

# Understanding the Reasons of Pedophilia

Sefa Bulut, Mert Can Çankaya

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling Psychology, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey*

## ABSTRACT

In today's world, everything is more complex than it used to be. In modern society, we have more complex problems than previous societies. Pedophilia is one of the most recent concepts of psychology even though its history goes back as old as human history. Pedophilia is a universal phenomenon that is observed in all cultures and social classes. Definitely, it has a detrimental effect on children mental health and well-being. It requires further attention. Therefore, the purpose of this review is to provide an in-depth understanding of this problem; such as definitions, prevalence and possible causes, and risk factors of phenomenon.

**Key words:** Child sexual abuse, pedophilia, reasons for pedophilia

**E**specially in last decades, sexual harassment to children became of the most critical problems in many societies. For many people, it is disgusting, unacceptable, and hard to understand that how an adult look at a small child and want to have sexual relationship. All societies see this situation as an unacceptable behavior and place it among one of the biggest crimes. Even though harsh punishments, still many people continue to do this behavior. Understanding the reasons of pedophilic behaviors and wishes is quite important to prevent this issue and protect children. Many psychologists started to make researches to understand the reasons of this behavior. There are a lot of researches done until today related to this topic. These researches find many factors which are related to pedophilia. We can classify these factors into several domains which are biological factors, neuropsychiatric factors, and neuroanatomical factors, environmental, and social factors. However, still none of them enough to understand the main reason of this situation or find a solution to prevent this issue completely. Hence, making researches about this topic are still quite needed and important to solve this issue that every society is facing every day.

## DEFINITION OF PEDOPHILIA

Pedophilia has been defined as a repetitive occurrence of intense, sexually stimulating fantasies, sexual impulses,

or behaviors related to engaging in sexual activity (for at least 6 months) with a child or children who have not entered puberty. Pedophilia is a clinical diagnosis, not a criminal or forensic concept. According to DSM-IV,<sup>[1]</sup> to be diagnosed with pedophilia, the person must be at least 16 years old, who are sexually active and be at least 5 years older than children. If a diagnosis of pedophilia is considered after a particular event, it is necessary to evaluate whether the event is during a psychiatric illness or substance abuse that will affect the person's judicial functions. It is known that fantasies of pedophilia cases are not foreign to the self (ego-dystonic) and disturbing. For this reason, it is very rare for them to apply for treatment to psychiatry clinics, and they usually appear in clinics as a result of forensic events due to sexual harassment. The majority of pedophilia cases were found to be male.<sup>[2]</sup> The rate of women who reported sexual abuse to children was 1–6%.<sup>[3]</sup> Found that only 1% of women were found to be women after examining 4007 sexually abused children, but stated that this rate does not reflect the real rate due to the low rate of women's reporting in general. According to Tardif and Van Gijsegem,<sup>[4]</sup> it has been stated for many years that pedophiles have psychopathic, psychosexual, and socially immature personality traits that have limited contact, introvert, and cannot establish a warm relationship with their spouse or family.

### Address for correspondence:

Dr. Sefa Bulut, Department of Counseling Psychology, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey.

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## THE PREVALENCE OF PEDOPHILIA

It is not possible to determine the prevalence of pedophilia cases because they usually perform their actions secretly and do not apply to treatment. Most of the data obtained consists of identifying the cases that have been transferred to the courthouse and do not show the actual prevalence. It is not possible to determine the proportions of those who have pedophilic fantasies and who do not. Many studies in this field reveal that the crimes committed by pedophiles are against many children in series, and most of them are not reflected in judicial authorities. It is important to differentiate between sexual abuses among children of the same age group because this situation is not accepted as a pedophilia. It is known that approximately half of the child sexual abusers started such actions during adolescence. Although this does not show that all cases showing sexual behavioral disorders, during adolescence will be pedophile in their adult years. These data points out those sexual acts to children during adolescence should not be considered as sexual behavior disorder that occurred only during adolescence. If an action is detected at this age, serious problems that may arise during adult years can be avoided by necessary measures are taken or treatment methods are used for adolescents. According to the study of Christopher *et al.*,<sup>[5]</sup> it is stated that 40% of sexual abuse to children <12 years of age is done by adolescents in the USA. In their study, they showed that 40% of people diagnosed with pedophilia had a history of sexual abuse of children during adolescence.<sup>[6]</sup> They reported that approximately 88% of the people who abuse the child will be diagnosed with pedophilia either now or in the future.

## THE REASONS OF PEDOPHILIA

In the process of developing primary prevention measures, determining the factors leading to the development of pedophilic tendency have great importance. There are many studies and theories in the literature that examine people who abuse children. Recently, theories have been developed stating that many factors including biological, psychological, and interpersonal relationships can lead to the emergence of a pedophilic tendency. These theories; Do individuals choose to be pedophilic? Or are they born like this? If they are born with this tendency, can any treatment turn these individuals into normal adult sexual orientation? Try to the search for answers to such questions. Some theories have emphasized that it is necessary to consider the interaction of developmental, familial, and environmental factors in the emergence of pedophilic tendency. Although there are many theories and researches on this subject, there is not yet sufficient experimental data on which risk factors are more important or how these factors interact. Studies and theories on this subject can be summarized under the following headings.

## BIOLOGICAL REASONS

According to experimental data; some candidate genes play a role in both the emergence of normal sexual behavior and sexual behavior disorders.<sup>[7]</sup> They determined that there is a correlation between the dopamine D2 and D1 receptor alleles of men and the age they first had sexual intercourse. They reported that this finding indicates that male sexual behavior of dopaminergic receptors plays a major role in both the preparation and satisfaction phase. Same research show that the role of genetic factors in the development of sexual behavior based on the cases with Tourette syndrome and the studies conducted on their relatives. Although paraphilic behaviors are not very common with Tourette syndrome in this study, a positive correlation was found between the burden of Gts genes and paraphilic behavior. The severity of sexual desire plays a decisive role in the development of sexual orientation and pedophilic and other paraphilic conditions. According to this view, pedophilia is similar to the phenotypic symptoms of “reward deficiency syndrome” genetically determined. The urge of sexual urges and behaviors to the child fits into one type of “abusing an unnatural reward.”

## NEUROPSYCHIATRIC DIFFERENCES

Many studies have been conducted comparing pedophilic individuals with other sexual assailants and healthy community samples in terms of neuropsychiatric differences. Although there are many study findings investigating the relationship between brain functions and pedophilia, such as removal of behavioral suppression, frontal abnormalities, cognitive executive functions in recent years, there is still no consistent data showing a definite cause-effect relationship. Research of Schiffer *et al.*<sup>[8]</sup> shows that neurophysiology, personality traits, sexual history, plethysmography, and neuroimaging studies have revealed the relationship between pedophilia and early brain development, but the neurobiological basis of pedophilia is still unknown. When all these findings are evaluated together, it is thought that pedophilia may be a neurodevelopment disorder.

## NEUROANATOMICAL THEORIES ABOUT PEDOPHILIA

There are two neuroanatomic theories stand out in pedophilia etiology: Frontal Dysexecutive Theory and Temporal-Limbic Theory. Frontal Dysexecutive Theory was created by considering the fact that sexual behavior disorders occur after the suppression (disinhibition) due to frontal cortex dysfunction. According to Cantor *et al.*,<sup>[9]</sup> the detection of purposeful executive functions in patients with pedophilia

and other sexual assaults as a result of neurophysiological tests such as Controlled Word Link, Delay of Pleasure, Porteus Maze, Stroop and Wisconsin Card Mapping supports this theory. Temporal-Limbic theory was created based on the data that sexual behavior and behavioral disinhibition are regulated by temporal lobe structures. Hypersexual and hyposexual behaviors are known to occur in temporal lobe-related disorders such as temporal lobe epilepsy, Kluver-Bucy syndrome. It has been shown that the temporal lobe is related to erotic discrimination and arousal threshold. Temporal lobe abnormalities were found in most of the brain imaging studies in which pedophilia cases and controls were compared. In the study of Blanchard *et al.*,<sup>[10]</sup> they examined the average intelligence levels of 679 pedophilic individuals. Found that the average intelligence levels of bisexual and homosexual pedophiles were significantly lower than heterosexual pedophilic individuals. This shows that there is a link between pedophilia and intelligence.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Many studies and theories report that environmental and social factors may be effective in the development of pedophilia. Supporting these theories, pedophilic individuals often state that environmental stress plays a role in increasing their pre-sexual drive and desire. In addition, it has been shown in many studies that most of the individuals who abused children are sexually abused in their childhood. According to research of Cohen *et al.*<sup>[11]</sup> showed that the most important environmental reason found to increase the probability of an individual to sexually attack the child in the future is the sexual abuse of the person himself. This relationship is called the “victimization-aggression cycle.” The frequency and prevalence of this situation vary from 28% to 93% from study to study, from where and how the sample was taken. It is stated that this situation is more pronounced in women and women who have sexually assaulted children have sexual abuse between 47% and 100%. Pedophiles with homosexual orientation are sexually abused in childhood more often than pedophilic ones with heterosexual orientation. In the studies of Richard and Ryan,<sup>[12]</sup> it has been determined that pedophilia, which are the age preference of children to be sexually abused, choose children at the age they are sexually abused. In the emergence of pedophilic features, the absence of someone to identify with during childhood, having a pathological family structure in terms of social components, and being deprived of support systems are held responsible.<sup>[4]</sup> Pointed out the effects of developmental and familial factors in childhood and adolescence in the emergence of pedophilic structure and stated that there may be problems with ego integrity due to the problems experienced in these individuals during development. The formation of an ego for healthy, balanced, and psychosocial adaptation is achieved through

identifications and maturation in the developmental period. It is suggested that individuals who have problems at the stage of ego structuring may turn into individuals who are prone to relational problems and have social harmony. In the study of Tardif and Van Gijsegem,<sup>[4]</sup> pedophilic individuals examined body perception and ego integrity. According to the controls, they found that problems with body perception and ego integrity were higher in pedophilic individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Researchers found that there is a link between some biological, neuropsychiatric, neuroanatomical, environmental, social factors, and pedophilia. Between these factors, environmental and social factors are more important than the other ones because there is strong and clear correlation between some environmental and social factors and pedophilia. For example, the important percentages (28% to 93%) of pedophiles have faced with sexual abuse when they were child. None of the other factors have such a huge correlation with pedophilia. Furthermore, according to studies, biological, neuropsychiatric, and neuroanatomical factors have effects on pedophilia, but their correlations are weaker than environmental factors. However, none of these factors are enough to understand or solve this issue completely. That is why still there is a huge need for new researches in this area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the researches are still not enough to understand the reasons of pedophilia. That’s why; there is a huge need for more researches in this area. The governments should support these researches and apply new regulations to prevent pedophilia in the future. In some countries, the governments are announcing the persons who have done sexual abuse or pedophilic behavior to other citizens. This is also a good way to prevent children from pedophiles. One of the best ways to prevent this situation is the parental control. Parents should not give their children to somebody they did not know exactly. Parents should teach their children about private areas of the body that others should not see or touch and also what should children do when somebody starts to touch their private areas.

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