UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Psychology
2018
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Date 05/08/2018
Studies suggest that child sex offenders (CSOs) are stereotyped and discriminated against due to lack of knowledge and negative attitudes. Research has identified several important variables related to knowledge and attitudes such as gender and previously being a victim of child sexual abuse (CSA). Research has also linked accurate knowledge with an increase in positive attitudes. However, no research has identified a link between personally knowing a CSO and an effect on knowledge and attitudes. The current study aims to assess how gender, previous history of CSA, and knowing a CSO may influence knowledge and attitudes toward CSOs. Almost 400 undergraduate students completed a survey assessing knowledge and attitudes toward CSOs. The current study found that knowledge scores were higher for those who had previously been victims of child sexual abuse and those who knew a CSO. Attitudes toward CSOs did not vary between groups and knowledge did not vary based on gender.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Sex offenders are perhaps the most feared and vilified group of people in the United States. Not only does the label sex offender carry a negative connotation in society, it also carries one in prison. The negative connotation thus creates a stigma that impacts the lives of sex offenders. Previous research has found that among sex offenders, the most feared and hated type of sex offender is the child sex offender (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009). This fear is not completely unfounded, as according to the US Department of Health and Human Services, in 2014 alone, over 58,000 cases of child sexual abuse were reported. However, public attitudes toward child sex offenders are largely influenced by media, and thus exacerbates this fear (Gavin, 2007). Media coverage may conflate or over-exaggerate the danger of sex offenders in general, and are especially relevant with current media coverage of both the #MeToo movement and the USA Gymnastics Larry Nassar scandal among others. These types of cases highlight sexual offenders in a more punitive light, and may be applicable to understanding opinions of all sex offenders. These types of movements and scandals impact how society understands and reacts to sex offenders.

Research on child sexual offenders (CSOs) has proliferated, with attention focused on understanding individuals who commit sexual crimes and on public perceptions of sexual offenders. Many of these attitudes are based in myths rather than facts (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Mears, Mancini, Gertz, & Bratton, 2008). The link
between attitudes and belief in myths (or knowledge) gives insight into overall perception. An understanding of community perceptions allows both researchers and professionals to identify biases present in the community. The present study investigates whether undergraduate students’ knowledge about and attitudes toward child sex offenders vary based on factors such as gender, history of sexual abuse victimization, and knowing a child sex offender.

Before the findings of this study are revealed, Chapter 2 will outline the impact of media and society on the lives of child sex offenders. Additionally, to gain an understanding of how knowledge of sex offenders is operationalized, the myths and facts of child sex offenders will be explained in the next chapter. Past research about community opinions of child sex offenders will be examined, especially how it relates to gender, prior victimization, and interaction with a child sex offender. Chapter 3 is an overview of the data collection and analytical strategy utilized for the study. The findings from the study are discussed in Chapter 4 of this document. The final chapter includes discussions on the connection between knowledge and attitudes toward a child sex offender, the role of gender in perceptions of sex offenders, and education and experience in perceptions toward child sex offenders are discussed. Chapter 5 also includes an overview of the limitations and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and society have perpetrated many myths about child sex offenders, in which the child sex offender is effectively “othered” (Brown, Deakin, & Spencer, 2008), and previous research has shown that community members use media for information about child sex offenders (Gavin, 2007). These myths include beliefs that all sex offenders are male, strangers, “dirty old men”, have a mental illness, were sexually abused as children, are homosexual, and belong to a lower socioeconomic status (DeMarni, Cromer, & Goldsmith, 2010; Fuselier, Durham, & Wurtele, 2002). One belief is accurate - child sex offenders are most likely to be male (Negriff, Schneiderman, Smith, Schreyer, & Trickett, 2014; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). The public’s belief that child sexual abuse is perpetrated by strangers is possibly due to an optimistic bias to enhance a feeling of safety (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Weinstein & Klein, 1996). Although debunked as a myth more than 20 years ago (Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994), some people still believe that child sex offenders are most likely homosexual. Some support exists for the notion that victims of child sexual abuse become perpetrators themselves (Glasser et al., 2001; Goldman, 2013; McCuish, Cale, & Corrado, 2017; Thornberry et al., 2013). Many of the respondents also believe that all sex offenders pose the same risk to the public. The public also may believe that child sex offenders are severely mentally ill.
Child sex offenders are a heterogeneous group. In terms of demographic characteristics, most child sex offenders are male, with about 91% of youth citing sexual contact with a male (Negriff et al., 2014). The average age of a male child sex offender is between 31 and 40, with about 71% of offenders being less than 35 (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). Child sex offenders are traditionally Caucasian and heterosexual, and many are in adult sexual relationships (Abel & Harlow, 2001; Russell, 1986). Most child sex offenders know their victims versus being strangers (Negriff et al., 2014; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). The younger the victim (11 and below), the more likely the perpetrator is related to the victim (Snyder, 2000). The average age of a female child sex offender falls in the 20s and 30s, and most are Caucasian (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Female child sex offenders are found most often with victims below the age of 6, but still at much lower rates compared to male child sex offenders (Snyder, 2000; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). While almost half of sex offenses against younger children (11 and below) are perpetrated by juveniles, about 27% of sex offenses against children 11-18 are perpetrated by juveniles (US Department of Justice, 2000).

Some studies classify incest offenders and pedophiles as two distinct groups (Danni & Hampe, 2000). The most common distinction, however, is between pedophile and child sex offender, despite the continued conflation of the two terms (Richards, 2017). Much of society struggles with feelings toward pedophiles even if the pedophile will never act on their urges (Jahnke, 2017). Child sex offenders do not have a continued sexual interest in children, and if not related to the victim are less likely to have a past record of sexual offenses (Feelgood & Hoyer, 2008; Sullivan & Beech, 2004). Pedophiles meet diagnostic criteria for Pedophilia Disorder and may not molest children.
Pedophilia is an attraction to prepubescent children that lasts for at least six months and the attraction must be to children at least five years younger than themselves (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Pedophiles may not act on their urges, but the urges must cause significant distress. Pedophiles may be attracted exclusively to children or to adults as well (Abel & Harlow, 2001).

**Knowledge, Attitudes, and Existing Scales**

With the increase of knowledge comes a more accepting attitude toward child sex offenders. Having a more positive attitude toward child sex offenders has been linked to believing fewer stereotypes. A study compared attitudes about child sexual offenders between child sex offender therapists and teachers (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006), using the Attitudes towards Sex Offenders Scale (Hogue, 1993) and the Knowledge of Child Abuse Questionnaire. It was found that the therapists did not endorse as many stereotypes about offenders (including lower IQ, older, sexually frustrated, stranger) compared to the teachers, and therapists had more positive attitudes toward the offenders. These results demonstrate that increased knowledge of child sex offenders may play a factor in increasing positive attitudes toward child sex offenders. This study also supports the concept that contact with child sex offenders may affect knowledge and attitudes of child sex offenders. A similar study found a similar impact of knowledge on attitudes, with those who had more overall knowledge of CSOs also had more positive attitudes toward child sex offenders (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). This same relationship has been documented with therapists. The more training a therapist has received, which includes an increase in knowledge, the more positive attitudes the therapist holds (Simon, 2010).
Research has also found that the more education a person has, the more likely they are to have rehabilitative (positive) attitudes toward sex offenders (Fuselier et al., 2002).

Research has been conducted on how the community in general perceives child sex offenders. Currently, much of the research into “attitudes” about sex offenders actually investigates perceptions (Harper, Hogue, & Bartels, 2017). Attitudes underlie perceptions, and do not focus only on the stereotypical views of sex offenders. Throughout most of the studies conducted, the only demographic factor shown to influence attitudes toward sex offenders is educational level; people with higher education levels have more positive views toward sex offenders. Researchers assert that discovering attitudes toward sex offenders is important because it can help in a therapeutic setting (offenders get more out of therapy when therapist is supportive) and shifting away from negative attitudes in order to lessen punitive policies.

Several scales have been developed to assess attitudes toward sex offenders. The Attitudes towards Sex Offender Scale (Hogue, 1993) has been used multiple times in past research. The scale was found to be psychometrically sound in a research study examining attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders (Whitehead, 2009). Simon (2010) also utilized the scale in order to investigate how psychologists view sex offenders. Harper (2012) compared how different types of education may influence opinions, and found that psychology majors were the more punitive compared to criminal justice majors. Additionally, the scale was used in a survey of teachers and therapists, where more positive attitudes were linked with less stereotype endorsement of child sex offenders (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006).
The Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders scale (CATSO; Harper & Hogue, 2014) has also been used in multiple studies. Initially developed in 2008, the scale was determined for use in treatment and community settings (Church, Wakeman, Miller, Clements, & Sun, 2008) in order to examine attitudes toward sex offenders. Harper and Hogue (2014) conducted a study to validate the Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders scale so it could be used as more than a dependent measure. This scale uses three underlying subscales in order to examine stereotypes, punitive attitudes, and risk perception of and toward sex offenders. This scale was administered to participants along with the short version of the Attitudes toward Sex Offenders Scale (Hogue, 1993), the General Punitiveness Scale (Maruna & King, 2009) and the Rational-Experiential Inventory (Pacini & Epstein, 1999). Using the correlation among the scales, a finalized version of the Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders scale was created. Additionally, based on the fact that the scale does not appear to measure judgments made by a person, Harper and Hogue suggested the name to be changed to the Perceptions of Sex Offenders scale.

**Gendered Perceptions toward Child Sex Offenders**

Researchers have often investigated the influence of age, education, gender, and occupation on these perceptions. Two important identified factors that influence overall attitudes are age (older) and gender (female) (Higgins & Ireland, 2009; King & Roberts, 2017; Palasinski & Shortland, 2016). Conflicting data exists as to whether females have more negative or positive views, with one study finding females as having more positive attitudes overall (Higgins & Ireland, 2009), whereas other studies have found that females are more punitive toward sex offenders and have more negative feelings toward
them (King & Roberts, 2017; Palasinski & Shortland, 2016; Willis, Malinen, & Johnston, 2013), and believe more of the myths (Olver & Barlow, 2010). Additionally, working with sex offenders, being a victim of a sex offense, or thinking that a sex offender is capable of change has been shown in some studies to lead to more positive views of offenders (Fuselier et al., 2002; Higgins & Ireland, 2009; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006; Simon, 2010). However, gender was found to be insignificant when considering attitudes of those surveyed who worked with sex offenders (Simon, 2010). Other factors that influence sex offender opinions include what an individual reads and whether they rate higher on openness (Olver & Barlow, 2010). These individuals are more likely to have a rehabilitative view of sex offenders. It is also thought that if a person thinks sex offenders are capable of changing, they will view them more positively (Harper & Bartels, 2017).

**Victimization Perceptions toward Child Sex Offenders**

Victims of child sexual abuse are heterogeneous. Children of any social class, ethnic origin, or race may be at risk of being sexually abused. Although exact statistics vary, about 8.4% of children who are maltreated are sexually abused (Child Maltreatment, 2015). While females are more likely to be the victims of intrafamilial abuse, overall, some reports show males are more likely to be sexual abuse victims (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). From 1991-1996, of incidents reported to police, about 66% of sexual assault victims were under the age of 18 (Snyder, 2000). The age at which males are at the most risk for sexual assault is 4 years old, while the age for females is 14. Children are also at a high risk for poly-victimization, or experiencing several different types of abuse (Turner, Finkelhor, & Orndrom, 2010). Of those who experienced sexual
abuse, about 25% also experienced another types of abuse such as maltreatment, emotional abuse, or physical abuse.

Past victimization of sexual abuse, whether as a child or an adult, affects attitudes toward CSOs and beliefs about how sex offenders should be managed. One research study compared the opinions of those with a history of sexual abuse to those who did not have a sexual abuse history (Spoo et al., 2017). Those with a history of sexual abuse had a more positive view of sex offenders compared to those who did not. These positive views recommended less restrictive registration and notification laws. Additionally, victims were more supportive of mandated treatment for sex offenders. Overall, this study also found that more knowledge of sex offenders in general leads to more positive views, regardless of victimization history. A similar study to the one conducted by Spoo and colleagues found that therapists who had a history of sexual abuse also held more positive attitudes than their non-victim peers (Nelson, Herlihy, & Oescher, 2002). Another study found that those who were victims of child sexual abuse held more positive attitudes compared to similar peers (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008).

**Offender Interaction Perceptions toward Child Sex Offenders**

Many of the studies examining the relationship between having contact with CSOs and attitudes have operationalized contact based on professional involvement with that population. Types of jobs such as child sex offender therapist, prison officer, and forensic staff (Higgins & Ireland, 2009; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006; Simon, 2010) have been found to influence attitudes. Therapists have been found to have the most positive views. However, the relationship between interactions with child sex offenders and knowledge/attitudes among community members has not been examined outside of one
study, where it was found that knowing a sex offender increases positive attitudes (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008).

Consistent with previous research, the current study’s hypotheses were developed. First, males are more likely to hold more sympathetic attitudes toward and more factual knowledge about child sex offenders than females (Higgins & Ireland, 2009; Palasinski & Shortland, 2016). Second, those with a history of prior victimization will have more positive attitudes and more factual knowledge about child sex offenders than those who were not victimized (Higgins & Ireland, 2009; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006; Simon, 2010; Spoo et al., 2017). Finally, reports of knowing a CSO will be explored in order to investigate the effect on knowledge and attitudes (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008). This research will allow for previous connections in literature to be re-examined, and ideally give educators and researchers an idea of the perceptions the community currently holds and to target education about child sex offenders toward community populations.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

A total of 399 undergraduate students attending University of Colorado Colorado Springs were recruited via direct approach from several undergraduate psychology classes; two required introductory courses for majors and a Psychology/Criminal Justice cross-listed course (Sex Abuse against Children). The two introductory courses sampled differed demographically on variables other than those sampled. The one introductory course was comprised mainly of psychology majors who had taken previous psychology courses. The other introductory course was comprised of multiple majors and mainly first year students who had never taken a psychology course before. These differences between classes sampled may have contributed to difference in scores on the scales used. The students were primarily female (75.9% female, 23.3% male, 0.8% transgender) with mean age of 21.9 ($SD = 5.0$). Students in the introductory courses received extra credit in exchange for participating in the study. Students in the cross-listed course participated as part of the class in order to assess knowledge and attitude changes throughout the semester. All procedures were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board.

Materials

After reading consent forms, students completed a paper survey entitled “Attitudes toward Child Sex Offenders.” After providing demographic information (gender and age), students answered several CSA and CSO related questions (see Table 1).
Table 1

*Demographic makeup of participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>Percentage Responding Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever taken a course where you studied child sexual abuse (CSA)?</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever worked in a professional capacity with CSOs?</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever worked in a professional capacity with CSA victims?</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a child/adolescent, were you a victim of sexual abuse?</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone in your family ever been the victim of child sexual abuse?</td>
<td>33.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you personally know anyone who has been a victim/survivor of CSA?</td>
<td>63.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you personally know anyone who has sexually abused a child?</td>
<td>35.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question with the highest endorsement was “*Do you personally know anyone who has been a victim/survivor of CSA?*” with 63.20% of the participants endorsing this item. Students then completed the Perceptions of Child Sex Offenders Scale (PCS0). This scale was developed using modified versions of published scales by substituting the phrase ‘child sex offenders’ for the phrase ‘sex offenders.’ Along with items created based on the pedophilia course module, statements came from the modified Attitudes Toward Sex Offender Scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993), Community Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders Scale (CATSO; Harper & Hogue, 2014), and the CSOM Myths and Facts Survey (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2000). Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale, scored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Two general areas were assessed, including:
1. Knowledge and Myths about CSOs. Statements measured respondents’ endorsement of CSO stereotypes (modified from CSOM, 2000) (e.g., “Child molesters are usually elderly men”; “Most CSOs use force or violence to get children to comply”; “CSOs generally have a lower level of IQ compared with the rest of the population”; “CSOs are more likely to abuse children who are strangers than children they know”). Items were created to assess students’ knowledge about pedophilia (e.g., “All pedophiles are CSOs”; “Being a pedophile is a crime in the United States”; “All CSOs are pedophiles”). Internal consistency for the 15-item Knowledge/Myths scale was calculated using Cronbach’s coefficient revealing an acceptable internal consistency (α = .71) (Wurtele, 2018). Scores were re-coded to create True/False responses (Agree/Strongly Agree or Disagree/Strongly Disagree) and re-coded answers analyzed as “Correct” (1) or “Incorrect” (0). Scores coded as 3 (undecided) were also coded as incorrect. Total Knowledge/Myths scores were calculated based on the number of correct responses, ranging from 0 to 15 (see Table 2).

2. Attitudes toward CSOs (modified from ATS; Hogue, 1993) (e.g., “I would like associating with some CSOs”; “I think I would like a lot of CSOs”; “I would like working professionally with CSOs”). Scores range from 7 to 35 (higher scores reflect more positive affect) (see Table 3). Internal consistency for these seven statements was calculated using Cronbach’s coefficient. Results indicated adequate to strong internal consistency (α = .86) (Wurtele, 2018).

**Procedure**

Students were tested during either the first or second week of class. They were explained the nature of the study and gave consent to participation. Instruments were
Table 2

*Percentage of students correctly responding to knowledge/myths*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question (recoded as true (T)/false (F))</th>
<th>Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All child sex offenders (CSOs) are pedophiles. (F)</td>
<td>26.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. All pedophiles are CSOs. (F)</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. One can choose to be a pedophile. (F)</td>
<td>26.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Being a pedophile is a crime in the United States. (F)</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Only males commit sex offenses against children. (F)</td>
<td>97.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Child molesters are usually elderly men. (F)</td>
<td>77.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. CSOs who molest same-sex children are homosexuals. (F)</td>
<td>47.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most CSOs use force or violence to get children to comply. (F)</td>
<td>51.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. CSOs generally have a lower level of IQ compared with the rest of the population. (F)</td>
<td>57.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The majority of CSOs are caught, convicted, and incarcerated. (F)</td>
<td>82.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. CSOs are more likely to abuse children who are strangers than children they know. (F)</td>
<td>73.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most CSOs know their victims. (T)</td>
<td>67.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Compared with males, female CSOs cause less harm to children. (F)</td>
<td>69.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Juveniles who commit sex offenses will most likely commit sex offenses as adults. (F)</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. CSOs are different from most people. (F)</td>
<td>29.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Positive Attitudes toward CSOs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most CSOs deserve to be helped</td>
<td>68.90</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs have feelings like the rest of us</td>
<td>79.70</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I would like a lot of CSOs</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>27.10</td>
<td>68.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs need affection and support just like anybody else</td>
<td>62.40</td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn't mind if an ex-CSO moved into my neighborhood</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>31.90</td>
<td>59.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like associating with some CSOs</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>32.60</td>
<td>62.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like working professionally with CSOs</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>30.30</td>
<td>51.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
passed out to students willing to participate. They filled out the instruments anonymously and passed them in to the professor of the class. All data was entered and analyzed utilizing SPSS. All data was utilized regardless of missing variables. During instances when instruments had more than one number written as an answer, only the first number was utilized for data screening.

**Analytical Strategy**

Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the three hypotheses. The MANOVA allows for an understanding of the interaction of knowledge and attitudes on the three variables being tested, gender, previous victimization, and knowing a child sex offender. Additionally, a third MANOVA was utilized for an additional analysis to examine the interaction of gender and previous victimization on knowledge and attitudes toward child sex offenders. Further analyses were conducted in order to assess how previous education, whether through classes, victimization, knowing a child sex offender, or career field, may increase positive attitudes. An independent samples t-test was used to see if answering yes to one or more of the seven demographic questions influences more positive attitudes compared to those who did not answer yes. A correlation was also utilized to understand if more answers of yes on the demographic questions influenced more positive attitudes toward child sex offenders.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Relationship between Knowledge and Attitudes toward CSOs

Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) for the two scales was reassessed to replicate earlier research. The scores on the Knowledge and Myths scale had questionable internal consistency ($\alpha = .69$). The scores on the Attitudes toward CSOs scale had strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$). The alphas from this study were very close in range to previous alphas, replicating those from Wurtele (2018). Total scores on the Knowledge and Myths and Attitudes toward CSOs were analyzed and correlated. The scores on the Knowledge and Myths scale ($M = 7.79, SD = 2.62$) and the Attitudes toward CSOs scale ($M = 19.80, SD = 4.92$) were positively correlated, $r(398) = .31$, $p < .01$. An additional analysis was performed to examine between group differences of those who had participated in the survey as part of the two different introductory psychology courses. Those who participated as part of the course mainly composed of psychology majors ($M = 7.62, SD = 2.67$) were significantly more knowledgeable than those who were part of the introductory class composed of multiple majors ($M = 6.77, SD = 2.61$), $t(197) = 2.27$, $p < .05$. The same effect was found for attitudes, with those in mainly psychology major course ($M = 19.90, SD = 4.14$) having significantly more positive attitudes than those who were not ($M = 18.15, SD = 5.07$), $t(197) = 2.64$, $p < .01$. 
Table 4

Effects of Variables on Knowledge/Myths and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Knowledge and Myths Scale (1 to 14)</th>
<th>Attitudes toward CSOs scale (7 to 30)</th>
<th>Wilk’s Lambda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7.29(2.85)</td>
<td>20.04(4.93)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.91(2.53)</td>
<td>19.71(4.90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization</td>
<td>13.08***</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.85(2.47)</td>
<td>20.03(5.29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.58(2.61)</td>
<td>19.76(4.82)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know a CSO</td>
<td>7.48**</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.27(2.48)</td>
<td>19.92(4.97)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.52(2.67)</td>
<td>19.76(4.87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender effects

An initial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the two outcome variables to assess gender differences and to control for multicollinearity (see Table 4 for all MANOVA results). No serious violations of homogeneity of variance were noted. Due to only having three participants who identified as transgender, only males and females were utilized for the comparison. There was no significant effect of gender on knowledge and attitudes, Wilk’s Lambda = 0.99, $F(2, 388) = 2.80$, ns.

Victim effects

Another MANOVA was conducted on the two outcome variables to assess whether or not previously being a victim of sexual abuse affects scores on the two
measures. There was a significant effect of being a victim, Wilk’s Lambda = 0.97, \(F(2, 390) = 6.80, p < .001\). The two groups were significantly different on the Knowledge and Myths scale, with those who had previously been victims answering more of the items correctly than those who had not been victims, \(F(1,393) = 13.08, p < .001; \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .03\). The result was non-significant for previously having been a victim or not for the Attitudes toward CSOs scale.

**Knowing a Child Sex Offender effects**

A third MANOVA was conducted to assess whether or not previously knowing a child sex offender affects scores on the two measures. There was a significant effect of knowing a CSO, Wilk’s Lambda = 0.98, \(F(2, 391) = 3.88, p < .05\). The two groups were significantly different on the Knowledge and Myths scale, with those who had personally known a CSO answering significantly more questions correctly than those who had not \(F(1, 393) = 7.48, p < .01; \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .02\). The results were non-significant for personally knowing a CSO or not on the Attitudes toward CSOs scale.

**Gender and Victim effects**

A final MANOVA assessed whether gender and previously being a victim together affected scores on the Knowledge and Myth scale as well as the Attitudes toward CSOs scale. There was no significant interaction effect of gender and being a child sexual abuse victim, Wilk’s Lambda = 0.99, \(F(2, 386) = 0.25, \text{ns}\).

**Education and Experience effects**

The demographic variables were utilized in order to see how prior experience and education affect knowledge and attitudes. Similar demographic variables were assessed to examine how many of the variables contained significant overlap. Interaction between
working child sexual abuse victims and child sex offenders was assessed. Of the 30 participants who reported working with either child sex offenders or victims, three worked only with perpetrators, 15 only with victims, and 12 with both. Additionally, the interaction between having a family member as a victim and knowing a victim was assessed. Of the 258 participants who reported having a family member as a victim or knowing a victim, six had only a family victim, 124 only knew a victim, and 128 both knew a victim and had a family victim.

An independent samples t-test was utilized in order to examine if participants who had prior experience with education or knowledge about child sex offenders or victims had more positive attitudes toward child sex offenders than those who did not. The t-test revealed that those who had reported at least one experience ($M = 20.13, SD = 4.94$) had more positive attitudes than those who did not ($M = 18.96, SD = 4.77$), $t(396) = 2.15$, $p < .05$. 

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The current study focuses on community knowledge and attitudes toward child sex offenders. The primary objective was to determine whether gender, victimization, and knowing a child sex offender had significant effects on knowledge and attitudes in a sample of undergraduate students. A secondary objective was to determine how education (operationalized as experience) effected attitudes. The results of this study indicated that two of the three hypotheses were partially supported.

The first hypothesis that stated that males are more likely to hold more sympathetic attitudes toward and more factual knowledge about child sex offenders than females was not supported by the study. No significant effect was found for gender on either knowledge or attitudes toward child sex offenders. These results do not coincide with previous studies that found that gender does significantly effect knowledge and attitudes. Previous studies have found that gender does significantly effect attitudes toward child sex offenders, with one study citing females as more positive (Higgins & Ireland, 2009), or more negative (King & Roberts, 2017; Palasinski & Shortland, 2016; Willis et al., 2013) compared to males. The non-significant findings from this study may have been influenced by the disproportionate number of female participants compared to males.

The second hypothesis, those with a history of prior victimization will have more positive attitudes and more factual knowledge about child sex offenders than those who
were not victimized, was partially supported. A significant main effect of victim status was found for the Knowledge and Myths scale, with those who had been victims having more knowledge about child sex offenders. No significant effect was found for Attitudes toward CSOs based on history of prior victimization. These results are supported by the literature, with past studies demonstrating that victimization is linked to less acceptance of myths about child sex offenders and having more positive attitudes (Nelson et al., 2002; Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008; Spoo et al., 2017). The non-significant result for attitudes may have been found due to the high rates of disagreement to two of the questions that comprise the scale, “I think I would like a lot of CSOs” and “I would like associating with some CSOs”.

The third hypothesis, reports of knowing a CSO will be explored in order to investigate the effect on knowledge and attitudes, yielded significant results for the Knowledge and Myths Scale. It was found that personally knowing a CSO showed a significant effect on knowledge about child sex offenders. Although exploratory in nature, these results were not supported in the literature based on the one study that had operationalized knowing a CSO outside of career (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2006), as no significant results for attitudes were found. These results may have been found due to the high rates of disagreement for the two Attitudes toward CSOs questions as stated earlier.

Additional analyses revealed the more experience with child sex offenders, whether through victimization, education, or career, increases positive attitudes toward child sex offenders. These results are supported by the literature, with previous studies finding that all factors contribute to positive attitudes (Fuselier et al., 2002; Harper, 2010; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006; Simon, 2010). These results were found not only due to the
literature, but the high rate of students that cited at least one instance of experience with child sex offenders.

There are several strengths from this line of research. Firstly, the current political climate has brought child sex offenders back into the spotlight in society, making this study relevant. Cases from major sports and Hollywood have re-vilified sex offenders in the minds of Americans. Examining attitudes toward child sex offenders during this time gives professionals and researchers an idea of how society views sex offenders. Additionally, knowledge and attitudes can have a significant effect on lawmakers and restrictions imposed upon child sex offenders. This is also one of the first studies to examine the impact of perpetrator interaction outside of career-fields related to working with CSOs, and the impact that this may have on attitudes and knowledge. Finally, the demographics section of the survey allowed for additional analyses to be utilized in order to see if experiences with child sex offenders influenced attitudes.

This study has several limitations. First of all, media and societal culture currently focuses on the persecution of sex offenders, including the #MeToo movement and the Larry Nassar sex abuse scandal. These types of events may have influenced attitude ratings. Additionally, the utilization of two different introductory classes was a limitation of the study. Although they are both introductory classes, one included a variety of majors while the other included almost exclusively Psychology majors. The results of this study may have been impacted by other demographic variables not assessed for, such as major or year in school. Additionally, there may have been instances of selection bias based on the classes, with those who previously held more knowledge or positive attitudes toward child sex offenders gravitating toward psychology
classes. Finally, many more female victims of child sexual abuse were sampled compared to male victims, 19.50% versus 9.70% respectively. A higher rate of male victims would have allowed for a better comparison of the interaction between gender and victimization. Another limitation would be of the specificity of the questions for the demographics section. The question assessing personally knowing a victim “Do you personally know anyone who has been a victim/survivor of CSA?”, contained significant overlap from the “Has anyone in your family ever been the victim of child sexual abuse?” question. This may have been because the knowing a victim question did not specify that the family member should not be included as personally knowing a victim.

Suggestions for future research include assessing for major, race, year in school, and political affiliation. These factors would allow for more specific conclusions to be drawn from the results, such as whether education on laws or human behavior has a greater influence on positive attitudes. Assessing for major would also allow for more specific comparisons between classes utilized. Race would allow for a more diverse sample to be drawn, and explore attitudes of minorities. Year in school would allow for easier assessment of the impact of education on knowledge and positive attitudes. Finally, political affiliation would allow researchers to draw conclusions and focus education on specific demographics of people. The survey should also be expanded to allow for a juvenile sex offender subscale to be developed. Few questions appear on the current scale, and as juvenile sex offenders make up a significant number of cases, more research could be done in that area. Additionally, the one juvenile sex offender question included on the Knowledge and Myths scale had the second lowest percentage of correct answers of the 15 questions.
Although future research needs to be conducted in order to fully examine the scope of attitudes toward child sex offenders, the present study allows key demographic variables to be highlighted and explored further. There is a danger in such negative attitudes toward child sex offenders, and a lack of knowledge of the facts, in that these variables could play a key role in public policies restricting the lives of child sex offenders (Harper, Hogue, & Bartels, 2017). Sex offender registration and notification laws (SORN) and residency restrictions are just some of the restrictions placed upon child sex offenders (Patrick & Marsh, 2011). Although meant to increase public safety and lower recidivism rates, studies have demonstrated that these restrictions have no impact on recidivism (Levenson et al., 2007; Schiavone & Jeglic, 2009; Zgoba & Levenson, 2012). Therefore, it continues to be important to explore attitudes and the influence of stereotypes of child sex offenders.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Attitudes toward Child Sex Offenders (CSOs)

We value your input and appreciate your participation in this study. Because you are taking this survey twice it will be necessary to create a code that you can use so that your first survey responses can be connected to your second survey responses.

Your Unique Code: This code will be used to connect your first survey with your second survey. Your name will not be connected with this code or any of your responses on this survey. Your code is composed of your birth month; the last 4 digits of your telephone number; and first letter of your middle name. Example, my code is July4082K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Birth Month</th>
<th>Last 4 telephone numbers</th>
<th>1st Letter of your Middle Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

After filling in boxes above, please tell us about yourself:

1. Today’s Date: ________________
2. Your Gender (circle one): Male  Female  Transgender  Other
3. Your Age: __________
4. Have you ever taken a course where you studied child sexual abuse (CSA)?  ___Yes  ___No
5. Have you ever worked in a professional capacity with CSOs?  ___Yes  ___No
6. Have you ever worked in a professional capacity with CSA victims?  ___Yes  ___No
7. As a child/adolescent, were you a victim of sexual abuse?  ___Yes  ___No
8. Has anyone in your family ever been the victim of child sexual abuse?  ___Yes  ___No
9. Do you personally know anyone who has been a victim/survivor of CSA?  ___Yes  ___No
10. Do you personally know anyone who has sexually abused a child?  ___Yes  ___No

Attitudes toward Child Sex Offenders (CSOs)

Using the 1-to-5 scale below, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each item. To respond, put the number to the right of each item that describes the extent to which you agree/disagree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All CSOs are pedophiles.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Being a pedophile is a crime in the United States.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>All CSOs were sexually victimized as children.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Only males commit sex offenses against children.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Few male adults find adolescent females sexually attractive.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Child molesters are usually elderly men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CSOs are “sick”.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>One can choose to be a pedophile.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>All pedophiles are CSOs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CSOs who molest same-sex children are homosexuals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Most CSOs use force or violence to get children to comply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Compared with males, female CSOs cause less harm to children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Juveniles who commit sex offenses will most likely commit sex offenses as adults.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>It’s easy to identify CSOs because they are highly homogenous (similar).</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CSOs are highly resistant to treatment and are likely to re-offend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Almost all people who view and collect online child pornography also commit contact offenses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Women are nurturing and protecting and do not purposefully sexually offend against children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Women who offend against children are forced into it, typically by a male or romantic partner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Adolescents rarely commit sexual offenses against children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Siblings rarely commit sexual offenses against their siblings.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Most child sexual offenses are committed by elderly men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sex offenders who abuse children are unable to form relationships with adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Men in relationships with healthy sex lives do not abuse children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>CSOs generally have a lower level of IQ compared with the rest of the population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>CSOs are obsessed with sex.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>CSOs are more likely to abuse children who are strangers than children they know.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>It is unlikely that CSOs would abuse children from their own family.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
28. CSOs who have sex with related children rarely abuse non-related children.  
29. The majority of CSOs are caught, convicted, and incarcerated.  
30. Children who are sexually assaulted will sexually assault others when they grow up.  
31. Juvenile sex offenders typically are victims of child sexual abuse.  
32. Juvenile sex offenders typically grow up to be adult sex offenders.  
33. Treatment for CSOs is ineffective.  
34. The cost of treating and managing CSOs in the community is too high.  
35. Most CSOs know their victims.  
36. Most child sexual assaults are committed by someone of the same race as the victim.  
37. Very few CSOs use physical force to get the child to comply.  
38. Most CSOs find their victims by frequenting such places as schoolyards and playgrounds.  
39. CSOs are only attracted to children and not adults.  
40. Adults who rape children do so because they cannot find a consenting sexual partner.  
41. Drugs and alcohol cause child sexual offenses to occur.  
42. CSOs are different from most people.  
43. Only a few CSOs are really dangerous.  
44. CSOs never change.  
45. CSOs should remain in prison for their whole life.  
46. CSOs who only offend against their own children should receive lower penalties than extra-familial perpetrators.  
47. All CSOs, regardless of age, should be required to register on a sex-offender registry.  
48. CSOs should be restricted on where they can live.  
49. Convicted CSOs can live safely in a community without posing a threat to children.  
50. Most CSOs deserve to be helped.  
51. CSOs have feelings like the rest of us.  
52. I think I would like a lot of CSOs.  
53. CSOs need affection and support just like anybody else.  
54. I wouldn’t mind if an ex-CSO moved into my neighborhood.  
55. I would like associating with some CSOs.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56. I would like working professionally with CSOs.
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 7/26/2017

IRB Review

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 17-020
Protocol Title: Students' Attitudes toward Child Sex Offenders
Principal Investigator: Sandy Wurtele
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: N/A
Application: Report of Change (I)
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (if changed from original approval if Applicable): Expedited 7
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 24 August 2018
*Note: if research is found to be no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by
the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.
Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review to add Kristin Bowman to the Protocol and to identify that
Robert Durham will not be involved in the data analysis portion of the study. The protocol identified above has been
reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review
category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any
changes in research activity related to the project:
- The PI must submit all protocol, recruitment, advertising, and consent form amendments/revocations to the IRB for approval.
  - The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
- If you are a student, please note that it is required to include the IRB approval letter or the library when you submit the
dissertation/thesis.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events
  must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45 CFR 46.106(b)(3)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated
  responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Removal of the IRB at least 18 business days prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Integrity Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research
Integrity at 719-385-5933 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,
Deborah J. Kenny, PhD, RN, FAAN
UCCS IRB Chair

www.uccs.edu/compliance

1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80919 719-255-3321 phone 719-255-3706 fax 34