1.3. Media effects on perpetrators and other groups

Media presentation and stereotypes of child sexual abuse perpetrators

Stjepka Popović

The main objective of this study was to determine how the newspapers present child sexual abuse (CSA) perpetrators. A longitudinal content analysis (2007–2016) of a random cluster sample of 1.159 CSA news printed in Croatian daily newspapers was conducted. Perpetrators are presented as single/individual, male, elderly perpetrator, usually a church figure or person in charge of childcare. They are a known person to the child or a complete stranger. Use of derogatory terms to describe the perpetrator is greater in episodic news dealing with criminal offenses that highlight background information on the perpetrator and victim. Also, perpetrators are often wrongly described as pedophiles, while a portion of the news still incorrectly describes perpetrators as mentally ill persons. Finally, the news prematurely reveals the identity of the perpetrators, and predictors of identity disclosure are emphasized. News reports still support common stereotypes regarding the perpetrators, making them difficult to detect and recognize.

Keywords: child sexual abuse perpetrators, media presentation, stereotypes, content analysis

Since the media are the main source of information on child sexual abuse (CSA) to the general public (Babatsikos, 2010; Goldman & Grimbeek, 2015), public knowledge and attitudes towards CSA perpetrators are shaped through media depictions. Moreover, the media has the power to stigmatize perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Pryor and Reeder (2011) formulated a conceptual model that seeks to clarify the existing yet diverse literature on the stigma (Bos et al., 2013). Their model displays four dynamically linked manifestations of stigma (public stigma, personal stigma, relationship stigma, structural stigma), with public stigma at the heart of the model, representing human social and psychological responses (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) to someone they perceive is being stigmatized (Bos et al., 2013). Public stigma affects personal stigma in three ways: by treating a person negatively, feeling and experiencing stigmatization, and internalizing or diminishing their own worth and associated psychological stress (Herek, 2007 as cited in Bos et al., 2013). In this context, the media has the power to label and stereotype the perpetrators. For this reason, it is important to investigate what labels the media attributes to CSA perpetrators and what stereotypes they support, so that implicit conclusions can be drawn about the stigmatizing potential of CSA news.

When considering the issue of child sexual abuse and the stigma and labeling theory, the first association includes the perpetrators of child sexual abuse, who experience severe stigmatization and labeling because, in addition to being personally responsible for committing sexual abuse, it is a serious and dangerous crime at the cost of one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The taboo nature of sexual intercourse with children makes it seem so deviant that negative emotional reactions from the public are completely justified and inevitable. Reading, listening, and viewing of stories of child sexual abuse is a consequence of the adults' need to not only protect the victim but also to express disgust and anger at the perpetrator. However, the stigmatization of perpetrators is problematic for detecting and reporting child sexual abuse. The stigmatization of perpetrators as "monsters" gives the impression that the perpetrators are easy to recognize, that we personally probably do not know them, and it discourages children from reporting for fear that they will not be trusted. In reality most sexual abusers give the impression of a kind, considerate, and caring person, which is the reason why they are able to mislead parents and children, make friends with them, and thus reduce the likelihood of the child disclosing the abuse (Buljan-Flander, 2003: 90). The perpetrators generally come from different social, ethnic, professional, and age groups, making them literally impossible to identify (Sanderson, 2005: 18). The stigmatization of perpetrators as mentally disturbed individuals gives the impression that the perpetrators are easily identified, and it diminishes the responsibility of the abuser for the committed abuse. This is a completely wrong stereotype because most abusers do not suffer from mental illness (Sanderson, 2005). In addition, calling the perpetrator mentally disturbed stigmatizes people with mental illness. Psychotherapists who have a stigmatizing attitude towards people who have been diagnosed with pedophile disorder may be less willing to provide counseling and psychotherapy, which underlies sexual abuse and recidivism prevention (Jahnke et al., 2015). In addition, perpetrators are aware of stigmatization, which is why they manipulate children into silence, but also develop anonymous methods of exploiting children to alleviate the feeling of stigmatization (sex tourism, "online grooming") (Modly, 2006). Moreover, labelling a perpetrator as a pedophile is wrong since not every person with pedophilia commits child sexual abuse offenses and not every child sexual abuse offense is committed by a person with pedophilia (Seto, 2008). In understanding pedophilia it is newsworthy to mention that many people with pedophilia take responsibility for their sexual preference and do not act on their sexual impulses (Stelzmann et al., 2020: 14).

Stigmatization of the perpetrator can also endanger members of the perpetrator's family. Research shows that the perpetrators' family members experience "relationship stigma" and "structural stigma", that is, embarrassment, scrutiny, and restrictions given that they are treated as extensions by the system and society. Approximately 85 % of family members of perpetrators in the United States have experienced stress from the perpetrator registry, over two-thirds have felt isolated and ashamed, and more than half have feared for their own safety, with 7 % being victims of physical violence and three-quarters being subject to the same housing restrictions as the offender (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). Perpetrators' children also feel the consequences. Most of them report that they are treated differently by the environment, 78 % say that the stigmatization has a negative impact on their friendships, while 13 % report suicidal tendencies (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). Comments on the news of child sexual abuse have urged the media to disclose the identity of the perpetrator to the public (Popović, 2017). The public believes that public disclosure of the identity of the perpetrator is the safest measure to protect the children because of the belief that the perpetrators will relapse (Levenson et al. 2007 as cited in: Schultz, 2014). The perception that most perpetrators relapse is based on media reports and is triggered by moral panic (Schultz, 2014). In reality, perpetrators have relatively low recidivism rates compared to perpetrators of other crimes – the recidivism rate is at 15 % (Robbers, 2008 as cited in Schultz, 2014). In addition, focusing only on those already known as perpetrators neglects the reality of most perpetrators who have never been discovered and reported to the authorities, and it misleads the community into a false sense of security. It is the media stigmatization that contributes to the moral panic that then results in emotion-based policies without really evaluating their effectiveness (Schultz, 2014).

The moral panic theory is one of the key theories in the criminological literature that explains the impact of media presentation of crime on its readership. A well-known example of moral panic when it comes to child sexual abuse is the "stranger danger" during the 1980s. However, caution is advised when applying moral panic to the problem of child sexual abuse as it may cause panic around the panic and create the impression that child abuse is an overrated social concern (Atmore, 1997 as cited in Wilczynski & Sinclair, 1999). This usually challenges the arguments of those who want to emphasize the seriousness of child abuse and to work on prevention. It is more appropriate to think about moral panic in the context of creating panic from specific categories of perpetrators (e.g., strangers, mentally ill, male perpetrators), who can completely divert public attention from the fact that children are most frequently abused by

well-known persons to them who are not mentally ill and which include women. In doing so, it is closely linked to the stereotyping of particular categories of offenders. The main objective of this research is to determine how CSA perpetrators are presented in CSA news, which stereotypes are supported, if there is a correlation between the use of endangering practices for perpetrators and stereotyping practices, and what are the predictors of endangering practices while reporting on CSA perpetrators.

Main concepts

There are several main concepts used in this research: general presentation of the perpetrator (gender, number, age, profession, relationship between perpetrator and child, background information on the perpetrator), stereotyping practices (use of derogatory terms, pedophile perpetrators, perpetrator as a mentally ill person, perpetrators as homosexuals, perpetrators use/engage in child exploitation material/exhibitionism), endangering practices for the perpetrators (premature disclosure of the perpetrators' identity), and predictors of endangering practices for the perpetrators (characteristics of a CSA event, characteristics of CSA victims, characteristics of CSA perpetrators).

Methods

This study is a part of a broader research project "Testing the model of media coverage and presentation of child sexual abuse content", so the detailed methodology is described in the article "Presentation of victims in the press coverage of child sexual abuse in Croatia" (Popović, 2021).

Sample

In order to investigate press coverage of CSA perpetrators, a content analysis method was conducted. As already described elsewhere (Popović, 2021), six printed nationally available daily newspapers in Croatia were analyzed, while the units of analysis were thematic (newspaper articles/news on CSA). The population consisted of all newspaper articles on CSA in national daily newspapers in the period 2007–2016. The Presscut Agency Archive was searched using keywords in order to track all newspaper

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articles on CSA. The search identified 3,289 units of analysis on CSA in a ten-year period (from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2016). Since the search yielded a large number of articles, cluster sample was selected. Cluster sample in this study represents a systematic random sample of five years out of ten years of news about CSA (Popović, 2021).

Relevance coding and intercoder reliability

Relevance coding of the articles was needed in order to determine all news on child sexual abuse published during five randomly selected years. Relevance coding assumed exclusion of the articles that did not meet the technical criteria of the news and coding of the remaining news according to relevance (adapted from Cheit et al., 2010). Three trained coders were included in the relevance analysis, and upon the completion of coding intercoder reliability was calculated. The APPA value was 0.96, while Krippendorff's α was 0.86, which made the coding results highly reliable. Following the relevance analysis, articles labeled "relevant" constituted a cluster sample of CSA news ($N = 1,159$) (Popović, 2021).

News content coding and intercoder reliability

News content coding was required in order to develop a reliable analytical matrix. A total of three trained coders analyzed the content. In the final calculation, the APPA value was 0.97 and the average value of Krippendorff's α was 0.90, so that the analytical matrix was justifiably considered to be extremely reliable. After calculating the final reliability, the author of the research independently analyzed the cluster sample of all CSA news ($N = 1,159$) (Popović, 2021).

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the research was acquired from the Ethical Committee of the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law, Social Work Study Center (Popović, 2021).

Results

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse in the news: general picture and stereotypes

The gender of the perpetrator is not specified in only 3.1 % of the news, with only 0.5 % of the perpetrators in the sample being female, while 4.4 % of the news includes perpetrators of both genders, and 91.8 % of the perpetrators in the sample are male. Similarly, at the event level[1], gender is not specified in 2.4 % of cases, 1.5 % of the perpetrators are women, 4.7 % are of both genders, and 91.4 % are male. Out of a total of 1,050 news reports that could determine the number of perpetrators, 61 % of CSA are committed by one person and 39 % by two or more perpetrators. In the sample of individual cases reported and specified by the number of perpetrators ($n = 335$), 76.9 % of CSA are committed by one perpetrator and 22.6 % by two or more perpetrators. The age of the offender is not specified in half of the sample news (51.9 %). The most frequent are elderly perpetrators (age over 50) (61.3 %), followed by the perpetrators aged 30–49 (34.2 %), and the least represented perpetrators are aged 18–29 (4.5 %), which is consistent with the stereotype that the perpetrators of CSA are elderly people.
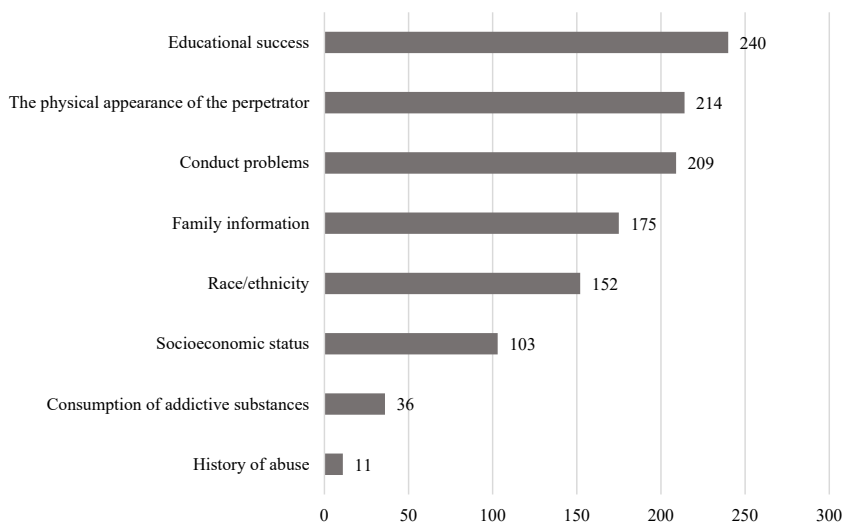
The profession of the perpetrators is specified in just under half of the news reports (43.2 % of sample-level news and 48.07 % of cases). Among the professions of the perpetrators in the media, the most prevalent are members of the clergy (55.1 %), child care workers (14.37 %), law and order representatives (9.78 %), perpetrators representing the entertainment industry (10.18 %), and perpetrators performing other reputable professions (7.58 %). In the overall sample, the emphasis on members of the clergy is more prevalent than in individual cases, while the emphasis on professions in charge of child care, government representatives, and law enforcement is more prevalent in the sample of individual cases. Because the professions in the analytical matrix have been recoded for the purposes of analysis by professions identified by keeping a case record, data on the specific proportion of low-skilled professions and persons with household access in the total sample of research are lacking. However, the practice of

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1 There is a difference between general sample and the event level sample. General sample includes all news articles on child sexual abuse ($N = 1,159$). However, the general sample of this research included 337 unique events/cases of CSA (since different newspapers report on the same events/cases) which are recorded during the collection of data in a separate record list, creating a separate database with the basic characteristics of individual cases.

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highlighting specific professions in the media has been observed. Thus, the news of the largest police investigation against child exploitation material in Croatia, where there were more than 100 suspects, mostly dealt with one offender who was an educator by profession. In an Australian police investigation involving 70 perpetrators, it has been pointed out that, among them, there is a police officer and several teachers; in an Italian police investigation, a priest was emphasized among 100 cases; in an U.S. investigation, a police chief, a scout leader, and a medical technician stood out among the 71 perpetrators, etc. Distinguished professions or professions that make regular contact with children are emphasized, e.g., doctors, educators, social workers, diplomats, lawyers, TV presenters. Generalizations are sometimes credited to editors in highlighting, for example, "teachers and educators filming children", whereas the text would indicate that only four of the 100 men suspected of exploiting child exploitation material were teachers. When it comes to people who have free access to the household, the headline regularly features the profession (e.g., mailman, chimney sweeper) that contributed to the creation of moral panic.

Figure 1
Distribution of the use of different types of background information about the perpetrator in the sample (N = 1,159)

In most news, it was possible to determine the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Persons known to a child, with authority over

the child (46.1 %), are slightly more represented than unknown persons (41 %), with the members of the immediate and broader family being the least represented perpetrators of CSA in the media (12.9 %). Among all known perpetrators, about 1/4 (24.7 %) are members of the child's family at the case level or about 1/5 (21.9 %) at the sample level.

Out of a total of 913 news that could encode the use of background information about the perpetrators, as many as 60.7 % use at least one piece of background information about the perpetrator. The frequency distribution of the most used background information is shown in figure 1.

In the overall sample of news regarding perpetrators, information on the perpetrators' educational success, physical appearance, conduct problems, family, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were the most frequently used. Family information was statistically significantly more frequently used when the (co)offender was female, while information on the educational level was significantly more frequent when the offender was exclusively male (table 1). No statistically significant differences were found for the offender's gender for the remaining background information.

Table 1
Relationship between the perpetrator's gender and background information on the perpetrator

		Perpetrator's gender			Test		
Background information		Male	Female (co-offender)	Total			
		N (%)	N (%)	N	$\chi 2$	df	P
Family information	Yes	152 (87.9)	21 (12.1)	173	22.305	1	0.000
	No	816 (96.5)	30 (3.5)	846			
Educational success	Yes	234 (98.3)	4 (1.7)	238	Fisher's exact test	1	0.003
	No	734 (94.0)	47 (6.0)	781			

When the perpetrator was a known person to the child, family information, information on the person's educational attainment, behavioral problems, and consumption of substance was significantly more used than when the perpetrator was a stranger (table 2). No statistically significant correlation was found for the remaining background information.

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Table 2

Relationship between the perpetrator-child relationship and background information about the perpetrator

Background information		Perpetrator-child relationship			Test		
		Stranger	Known to a child	Total			
		N (%)	N (%)	N	$\chi2$	df	*P*
Family information	Yes	54 (32.5)	112 (67.5)	166	5.959	1	0.015
	No	343 (42.8)	459 (57.2)	802			
Educational success	Yes	67 (31.5)	146 (68.5)	213	10.310	1	0.001
	No	330 (43.7)	425 (56.3)	755			
Conduct problems	Yes	60 (33)	122 (67)	182	5.997	1	0.014
	No	337 (42.9)	449 (57.1)	786			
Consumption of addictive substances	Yes	6 (19.4)	122 (80.6)	31	6.209	1	0.013
	No	391 (41.7)	546 (58.3)	937			

The correlation between the use of derogatory terms to describe the perpetrator in the media and the general practices of creating news and presenting background information about the perpetrator and victim was tested (table 3).

Table 3

Relation of using derogatory terms to describe perpetrators, general news-making practices, and background information about the perpetrator and victim

General practices of creating news and background information on perpetrators and victims		Derogatory terms to describe perpetrators			Test		
		Yes	No	Total			
		N (%)	N (%)	N	$\chi 2$	df	*P*
Media frame	Episodic	218 (27.4)	579 (72.6)	797	8.163	1	0.004
	Thematic	20 (15.5)	109 (84.5)	129			
Main topic	The offense	190 (30.4)	436 (69.6)	626	31.691	1	0.000
	CSA in church	17 (9.5)	162 (90.5)	179			
Family info perpetrator	Yes	93 (54.4)	78 (45.6)	171	83.194	1	0.000
	No	177 (20.7)	677 (79.3)	854			
Race/ethnicity perpetrator	Yes	58 (38.7)	92 (61.3)	150	13.757	1	0.000
	No	212 (24.2)	663 (75.8)	875			
Socioeconomic status perpetrator	Yes	38 (37.6)	63 (62.4)	101	7.350	1	0.007
	No	232 (25.1)	692 (74.9)	924			
History of abuse perpetrator	Yes	8 (88.9)	1 (11.1)	9	Fisher's exact test	1	0.000
	No	262 (25.8)	754 (74.2)	1016			
Conduct problems perpetrator	Yes	86 (42.0)	119 (58.0)	205	32.181	1	0.000
	No	184 (22.4)	636 (77.6)	820			
Consumption of addictive substances perpetrator	Yes	20 (58.8)	14 (41.2)	34	19.123	1	0.000
	No	250 (25.2)	741 (74.8)	991			
Physical appearance perpetrator	Yes	76 (35.5)	138 (64.5)	214	11.728	1	0.001
	No	194 (23.9)	617 (76.1)	811			
Family info victim	Yes	97 (52.7)	87 (47.3)	184	80.408	1	0.000
	No	173 (20.6)	668 (79.4)	841			
Socioeconomic status victim	Yes	18 (40.0)	27 (60.0)	45	4.525	1	0.033
	No	252 (25.7)	728 (74.3)	980			
Conduct problems victim	Yes	43 (40.6)	63 (59.4)	106	12.329	1	0.000
	No	227 (24.7)	692 (75.3)	919			
Mental health victim	Yes	102 (56.7)	78 (43.3)	180	103.487	1	0.000
	No	168 (19.9)	677 (80.1)	845			

Although most news items did not use derogatory terms to describe the perpetrators (73.7 %), the odds that derogatory terms would be used in episodic frame news was 2.052 times higher than in thematic news (95 %

CI, 1.243 – 3.388) and 4.153 times higher when the news dealt with the offenses and persecutions of the perpetrators in general than with the CSA in the church (95 % CI, 2.449 – 7.041). Also, the odds of using derogatory terms were 4.560 times higher when using family information about the perpetrator (95 % CI, 3.235 – 6.429), 4.234 times higher with the use of substance abuse information (95 % CI, 1.243 – 3.388), 1.972 times higher for race and ethnicity information (95 % CI, 1.371 – 2.835), 1.799 times higher for the offender's socioeconomic status information (95 % CI, 1.171 – 2.763), 2.498 times higher for the offender's behavior problems (95 % CI, 1.810 – 3.448), and 1.752 times higher when describing the physical appearance of the perpetrator (95 % CI, 1.268 – 2.420). Regarding the background information on the victim, the odds of using derogatory terms to describe the perpetrator were 5.270 times higher when using the victim's mental health information (95 % CI, 3.752 – 7.402), 4.305 higher when using family information (95 % CI, 3.082 – 6.014), 2.081 times higher when describing the victim's behavior problems (95 % CI, 1.373 – 3.153), and 1.926 times higher when describing the victim's socioeconomic status (95 % CI, 1.043 – 3.556).

At the quantitative level, the stereotype that the perpetrators are homosexuals is not supported in the media. Out of 484 news reports in which the perpetrator is male, 36.0 % are male victims and 64 % are female victims. The stereotype of homosexual perpetrators was only supported in the news about the CSA in the Catholic Church. For example, in the news with the title "I know that pedophilia is caused by homosexuality" (Jutarnji List, 2010: 18) the Vatican cardinal gives false information about the connection between pedophilia and homosexuality. In the sample, only four news articles deal with the CSA committed exclusively by women, with all victims being male. However, at a qualitative level it is possible to notice a different way of reporting when compared to cases where the perpetrator is a man and the victim a girl. For example, in the news "My husband is 16, but he seems like a 30-year-old", the perpetrator is called a sex trainer, the responsibility for the abuse is shifted to a 13-year-old boy ("he seduced me"), and the relationship is called love (Jutarnji List, 2012: 11). No news deals with the CSA in which both the perpetrator and the victim are female. By contrast, in the news where women are co-perpetrators, females account for as many as 80.7 % of the victims.

In the list of case records, out of a total of 72 individual cases of child exploitation material not one perpetrator committed CSA with contact, while at the level of a sample of 291 child exploitation material news reports, in which it was possible to determine that contact had been made, only three cases included contact between the perpetrator and the victim.

Thus it can be argued that the news supports the stereotype that people who use child exploitation material or exploit children for child exploitation material will not sexually abuse children. Exhibitionism was recorded only at the level of the case record list, so that out of a total of seven exhibitionism cases only one perpetrator engaged in child sexual abuse.

The stereotype of pedophile perpetrators has been confirmed since, out of a total of 813 news where the term "pedophile" is used at least once, 72.3 % use this term to describe the perpetrator of sexual abuse, while as many as 87.3 % used the term incorrectly (from which in 11.2 % it is certainly not a pedophile disorder and the rest cannot be said to be a pedophile disorder).

Although most news reports do not describe perpetrators as a mentally ill person (86.3 %), in 145 news outlets that describe the perpetrator in this way, only 19.3 % (n = 28) can confirm that a person suffers from a mental illness, 78.6 % could not confirm that it was a mental illness, while in 2.1 % it was certainly not a mental illness. In doing so, in the news that with certainty reports that it is not an illness, a qualitative analysis shows that the most commonly used terms are "disturbed", "sick", "maniac", and "out of their mind".

The correlation between the use of endangering practices for perpetrators and stereotyping practices

The only endangering practice for the perpetrator is the premature disclosure of the perpetrator's identity. The identity of the alleged perpetrator was prematurely disclosed in as many as 40.8 % of the news (n = 894), with the same proportion being revealed directly (49.3 %) and indirectly (50.7 %). An association was found between the premature disclosure of the identity of the perpetrator and the use of derogatory terms to describe the perpetrator, the description of the perpetrator as a mentally ill person, and the description of the victim as permanently damaged (table 4).

Table 4

Relationship between premature disclosure of perpetrators' identities and stereo-typing practices

Stereotyping practices		Premature identity disclosure					
		Yes	No	Total	Test		
		N (%)	N (%)	N	$\chi 2$	df	P
Derogatory terms to describe a per-petrator	Yes	75 (30.2)	173 (69.8)	248	15.784	1	0.000
	No	289 (44.9)	355 (55.1)	644			
Description of perpetrator as mentally ill	Cor-rect	3 (12)	22 (88)	25	4.760	1	0.000
	Not correct	34 (34.3)	65 (65.7)	99			
Victim perman-ently damaged	Yes	33 (26.8)	90 (73.2)	123	11.906	1	0.001
	No	328 (43.3)	429 (56.7)	757			

The odds were lower that the news which prematurely disclosed the perpe-trator's identity would use derogatory terms to describe the perpetrators (OR 0.533, 95 % CI: 0.390 – 0.728), would use correctly the perpetrator's description as a mentally ill person (OR 0.261, 95 % CI: 0,073–0,934), and would describe the victims as permanently damaged (OR 0,480, 95 % CI: 0.319 – 0.733). No significant association was found for other stereotyping practices.

Predictors of the identity protection of the alleged perpetrator

Binary logistic regressions were conducted to determine the predictors of the identity protection of the alleged perpetrator. Variables at the CSA event level (type of CSA, form, duration, use of physical force/threat, additional crimes), victim level (gender, age, number, and background information about the victim), perpetrator level (gender, age, number, relationship with the child, and background information about the per-petrator) were used as predictors. Table 5 provides the results of binary logistic regressions.

Table 5

Predictors of the identity protection of the alleged perpetrator

	Predictors	OR	95 % CI		P	Nagelker-ke R^2	Hosmer & Leme-show test
			Lower	Upper			
Characteristics of CSA events	Type	0.826	0.445	1.535	0.545	0.140	0.881
	Form	1.351	0.923	1.977	0.122		
	Duration	1.325	0.818	2.144	0.253		
	Physical force	3.058	1.740	5.375	**0.000**		
	Additional crimes	2.284	1.112	4.690	**0.024**		
Characteristics of CSA victims	Gender	0.485	0.298	0.789	**0.004**	0.102	0.425
	Age	1.157	0.648	2.064	0.622		
	Number	1.025	0.624	1.683	0.922		
	Family info	0.954	0.549	1.658	0.868		
	Ethnicity	1.116	0.485	2.564	0.797		
	School success	0.367	0.144	0.940	**0.037**		
	Socioeconomic status	0.452	0.183	1.118	0.086		
	Sexual behavior	1.115	0.569	2.183	0.751		
	Conduct problems	1.022	0.530	1.974	0.947		
	Mental health	1.795	1.075	2.998	**0.025**		
	Physical appearance	1.917	0.940	3.911	0.074		
Characteristics of CSA perpetrators	Gender	0.523	0.167	1.635	0.265	0.111	0.881
	Age young				0.731		
	Age mature	1.403	0.508	3.872	0.513		
	Age old	1.131	0.722	1.772	0.591		
	Number	1.265	0.686	2.335	0.452		
	Relationship with a child	0.541	0.341	0.857	**0.009**		
	Family info	0.882	0.504	1.545	0.661		
	Ethnicity	1.623	0.904	2.912	0.105		
	Educational success	0.554	0.322	0.955	**0.033**		
	Socioeconomic status	0.400	0.187	0.856	**0.018**		
	Conduct problems	1.115	0.675	1.840	0.671		
	Consumption of addictive substances	3.009	0.973	9.311	0.056		
	Physical appearance	1.114	0.649	1.911	0.695		

Eight predictors significantly contribute to predicting whether the news will protect the identity of the suspect in the CSA: use of physical force, presence of additional crimes, victim's gender, victim's academic achievement, victim's mental health, offender's relationship with the child, offender's educational attainment, and the socioeconomic status of the offender. When it comes to the predictors of CSA characteristics, two significant predictors were found: news that used physical force is 3.058

more likely to protect the identity of the perpetrator, while news that has additional crimes is 2.284 times more likely not to reveal the identity of the alleged perpetrators. When it comes to the victim-level predictors, news about female victims is 2.06 times more likely to protect the identity of the suspect than news about male victims (OR 1/0.485 = 2.061), news that does not provide information about the school achievement of the victims is 2.72 times more likely to protect their identities (OR 1/0.367 = 2.724), and news items that provide victim's mental health information are 1.795 times more likely to protect the identity of the alleged perpetrator. At the perpetrator level, three predictors stand out. News in which the perpetrator is a known person to the child is 1.85 times more likely to protect the suspect's identity than news in which the perpetrator is a stranger (OR 1/1.848); news that does not present information about the perpetrator's educational success is 1.81 times more likely to protect the suspect's identity than news that provides information on their educational achievement (OR 1/0.554 = 1.805), while news that does not present information on the socioeconomic status is 2.5 times more likely not to disclose the identity of the alleged perpetrator than the news that provides socioeconomic information (OR 1/0.400 = 2.5).

Discussion

Croatian daily newspapers support most of the dominant stereotypes about perpetrators, which impairs the capacity of identifying perpetrators in the environment and gives the impression that we cannot know them personally. Research into the association between the news content and online commentary on CSA news has found that perpetrators are the most represented among the readers' comments (Popović, 2017). In the Croatian daily newspapers, the perpetrators are mostly men, while women are portrayed as persons who cannot sexually abuse children, and if they do, they are described in the context of a love affair with a younger male person or create the impression that they were persuaded into the act by the male perpetrators. Sexual abuse of female children by women is virtually non-existent in the media, while in cases where female are co-offenders most victims are female children. Research has long suggested that not only women are perpetrators of child sexual abuse, both female and male (Graystone & De Luca, 1999), but also that child victims often suffer the long-term effects of female abuse, which includes substance abuse problems, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, depression, and others (Denov, 2004). Bourke et al. (2014) found on a nationally representative sample of adult

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victims that women committed 6 % of the CSA and that their victims were more likely to be young, male, and children between nine and 17 years of age compared with the victims of male perpetrators. Children at the age of five and boys in their teens are at a highest risk; however, the latter is often ignored and dismissed as an introduction to adult sexuality (Sanderson, 2005). The difficulty in believing that women are abusers is the consequence of the belief that women's sexuality causes them to be perceived as a passive recipient and not as an active initiator of sexual relations. Often associated with this is the mistaken belief that the CSA refers only to the penetration by sexual organ, which ignores the full range of abusive activities that can be done to a victim in other ways (either by objects or by forcing the victim to do something to the perpetrator). Moreover, it ignores the fact that women abuse not only male but also female children. It is generally estimated that women commit about 14 % of CSA in boys and 6 % of CSA in girls, while Sanderson (2005) estimates that as many as 20–25 % of CSA are committed by women. A systematic review of research of CSA by women from the perspective of victims and experts shows that CSA experts considered CSA committed by women as less serious, less harmful, and less valuable to investigate than CSA committed by men, while the victims feel that their experience has significantly affected their psychological well-being and ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships (Clements et al., 2013). The language used in the newspapers to describe CSA committed by women is qualitatively different from the language used to describe CSA committed by men. Similar findings we can see by Landor and Eisenchlas (2012); they found that female sexual offenders are more romanticized, that they are described more sympathetic, or that excuses are used to reduce the severity of abuse compared to male offenders. The authors conducted a qualitative analysis of the content of Australian newspapers in order to compare media coverage of perpetrators of CSA by gender (e.g., teachers, educators). They found that the media presents male perpetrators with derogatory labels such as "pedophiles" or "perverts", while sexual abuse perpetrated by women is somewhat romanticized by the use of consensual words such as "student lover" or "young lover" or while female perpetrators are infantilized. An analysis of online news on CSA in the national daily newspapers in Croatia found that derogatory terms were predominantly used to describe perpetrators (53.2 %), whereby no statistically significant gender difference were found (Popović, 2017). However, derogatory terms for describing male and female perpetrators differed qualitatively, with men being described with the terms "monster", "disgusting sex monster", "stepfather from hell", "maniac", "sick", "pig", "mentally depraved", "deranged mind", "demons", "sav-

ages", "beasts", or "barbarians", while the two terms most commonly used for women are "lascivious" and "lustful" (Popović, 2017: 114). Rachel All-sopp (2014) also found in her literature review that CSA female perpetrators are presented as either "virgins" or "prostitutes", while male perpetrators are presented as embodiments of evil, and the term "pedophile" is much more commonly used to create a completely misleading picture that most perpetrators are persons diagnosed with the pedophile disorder. Female perpetrators appear to be less serious than male perpetrators, whom the media demonizes, thus inciting the public to retaliate against them. The moral panic surrounding male perpetrators is probably the result of male perpetrators being more frequently included in media reports, and the media only report on female perpetrators when forced by men (All-sopp, 2014). Goddard and Saunders (2000) also found that journalists often use language that reduces the severity of abuse. Because of the cultural belief that women are caregivers and incapable of sexual aggression, women are not considered to engage in child sexual abuse (Sanderson, 2005). Consequences of this may be the belief that boys do not suffer the consequences of sexual abuse perpetrated by a woman and that therefore the consequences for boys are less serious than for female victims of a male perpetrator. This also supports the belief that boys want to have sexual experiences with older women. A survey of online commentary on CSA news confirmed that comments about "lucky boys" were statistically significantly higher in news in which the offender was a younger female and the victim was a teenage male, as well as in the news that used consensual words for describing the abuse, describing details, and revealing the victim's identity (Popović, 2017).

Not only on a quantitative but also on a qualitative level the media research also supports the stereotype that CSA perpetrators are old, while the CSA committed by adolescents is underrepresented. A survey of police cases in Croatia shows that the average age of the perpetrator is 37 years (Sladović & Družić, 2000), and foreign studies show that adolescents commit as many as 1/3 of child sexual abuse cases[2].

When it comes to professions, the perpetrators in this media study are the predominantly church members of the clergy, followed by the persons in charge of child care, law and order representatives, and those working in the entertainment industry. Keeping a case-by-case record has found that the offender's profession stands out when it comes to persons in

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2 https://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/statistics-on-per-petrators-of-csa (May 27, 2019).

charge of child care, but also when it comes to persons with free access to the household, which contributed to the moral panic surrounding specific categories of offenders (e.g., chimney sweeper, postman). Also the practice of highlighting respectable professions, professions that come into regular contact with children, and professions in child welfare has been observed in the media when reporting mass arrests of perpetrators in child exploitation material cases, where the professions in question constitute a minority of perpetrators. Such generalizations seem to attract the attention of the readership and create moral panic around particular professions and support the stereotype that perpetrators engage exclusively in these professions.

On a quantitative level it could be concluded that the myth that the perpetrators are strangers is not supported because just over half of the news reported on persons known to the child; however, the proportion of strangers is still much higher in the media than it actually is. Research has consistently shown that in 90 % of cases the victim knows the perpetrator (Finkelhor, 2012; Whealin, 2007). Creating the fear of "strangers" draws attention from the fact that children are most often abused by people in their immediate vicinity, including family members. The danger of this myth is that it entices children and parents into a false sense of security that nothing will happen to them if they are taught not to communicate with strangers. Reporting suggests that children are mostly at risk from known persons who have authority over them and from strangers, yet the least from their own family members. When it comes to family members who commit sexual abuse, the dominant figure in the media is the paternal figure (father, stepfather, mother's partner). Sexual abuse perpetrated by an older sibling has not been the topic of any CSA news, whereas research indicates that it may be the most common and long-lasting form of CSA within the family, although the least reported and explored (Tener et al., 2017).

Although most news outlets do not use derogatory terms to describe the perpetrators, it is important to note that the word "pedophile" in this research is not coded as a derogatory term, because it is assumed that journalists and the public consider all persons who commit CSA as pedophiles. Derogatory terms were much more used in episodic news, in which the main topic was the description of the perpetration or of the persecution of the perpetrator, than in news about the CSA in the church. The avoidance of using derogatory terms when describing CSA in the church in relation to other cases points to the inclination of journalists to "protect" church people from demonization in the media, which may also be due to the predominantly thematic coverage of the topic. The chances were higher

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that the media would use derogatory terms when it came to family information about the perpetrator, consumption of addictive substances, the race/ethnicity of the perpetrator, socioeconomic status, problems with the perpetrator's behavior, and physical appearance. In other words, derogatory terms were reserved for cases in which the offender displayed other behavioral problems or had a minority group status. A survey of online commentary on CSA news has shown that using derogatory terms for the perpetrator promotes the public view that the perpetrators are "monsters to be killed" (Popović, 2017). This portrayal of perpetrators gives the impression that the perpetrators are easy to identify and that we cannot personally know them, which may discourage children from reporting the perpetrator for fear that they will not be trusted. The belief that perpetrators are monsters completely distorts the dynamics with which sexual abuse usually takes place. Most sexual abusers leave the impression of kind, considerate, and caring people, because without that mask they would not be able to approach either children or parents (Sanderson, 2005). Many spend months first to gain family affection by establishing a friendly relationship and only then approach the child, paying particular attention to them, ensuring that the child will not discover what is happening for fear that he/she will not be trusted (Sanderson, 2005). Because they develop a "special" relationship with both the parents and children, it often happens that children love the perpetrator and want to protect him, especially if the perpetrator is a family member. Many children do not want to end this relationship or do not want the perpetrator to be punished; they just want the abuse to end.

Croatian daily newspapers support the belief that the perpetrators of CSA are persons with pedophilia, but as many as 87.3 % of the news that uses the word "pedophile" does it incorrectly. A minority of child sexual abusers suffers from the pedophile disorder; in the Croatian prison population only 13 % of sex offenders suffer from pedophilia (Mužinić & Vukota, 2010). In their analysis of 50 expert reports made at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry, Goreta et al. (2004) found the diagnosis of pedophilia in 14 % of sexual offenders. Naming the perpetrator of child sexual abuse a pedophile draws attention from the fact that children are abused by persons who have sexual preferences towards adults and who are usually married, but also from the fact that some perpetrators of CSA are women. The patterns in which sexual arousal occurs towards children are different and include not only persons with pedophilia, whose primary and exclusive sexual object is the child, but also those who show sexual deviations towards adults or who are situational abusers (Buljan-Flander, 2003). These are persons who have an adult sexual orientation but respond with sexual arousal

towards children in certain conditions (e.g., lack of other sexual experiences, stress affecting marital and interpersonal relationships and communication, etc.) (Buljan-Flander, 2003). Situational abusers abuse in situations of stress and have fewer victims than perpetrators who are persons with pedophilia; the victims are usually family members and these perpetrators begin to abuse at a later age than persons with pedophilia (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Although most news outlets do not describe perpetrators as mentally ill individuals, of the news using words that imply a mental illness only 1/5 can confirm that they are mentally ill. Although the purpose of such a description is to demonize the perpetrator, the stereotype is particularly dangerous because it absolves the perpetrator of the responsibility for the abuse and further stigmatizes those with mental illness who have never committed a crime. A minority of perpetrators suffer from mental illness, most of them acting quite normally. Mužinić and Vukota (2010) point out that among the prison population of sexual delinquents there are a smaller number of those with a mental illness or underdeveloped intellectual capacity. A systematic review conducted by Greathouse et al. (2015) found that studies were not equivocal on perpetrators of social skills difficulties, although they found that deficits in social skills could be slightly greater compared to the perpetrators of sexual abuse at the expense of adults. Multiple studies have found that offenders have problems with a lack of empathy (results vary depending on the type of empathy being measured), attachment style, and misconceptions about sexuality (victim-related cognitive distortions) (Greathouse et al., 2015). In a survey of online commentary on CSA news, the stereotype of perpetrators as mentally ill was significantly more prevalent in the commentary of the news about exhibitionism than of the news on other types of sexual abuse, and it was associated with the stereotype that exhibitionists would not sexually abuse children (Popović, 2017). The latter stereotype is confirmed by this research, as well as the stereotype of persons who use child exploitation material as those who will not sexually abuse children, which completely negates the fact that the production and exploitation of children for child exploitation material is also a criminal offense of sexual abuse. Elliott, Browne, and Kilcoyne (1995: 584) found that 21 % of perpetrators used pornographic content just before engaging in CSA. The stereotype of perpetrators as homosexuals is not supported on a quantitative level; however, it has been mentioned qualitatively in CSA cases in the church as a cause of CSA in priestly ranks in an effort to further stigmatize an already stigmatized minority social group. The perpetrator's stereotypes are usually associated with social stereotypes about minority social groups (e.g., "Perpetrators of sexual

abuse of boys are homosexual" or "Perpetrators of sexual abuse belong to national minorities") (Popović, 2017).

When the identity of the perpetrator was revealed in the news, the chances were less that derogatory terms would be used to describe the perpetrator and that the victim would be described as permanently damaged. This finding is not surprising given that journalists want to protect themselves from a possible lawsuit for breach of reputation and honor by the alleged perpetrator. The main predictors of the disclosure of the perpetrator's identity were: the news about CSA that did not involve the use of physical force; perpetrators who did not commit additional crimes, had male victims, and were unknown to the child; provided information on educational attainment and the socioeconomic status of the perpetrator; provided information about the victim's school performance; the omission of information about the victim's mental health. Such findings clearly show that journalists are more inclined to identify persons who have not committed additional crimes or used physical force, which makes them less "dangerous" for themselves. The tendency to disclose the identity of the perpetrators is not surprising given that the public, and even media professionals, often consider this to be the best type of protection against the CSA. Moreover, the research by Klein, Tolson, and Longo (2013) shows not only the propensity to disclose the identity but also the tendency to characterize a suspect as guilty before being found guilty. A study of one Croatian portal in 2015 found that the chances of discovering the identity of the perpetrators were higher in cases that had entered the final stages of the judicial process, in which the victims were elderly and male, and in which they gave a detailed description of the abusive event (Popović, 2017). The consequences of premature identity disclosure can cause lifelong harm to both the innocent and closely related individuals since it is probably the most undesirable possible label that may harm the family of the alleged perpetrator because they experience a "relationship stigma" (Schultz, 2014).

Research limitations and recommendations for future research

This is the first exploratory study of how Croatian daily newspapers report and present content on perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Since it is part of a broader project, it suffers from the limitations already described elsewhere (Popović, 2021): The selected newspapers are not representative of all daily newspapers in Croatia, but they are the most popular printed Croatian daily newspapers. Moreover, all recommendations for future

research apply to this research as well (Popović, 2021): to address the changes of reporting over time, to investigate differences in reporting between nationally and regionally oriented newspapers, to determine the extent to which the clusters describe the dependent variable, to carry out experimental research into the impact of CSA news on the readership, to do a comparative study of the analysis of the documentation by the competent authorities and the analysis of the media content, to investigate the reactions of victims and perpetrators to CSA news, and to focus on online media and CSA television news (Popović, 2021).

Conclusion

The news still supports common stereotypes regarding perpetrators of CSA, making it difficult to detect them in our environment. Perpetrators are presented as single/individual, male, elderly, usually a member of the clergy or a person in charge of child care. Perpetrators are persons known to a child or complete strangers. They have a lower educational success and their physical appearance is important. Highlighting background information on the perpetrator is more likely when the perpetrator is a known figure to the child. The use of derogatory terms to describe a perpetrator was greater in episodic news dealing with the criminal offenses that highlight background information on perpetrator and victim. Homosexual perpetrators are highlighted in the news about CSA in the Catholic Church. The news supports the idea that those who use child exploitation material and exhibitionists will not sexually abuse children. Also perpetrators are described as persons with pedophilia, while a portion of the news still wrongly describes perpetrators as mentally ill persons. Finally, the news prematurely reveals the identity of the perpetrator of sexual abuse, potentially compromising the quality of life of innocent persons and their family members.

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