mount incrementally.

## METHOD

### Participants

Statements about alleged sexual abuse were provided to police investigators in the late 1990s by 94 British girls and 10 boys between the ages of 3 and 13 years. Overall, the suspects' ages, the suspects' familiarity, the children's ages, and the severity of the abuse allegedly experienced by male and female victims did not differ significantly. Slightly more than half (54.8%) of the victims claimed to have experienced abuse on multiple occasions. The participants reported experiencing sexual touches ( $n = 70$ ) or penetration ( $n = 27$ ). The alleged offenses took place in the children's homes (36.5%), the offenders' homes (34.6%), and school and public places (18.3%).

### Procedure

All participants were informed that the interviews were being video recorded, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Because the transcripts were used for law enforcement purposes and because the transcripts were made anonymous prior to this study, permission of parents or caretakers of the participants was unnecessary. The relevant ethical review boards approved use of the transcripts for research purposes. The interviews were conducted by six police officers who had been trained to use the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol (Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach, & Esplin, 2008), which emphasizes the use of open-ended questions rather than the focused, leading, and suggestive questions that often dominate interviews with alleged victims (see Lamb et al., 2008, for a review). The statements used in this study were given to police officers investigating possible crimes and would have (in accordance with British law) constituted the children's evidence-in-chief if the cases had been prosecuted, as some were. Interviews were included in the study when (a) they conformed to the Protocol, (b) the allegations involved sexual abuse, (c) the interviewees were victims not witnesses, (d) there was no more than one alleged perpetrator, and (e) the allegations were deemed plausible (Aldridge et al., 2004; Lamb et al., 2009). Two coders were trained using the coding scheme. They first practiced using the coding scheme on transcripts of interviews that were not included in the study. After being familiarized with the coding scheme, the coders started classifying the alleged

perpetrators' strategies, agreeing 90% of the time. Initially 104 files were randomly selected from an archive of CSA allegations, which were deemed very plausible on the basis of convergent information provided by other witnesses or by the perpetrators themselves. Cases of sexual exhibitionism (e.g., victim and/or offender undressing, masturbating, or taking photographs for pornographic purposes) ( $n = 2$ ) were excluded because they were rare. All reported sexual assaults involved male perpetrators, except for two females who reportedly abused a 10-year-old girl and a 13-year-old stepson. Because there were so few female offenders, these two cases were also excluded from the dataset. The dataset was thus reduced from 108 to 104 cases.

### Coding

The alleged offenders' strategies were classified as examples of persuasion or coercion. Persuasion involved rewarding the victims (e.g., by offering material goods or making promises) verbally encouraging them to cooperate (e.g., by saying "Everyone does it" or "You would never dare to have sex with me"), or promising love (e.g., "I am the only one who loves you"). Coercion involved verbal threats against the child or the child's family (e.g., threatening to kill the child or victim's family) or physical force (e.g., holding the victim down or physically restraining the victim) or physical violence (e.g., hitting or beating the child). Examples of offender strategies were obtained from the literature and from sexual abuse cases reported in the media, and these facilitated the creation of the coding scheme and the two variables persuasion and coercion. Whenever the alleged victims reported any of the above examples of offender strategies, the coders classified and recorded this as either persuasion or coercion. In some cases, offenders used both persuasion and coercion in the grooming or post-offence phases. Persuasion and coercion for the pre- and during offense (persuasion:  $n = 20$ ; coercion:  $n = 38$ ) and postoffense (persuasion:  $n = 14$ ; coercion:  $n = 24$ ) phases were coded separately.

The independent variables, coded as dummy variables, concerned abuse and situational characteristics. An index of alleged offender-victim familiarity distinguished between intrafamilial (both biological relatives and others living with the child, including stepparents and half-siblings) and extrafamilial (e.g., babysitters, strangers, and friends of the children or families) offenders. A distinction was made between cases reportedly involving a single as opposed to multiple separate incidents of abuse. In the majority of cases, the police officers or the alleged victims reported or estimated the suspects' ages. They ranged from 11 to 86 years, and, because there were many teenagers, the authors distinguished in the analyses between those 19 years and below ( $n = 33$ ) and those over 20 years of age ( $n = 47$ ) so that the modus operandi of adult and juvenile offenders could be compared. The alleged victims ranged in age from 3 to 13 years, and this variable was

coded as a continuous variable. The alleged victims' resistance was reflected in reported physical or verbal expressions of opposition (e.g., saying no, crying, or hitting the offenders). Abuse was deemed less severe when it involved touches (of either the alleged offenders or children over and/or under the clothes) and more severe when it involved penetration (i.e., oral, anal, or vaginal). The locations (the child's home, the offender's home, and school and public places) of the alleged crimes were also recorded.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analysis

Five significant associations were found among the independent variables. Firstly, victims of intra-familial abuse were reportedly less likely to have experienced a single incident of abuse ( $n = 14$ ) than alleged victims of extrafamilial abuse ( $n = 30$ ),  $\chi^2(1) = 8.34$ ,  $p < .05$ . Secondly, a significant association between the frequency and severity of abuse,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.19$ ,  $p < .05$ , indicated that alleged single abuse incidents were more likely to include sexual touch ( $n = 37$ ) than penetration ( $n = 6$ ). Thirdly, victims reported more resistance when abuse occurred only once rather than repeatedly,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .05$ . Fourthly, the familiarity of the suspects to the children was significantly related to the children's ages ( $r_{pb} = .27$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Children reportedly abused by family members were significantly younger ( $M = 8.13$ ;  $SD = 2.88$ ) than those allegedly abused by offenders from outside the family ( $M = 9.64$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ). Fifth, a significant relationship was found between the children's ages and the occurrence of resistance ( $r_{pb} = .36$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Younger children were less likely to report offering resistance ( $M = 7.70$ ,  $SD = 2.92$ ) than older children ( $M = 9.78$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ).

The variance inflation factor (VIF) showed values less than 10 and tolerance levels of above .77, suggesting no issue of collinearity among the independent variables. Furthermore, the average VIF of 1.17 for persuasion and coercion showed that the regressions were unlikely to be biased. The Durban-Watson statistic had a value of 2.02 for persuasion and 2.16 for coercion, suggesting no intercorrelation between the two types of strategy.

### Location Where Alleged Abuse Occurred

The older the victims, the greater the likelihood that the alleged offenses had taken place in the offenders' homes ( $M = 8.28$ ,  $SD = 3.00$ ) or in schools and public areas ( $M = 10.84$ ,  $SD = 1.803$ ;  $r_{pb} = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, significant associations were found between location and the frequency of abuse,  $\chi^2(2) = 7.762$ ,  $p < .05$ , the familiarity of the alleged offender,  $\chi^2(2) = 19.58$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the severity of abuse,  $\chi^2(2) = 10.24$ ,  $p < .05$ : abuse by family members was more likely to have occurred inside children's homes (59.5%)

than in schools or public areas (2.4%), and abuse by nonfamily members was more likely to have happened in schools or public areas (37.5%) than in the children's homes (25%). Also, it was found that 52% of the multiple abuse incident cases and 27.5% of the single abuse cases tended to happen inside the children's homes, whereas these percentages were 12% (multiple abuse cases) and 32.5% (single abuse case) for schools and public areas. The alleged victims reported more severe abuse, involving penetration in their homes ( $n = 17$ ) than in the offenders' homes ( $n = 4$ ).

### Persuasion

Thirty alleged victims reported persuasion and logistic regression was performed to determine which characteristics of abuse were related to the use of persuasion. The model as a whole fitted significantly better than the null model without the predictors,  $\chi^2(6) = 25.19$ ,  $p = .00$ . The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit statistic,  $\chi^2(8) = 9.51$ ,  $p = .30$ , implied that the model's estimates fitted the data at an acceptable level, as did the Cox and Snell  $R^2$  (.29) and the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  (.42). Three of the six predictor variables made significant contributions (see Table 1). For multiple abuse cases, the odds of persuasion being used by the alleged offenders increased by a factor of 11.89. In 23 multiple abuse cases, as opposed to only six of the single incident cases, the alleged offenders were reportedly more persuasive. For older suspects, the odds of persuasion being used increased by a factor of 6.04. Seventeen suspects aged 20 years or above persuaded their victims, compared with only six of the alleged offenders under 20 years of age. When children reported resistance, they were 16.64 times more likely to report that the perpetrators used persuasion. The remaining predictors (e.g., familiarity, age, and severity), and location were not significant.

Closer examination of persuasion prior to (i.e., during the grooming process) and during the postoffense phase, using logistic regression revealed that, in multiple abuse cases, the odds of persuasion in the grooming phase increased by a factor of 6.33, 95% confidence interval (CI; 1.40–28.70).

**TABLE 1** Logistic Regression Examining Circumstances in Which Persuasion was Employed

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP (B)	
						Lower	Upper
Children's age	-.01	.14	1	.92	.99	.75	1.30
Intra-/extra-familial	.28	.70	1	.69	1.32	.33	5.20
Single/multiple	2.48	.79	1	*0.00	11.89	2.54	55.79
Suspect adolescence/adult	1.80	.77	1	*0.02	6.04	1.34	27.16
Children's resistance	2.81	.99	1	*0.00	16.64	2.37	116.72
Touch/penetration	.32	.69	1	.65	1.37	.35	5.35
Constant	-5.60	1.65	1	.00	.00		

\* $p < .05$ .



Forty-three children who experienced multiple incidents of abuse did not report persuasion by the offenders, whereas fourteen victims of repeated abuse described offenders' use of persuasion. When children reported resisting, they were 7.02 times more likely to report that the perpetrators used persuasion. In 16 out of 20 cases the victims reported resisting offenders' persuasion strategies in the grooming phase. When persuasion preceded the sexual event, 12 alleged victims reported multiple incidents of abuse, compared to two alleged victims reporting a single incident. Analyses showed that multiple reported incidents were 7.66 times more likely to involve post-event persuasion, 95% CI (1.25–46.86) than single incident offences. If children reported resistance, the odds of persuasion being used by the alleged offenders in the post-abuse phase increased by a factor of 17.68, 95% CI (1.225–255.19). Three percent of the cases supposedly involved persuasion by the offender but the victims did not report resistance, whereas 10.6% of the children reported resisting offenders' attempted persuasion. No significant associations were found between the abuse location and the offenders' attempted persuasion in the grooming,  $\chi^2(2) = 5.42, p = .07$ , and postoffence phases,  $\chi^2(2) = 2.12, p = .35$ .

### Coercion

Forty-seven children reported coercion. Logistic regression analysis performed to determine which characteristics of abuse predicted the use of coercion yielded a Goodness of fit likelihood ratio of,  $\chi^2(6) = 19.44, p = .00$ , suggesting that the model was significantly better than the null model. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit statistic,  $\chi^2(8) = 5.31, p = .72$ , Cox and Snell  $R^2$  (.23) and the Nagelkerke R Square (.31) all showed similarly that the fit was good. The model showed one significant predictor (see Table 2): When children reported resistance, the alleged perpetrators were 7.03 times more likely to be coercive. Thirty-seven children (35.6%) reported resisting attempted coercion, whereas only 10 victims of coercion did not report resistance (9.6%) (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2** Logistic Regression Examining Circumstances in Which Coercion was Employed

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP (B)	
						Lower	Upper
Children's age	.10	.11	1.00	.37	1.10	.89	1.37
Intra- /extra-familial	-0.21	.60	1.00	.73	.81	.25	2.63
Single /multiple	.88	.61	1.00	.15	2.41	.74	7.91
Suspect adolescence/ adult	-0.42	.56	1.00	.45	.66	.22	1.95
Children's resistance	1.95	.68	1.00	*0.00	7.03	1.86	26.58
Touch/penetration	.98	.66	1.00	.14	2.68	.73	9.84
Constant	-2.60	1.12	1.00	.02	.07		

\* $p < .05$ .

Resistance was associated with pre-abuse coercion,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 7.70$ , 95% CI [1.84 – 32.23]. Thirty-two children reported resisting coercion prior to the sexual event, whereas 6 victims reported no such resistance. There were no significant predictors of postevent coercion. No significant associations were found between the offenders' use of coercion and the locations where the abuse allegedly occurred.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reported above add to our understanding of CSA in several ways, not least by identifying differences between the strategies adopted by intra- and extrafamilial offenders, younger and older offenders, and offenders who abused the same victims once as opposed to multiple times. Because this study included a substantial number of child victims' statements, furthermore, the findings regarding offenders' modus operandi may be quite robust.

When multiple incidents reportedly occurred, perpetrators were more likely to reward victims (e.g., offering or promising material goods or activities), verbally encourage victims to cooperate, promise love, or provoke/dare the children both before and after the abuse than when abuse occurred only once. Perhaps this was because the offenders anticipated abusing the children on future occasions and thus wanted children to regard them as attentive, generous, and trustworthy friends to whom they might feel obligated to offer sexual favors in return. Postoffence persuasion may also delay children's disclosure, thereby granting offenders further opportunities to abuse the children (Bussey, Lee, & Grimbeek, 1993; Lamers-Winkelman, 1995; Lyon, 2002; Sjöberg & Lindblad, 2002). Moreover, Sas and Cunningham (1995) found both that immediate reporting was less likely when the victims and perpetrators were emotionally close and that offenders tended to reabuse children when the first sexual incident was not reported. In this study, repeated abuse tended to involve more severe offences (i.e., penetration) by intrafamilial perpetrators and tended to take place in the children's homes, possibly because intrafamilial perpetrators and children often share the same house and spend a lot of time together. Similarly, a reluctance to disclose mistreatment by family members may mean that some perpetrators can commit several, possibly severe, forms of abuse before disclosure, whereas victims might disclose more promptly and offer more resistance when the perpetrators were not family members. Many researchers have reported that intrafamilial abuse victims are more hesitant to disclose, perhaps because they fear disbelief or lack familial support (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Hanson, Resnick, Saunders, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1999; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2007; Smith et al., 2000).

In the present study, abuse was most likely to occur in school and public areas rather than in the children's and offenders' homes when it involved older victims. Younger victims reported more intrafamilial abuse than older

children, probably because older children are more likely to leave the house without parental supervision. Also, older victims were more likely to report resisting the perpetrators' behavior. This could be attributed to the fact that young children may not yet have the cognitive abilities to judge particular behaviors and may therefore simply not resist, or they may be less likely than older children to report resistance even when it happened. As predicted, alleged perpetrators above 20 years of age were reportedly more likely than adolescent perpetrators to attempt persuasion, possibly because older perpetrators have more resources and can afford to offer treats and rewards (e.g., taking children out in their cars, visiting theme parks, supplying children with expensive presents); young perpetrators need to find other ways of grooming victims and maintaining their silence about the abuse. Reporting a similar association, Proulx and colleagues (1997) suggested that adolescent perpetrators are more coercive, whereas adult offenders are more persuasive. Adult offenders may be more skilled at manipulating potential victims into abuse, and may thus attempt to persuade them more often (Hunter, Hazelwood, & Slesinger, 2000; Kaufman et al., 1996; Proulx, Cusson, Beaugard, & Nicole, 2005), whereas younger offenders may lack the authority that would lead children to comply obediently (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Remarkably, however, no significant association between attempted coercion and the alleged perpetrators' ages was found. Overall, offenders allegedly used more persuasion when multiple incidents were reported, whereas older alleged suspects were more likely to use persuasion than younger ones.

There was a significant association between reported resistance and the reported use of both coercion and persuasion. Resistance may seem to have been futile because the alleged offenders reportedly assaulted the victims sexually, but the study only included cases in which abuse had been reported, and it is unclear how many instances of abuse had been averted by resistance. Perhaps different findings would emerge if alleged victims who did not report abuse to the authorities had been studied. Some authors encourage resistance (Bachman, Saltzman, Thompson, & Carmody, 2002; Kleck & Tark, 2005; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), whereas others claim that it makes victim injuries more likely (Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 1988; Robertiello & Terry, 2007). Given the heterogeneity of abusers, it seems likely that resistance may be effective in some cases but counter-productive in others (Kleck & Sayles, 1990). Further, our understanding is limited because the statistical analyses were correlational, making it difficult to determine the exact sequence of the offenders' and children's behaviors. For example, it was assumed that the alleged offenders' strategies were responsive to the children's resistance, but the reverse may have been the case.

## Prevention

As indicated earlier, research of this sort has important implications for the design of appropriate prevention and intervention strategies (Clarke, 1995;

Cornish, 1994; Leclerc, Proulx & Beaugard, 2009; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Leclerc et al. pointed out that few professionals have used situational prevention techniques to address CSA, however, perhaps because situational prevention is essentially rooted in criminology whereas psychologists have largely conducted research on CSA. Leclerc et al. (2011) proposed that a script model analysis might elucidate the behavioral strategies of sex offenders, making preventive interventions more effective. These researchers examined reports by 221 incarcerated offenders in Australia, using the results to develop a number of intervention measures designed to impede the commission of crimes. Crime scripts were not explicitly explored in the present study, but the child victims' descriptions of the crime-commission process provided insight into the offenders' behavior prior to and following the abuse, and this, too, promises to inform the development of crime prevention measures.

The results of this study have important implications for parents and professionals eager to minimize the likelihood of abuse. Offenders may take advantage of widespread ignorance regarding their strategies and our findings suggest some situational prevention measures that might be useful. Leclerc et al. (2011) suggested that "some offenders may find themselves in a situation alone with a child without any clearly formed intention to abuse the child but simply exploit the opportunity when it arises" (p. 229) and parents might minimize the possibilities of abuse by ensuring that children are not left alone with others for extended periods. Regular unexpected visits could impede or prevent abuse.

Furthermore, younger children might perhaps be taught how to defend themselves and how to recognize violations of their privacy. Particularly younger children can be encouraged to be less trusting when others attempt to violate their privacy. Older offenders also used more persuasion than young offenders and children need the capacity (self-esteem) to resist such persuasion, especially by adults. Prevention programs should also encourage child victims to disclose abuse promptly to minimize further victimization and to resist manipulative appeals by offenders to the children's friendship and loyalty. Moreover, early recognition of grooming behavior might help potential offenders to seek help and thus prevent sexual abuse.

### Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. First, the sample was relatively small which affects the external reliability of the results. In addition, all cases were from Britain and perhaps there are cultural differences in the ways offenders operate. The results of this study may thus not be applicable in other societies. This study also relied on two examples of grooming behaviors, namely offenders' use of persuasion and coercion. Although the variables persuasion and coercion included many offender strategies, it is probably that the

offenders also used other strategies that were not studied. To obtain a more reliable description of offenders' behavior, future research needs to focus on a more extensive range of offender strategies. Because the dynamics of the offenders' behaviors have not been recorded, it was also unknown when the offenders used persuasive or coercive strategies and the order in which these occurred. Unfortunately this study relied solely on the children's accounts. These children, particularly the younger ones may not have been aware of the perpetrators' strategies, and thus may not have reported some of the perpetrators' behaviors. Older children provide more information about experienced events than younger ones do (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Orbach, Katz, & Horowitz, 2012; Lamb, Sternberg, & Esplin, 2000; Lamb et al., 2003), and this may have affected the informativeness of the younger children's accounts. Moreover, there was no systematic corroboration of the children's allegations. This study is based on children's perceptions of offenders' behavior reported in investigative interview settings exploring the alleged abuse. In future research, interviewers could question children specifically about offenders' behavior. Others might survey children who have not been formally questioned by the police about otherwise unknown approaches by potential offenders. Future research is also needed to explore the sequence of offenders' behaviors in the grooming and postoffence phases.

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