

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

Background

- Attracted to children after being diagnosed in the context of child service abuse
- Emerging theoretical and research about attraction to children but do not focus on these attractions
- Issue: Lack of research on non-kidnapping attractions
- Purpose of the Help Wanted Project: shed light on tendencies, actions, desires, mental health care, risk factors of adults who express their needs
- The sample: 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 clustered 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 thoughts and behaviors

Discussion

- Results suggest attraction with attraction to children may be an issue for mental health professionals
- Implications for mental health professionals
- Future directions: study more issues in greater depth and investigate the link of depth in understanding



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- Future directions: study more issues in greater depth and investigate the link of depth in understanding



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

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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



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- Awareness often occurred gradually
- Confusion, fear, hopelessness, depression, feelings of isolation

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 attractions 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 teacher, 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 excluded 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 I would never win. 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.

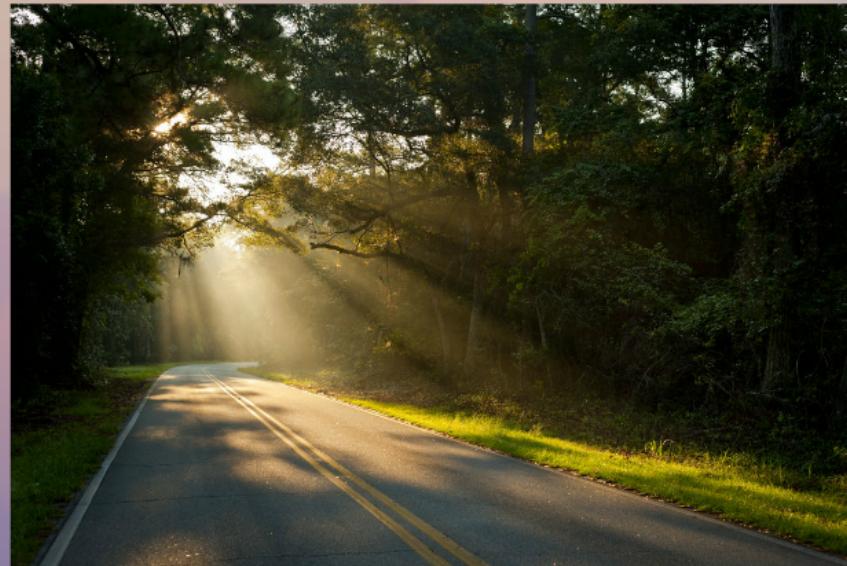
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Discussion

- 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



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