Experiences during adolescence in a sample of individuals with attraction to children

Methods
- The study followed 83 adolescents over 18 months
- Weekly journal entries
- 1:1 interviews
- Focus groups

Results
- Themes that emerged in participants' experiences during adolescence
  - Challenges surrounding the awareness of attraction
  - Sense of isolation from others
  - Mental health issues
  - Identity, appearance, and self-esteem and behavior

Background
- Descriptive, qualitative research
- Exploratory study
- Data collection through interviews and journal entries
- Analysis through thematic content

Prezi
Experiences during adolescence in a sample of individuals with attraction to children
Background

- Attraction to children often only discussed in the context of child sexual abuse

- Emerging discussion and research about individuals who are attracted to children but do not act on these attractions

- Issue: Lack of research using non-forensic samples

- Purpose of the Help Wanted Project: shed light on hidden population, develop mental health care that ethically and effectively addresses their needs

- This analysis: participants’ experiences during adolescence
Methods

• The Help Wanted Project: qualitative interviews of 30 participants
  • Ages 18-30.
  • 27 male, 2 female, 1 did not choose a sex
  • Fluent in English
  • Self-identifying as being attracted to children

• Used Grounded Theory to analyze the interviews, focusing on participants’ descriptions of their experiences during adolescence.
  • Analyzed interviews for recurrent topics and created codes that could be systematically applied to each interview
Results

- Themes that emerged in participants’ experiences during adolescence:
  - Distress surrounding the awareness of attraction
  - Sense of isolation from others
  - Mental health issues
    - Anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and behavior

Distress surrounding awareness of attraction
- Most commonly reported ages: 12 and 13
- Awareness often occurred gradually
- Confusion, fear, hopelessness, depression, feelings of isolation

Sense of isolation during adolescence
- One of the most common themes was a sense of isolation
- Feeling like outcasts, isolating themselves out of fear of discovery, having no one to talk to or turn to for help

Mental health issues during adolescence
- Anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts
- Often attributed to fear or hopelessness about the attraction and the stigma associated with it
Distress surrounding awareness of attraction

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Sometimes it was depression, because I felt like monster. Sometimes, it was just thinking you will grow up from that. Maybe it's just a phase. It really changed from day to day, from time to time. Some emotions were positive, some were negative.

I thought that if I admit that I had the attraction then I was admitting that I was like them and that I would become like them.

It's something I never would've ever wished for. All you see in public media, anywhere, is just that what a monster these people are. Growing up, that's what I associated that feeling with. It's awful. It's never something I would ever want to have. I wished it would go away many, many, many times.
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Sense of isolation during adolescence

- One of the most common themes was a sense of isolation
- Feeling like outcasts, isolating themselves out of fear of discovery, having no one to talk to or turn to for help

There's nobody to talk to about that for a teenager. You can't tell your parents. You can't tell your teachers, your community, you can't go ... I guess you can go to a priest in a confession and talk about it but I don't think people really do that anymore. There's just nobody out there. There's no support.

I pretty much felt like nobody at all could understand me and that if they knew the truth about me that they would hate me anyway. I just pulled back from everybody and saved them the trouble basically.

When you're 15, I think having your friends actually means more than your family ... When I figured it out that I wasn't like them, I felt isolated from their group and I felt alone ... I pretty much realized that ... I'm going to be separated from everyone else. I'm going to be alone in certain ways for all my life...
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Mental health issues during adolescence

- Anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts

- Often attributed to fear or hopelessness about the attraction and the stigma associated with it
I would just try and tell the thoughts to go away, but that wouldn't ever work, so then I would get really depressed… It just made me really depressed because I felt out of control because when you're sitting there and you've got thoughts running in your head and these impulses that keep coming up, but you don't want them to come up, but you can't stop the thoughts, screaming at thoughts telling them to stop isn't doing anything.
When I was depressed, I just thought that I had no future for me, and I thought I'm going to end up like one of those people who get arrested, and I just don't think that I should be alive, and just, I'm a monster; a waste of space, I guess.
...Somebody who's at war and throws themselves on a grenade to save their peers, that's somebody we consider to be a hero. I honestly felt like I was basically that I was the grenade. I knew I had time. I knew I didn't want to hurt anybody yet... I begged and begged to have the attractions taken away, but they never were. That was always in the back of my mind that I was going to someday have to do what I need to do. Jump on the grenade.
Discussion

• Results suggest adolescents with attraction to children may be at risk for serious mental health and social consequences

• Highlights valuable opportunities for prevention and intervention

• Future studies should explore these issues in greater depth and investigate the role of stigma in adverse outcomes
Experiences during adolescence in a sample of individuals with attraction to children

Methods
- The many-faceted Project, qualitative research of 120 participants.
  - Data was transcribed and analyzed using the thematic analysis method.
  - Open coding and axial coding were used to identify themes.

Results
- Themes that emerged from participants' experiences:
  - Sense of isolation from others
  - Mental Health Issues
  - Anxiety, depression, and social anxiety

Background
- Background information on the participants and their experiences.