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Life history of men with pedophilic disorder serving time in prison

História de vida de homens com transtorno pedofílico em cumprimento de pena

Historia de vida de hombres con trastorno pedófilo en prisión

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Abstract: This study's objective was to understand the life story and romantic relationships of men serving time for the rape of children and/or adolescents and the circumstances under which the crimes were committed. This is a qualitative study with a multiple-case design. Three men diagnosed with pedophilic disorder, convicted of sexual violence against children and/or adolescents participated. The following instruments were used: a sociodemographic form and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the victimizers consider that sexual interactions with children/adolescents are appropriate, provided not very young children or violence is involved. They acknowledged their disorder only in terms of immaturity. In addition to criminal punishment, psychological counseling provided to pedophiles is vital to prevent relapses.

Keywords: pedophile disorder; pedophile; child sexual abuse.

Resumo: Esta pesquisa objetiva compreender a história de vida e dos relacionamentos amorosos de homens com transtorno pedofílico que cumprem pena pela condenação por estupro de vulnerável contra crianças e/ou adolescentes, bem como das circunstâncias dos crimes que cometeram. Trata-se de um estudo de base qualitativa com delineamento de casos múltiplos. Participaram três homens que apresentam o diagnóstico de transtorno pedofílico, em situação de condenação por crimes que envolvem violência sexual contra crianças e/ou adolescentes. Foram utilizados os seguintes instrumentos: questionário sociodemográfico e entrevista semiestruturada. Os resultados revelaram que os vitimizadores avaliam os relacionamentos com crianças/adolescentes como adequados, quando não envolvem crianças muito pequenas e ocorrem sem uso de violência. Eles reconhecem seu transtorno somente em termos de imaturidade. Destaca-se a relevância do acompanhamento psicológico de vitimizadores sexuais infantis, concomitante ao cumprimento da pena, de modo a prevenir a reincidência.

Palavras-chave: transtorno pedofílico; pedófilo; abuso sexual infantil.



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Resumen: Esta investigación tiene como objetivo comprender la historia de vida y las relaciones amorosas de los hombres con trastorno pedófilo que cumplen condena por el delito de estupro contra niños y adolescentes, así como las circunstancias de los delitos que han cometido. Este es un estudio de base cualitativa con un resumen de múltiples casos. Participaron tres hombres diagnosticados con trastorno pedófilo, en situación de condena por delitos de violencia sexual contra niños y adolescentes. Se utilizaron los siguientes instrumentos: cuestionario sociodemográfico y entrevista semiestructurada. Los resultados revelaron que los victimarios evalúan las relaciones con niños / adolescentes como adecuadas, cuando no involucran a niños muy pequeños y ocurren sin el uso de violencia. Reconocen su trastorno sólo en términos de inmadurez. Se destaca la relevancia del monitoreo psicológico de los victimarios sexuales infantiles, junto con la ejecución de la sentencia, para prevenir la recurrencia.

Palabras clave: trastorno pedófilo; pedófilo; abuso sexual infantil.

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Only a portion of molesters abusing children is affected by pedophilic disorder; not all child molesters are pedophiles, and not all pedophiles are child molesters (Arakaki, Hastenreiter, Oliveira, Guerra & Souza, 2019; Baltieri, 2013). The reason is that in many cases, sex offenders do not prefer children and/or adolescents; these victims may only happen to be convenient (Williams, 2012). On the other hand, individuals diagnosed with pedophilic disorder may experience recurrent intense sexual fantasies involving children but never pursue these fantasies (Arakaki et al., 2019; Santos & Mesquita, 2019). Therefore, according to Santos and Mesquita (2019), an individual with pedophilic disorder should be considered a child molester only when there is sexual interaction with a child or prepubescent; a molester is someone who uses his/her (psychological and/or physical) power to dominate a victim and obtain sexual advantages.

Even though many pedophiles do not pursue their fantasies, psychosocial factors are suggested to facilitate the expression of fantasies, such as affective disorders, intense psychological stress, and psychoactive substance abuse (Baltieri, 2013; Marsden, 2009). In addition, Monteiro (2012) notes that pedophilic disorder is a chronic disorder that may have different sexual orientations, and its onset usually occurs during adolescence.

The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for the pedophilic disorder (APA, 2013) include a) having intense and recurrent sexually arousing fantasies and sexual urges involving sexual activity with prepubescent children (13 years old or younger) for at least six months; b) The individual has acted on these sexual urges or these urges or fantasies cause intense distress or interpersonal difficulties; and c) The individual is at least 16 years old and at least five years older than the victim. In this case, it does not include an individual at the end of adolescence having a continuous sexual relationship with a 12- or 13-year-old individual. Additionally, there is a distinction within pedophilic disorder between exclusive type (i.e., exclusively attracted to children, i.e., 14 years old or younger) and nonexclusive type (whereas the individual is attracted to children and adults; APA, 2013).

The little empirical data available are mainly based on the sample of individuals convicted of sexual crimes (Casarin, Botelho, & Ribeiro, 2016; Seto, Babchishin, Pullman, & McPhail, 2015). In Brazil, the rape of vulnerable persons is the most recurrent crime. According to Baltieri (2013), only 20 % of the individuals convicted of sexual crimes against children and/or adolescents present characteristics that meet the pedophilic disorder diagnostic criteria. However, the author notes that despite the need to diagnose and provide specific treatment to these individuals, many of those convicted of sexual crimes against children and/or adolescents are not diagnosed or receive any psychosocial assistance. Not receiving guidance regarding this condition may favor relapses (Soldino & Carbonell-Vayá, 2017). One of the studies conducted in the Brazilian context sought to describe the profile of men convicted of the rape of vulnerable persons, and their experiences within their families of origin, verifying that only 6.1 % of the sample was diagnosed with the pedophilic disorder (Marafiga & Falcke, 2020).

Despite this phenomenon's severity, case studies addressing individuals diagnosed with pedophilic disorder are still incipient due to difficulties accessing this population (Baltieri, 2013; Marafiga, Falcke & Teodoro, 2017; Herrero & Negredo, 2016; Van Leeuwen et al., 2013). Studies report that many individuals with pedophilic disorder experienced trauma and sexual violence during childhood (Baltieri, 2013; Williams, 2012). One study conducted in Switzerland addressed a sample of adolescents and verified a relationship between experiencing sexual violence and abusive behaviors perpetrated by part of the population (Aebi et al., 2015).

Sexual victimization and a lack of a protective and nurturing environment may predict the development of pedophilic disorder (Margolin et al., 2009). In addition, psychological issues such as low self-esteem (Etapechusk & Santos, 2017; Scortegagna & Amparo, 2013), depression, and inappropriate social skills are characteristics commonly manifested by individuals with this disorder (Barros, 2017). Some studies (Castro, López-Castedo & Sueiro 2009; Demidova et al., 2020; Etapechusk & Santos, 2017) indicate that emotional immaturity is not rare among these individuals. Additionally, they may also have social behavior problems, lacking appropriate social and problem-solving skills. Thus, they may adopt maladaptive coping strategies, face problems at work, have difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and have low frustration tolerance (Castro et al., 2009; Marsden, 2009).

Individuals with pedophilic disorder do not necessarily have cognitive deficits and usually understand the severity of victimizing children (Baltieri, 2013). However, their volitional processes may be compromised, especially regarding the ability to control sexual urges, desires, or behaviors toward their victims (Castro et al., 2009; Marsden, 2009; Stein, Black & Pienaar, 2000).

Cognitive distortions regarding sexual interactions between adults and children or adolescents are present in child molesters (Reis & Cavalcante, 2019a). Cognitive distortions are dysfunctional thoughts that distort reality (Muse & Frigola, 2003). For example, an individual with pedophilic disorder presents cognitive distortions that justify their actions; that is, they believe a child and/or adolescent is able to consent to have sexual interactions and tend to deny or minimize the fact (Muse & Frigola, 2003).

Seeking to contribute to the advancement of knowledge on this topic, this study's objective was to analyze the life history, romantic relationships, and the convictions for the rape of vulnerable persons of three men diagnosed with pedophilic disorder, currently serving their sentences in a closed prison regime. More specifically, the objective was to learn about the experiences of these men in their families of origin and describe their motivations and how they planned the crimes for which they were convicted, including their feelings and assessment of repercussions.

Method

This is a qualitative study with a multiple-case design. Case studies can be used to empirically investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2010).

Participants

Three men diagnosed with pedophilic disorder, convicted of crimes that involved sexual violence against children/adolescents, participated in the study. A forensic psychiatrist provided the diagnoses, which were included in the participants' judicial processes.

Table 1.
Participants' characteristics

Name	Age	Education	Marital status	Children	No. of victims	Victims' sex	Sentence
Robson	40 years old	High school	Single	0	3	Male	23 years
Junior	49 years old	College	Divorced	0	5	Male	51 years
André	55 years old	College	Divorced	2	12	Female	220 years

Instruments

Sociodemographic questionnaire and analysis of the judicial processes: to collect personal data (age, education, occupation, marital status) and information regarding the judicial processes (sex and age of the victims, and crime circumstances).

Semi-structured interviews (adapted from Passarinho, 2015): to ask questions concerning the participants' life history, including whether they experienced violence during childhood and regarding the rape of vulnerable persons. The questions also addressed: "What were the motivations for the crime?", "What were the coercive tactics used?" and "What were your beliefs about child violence?".

Research and Ethical Procedures

Contact was first made with the study setting, a penitentiary located in Curitiba, Brazil. After obtained the Letter of Agreement, the project was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Unisinos (protocol 2.662.961). The person responsible for the facility signed an Information Assignment Agreement authorizing the use of data regarding the judicial processes. The participants with a pedophilic disorder diagnosis reported in their processes were invited to participate and signed free and informed consent forms, confirming their consent. The participants were ensured of their rights concerning the confidentiality of their identities, the right not to answer any of the questions or withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were held in a room on the prison's premises and lasted two hours on average. The participants were not handcuffed, but prison officers monitored the meetings.

Data analysis

Each case was vertically analyzed after the interviews were transcribed. The objective was to understand each participant's subjective experiences. Afterward, a horizontal analysis was performed to seek similarities and particularities between cases, from which a cross-case synthesis emerged (Yin, 2010).

Results

The results are presented below, and each case is described. The narrative of cases was based on the topics established according to the study's objectives: life history, affective relationships, description of the sexual crime, and assessment of repercussions.

Case 1 - Robson

Robson grew up in a rural environment, studied in small schools, had few friends, and was bullied by his peers. His family was calm but not very affectionate: "I would not describe it as an environment where I received affection or some physical contact".

Robson does not consider he was abused as a child, but he awakened for sexual interests very early: "At the time I'd see this magazine, and there were these underwear ads, and I'd go there to see the boys in underwear. I'd masturbate looking at them". He reports that his first sexual interaction was with his cousin. He was eight, and his cousin was 13:

He'd ask me to masturbate him, and I'd get frustrated because he didn't do the same for me. [...] Once he asked me to have oral sex with him, and I... I tried, but I couldn't. I said I didn't like it... he respected that.

Robson mentioned he never married but had two girlfriends. He dated one of the girls for three years, and according to him, they were "very well behaved". They both attended church and did not have sexual intercourse. The second relationship happened when Robson lived in another country, and they lived together for eight months. After which, Robson started living with a 15-year-old boy, whom he referred to as his *stepson*, even though he never had an emotional relationship with the adolescent's mother: "It was a situation of a child in need of attention, you know, and an adult was willing to give it, right?"

Robson reports he was convicted of the rape of vulnerable persons for engaging in libidinous acts with two 13-year-old boys, practicing sex in the presence of a minor (under 14), and having pictures in his computer. He was sentenced to 23 years in prison. Robson describes the situation that led to his conviction:

These two boys, they had fled from a shelter for minors. They were homeless, and my stepson invited them to come to my apartment... What happened was a situation in which I got involved in a game with them, and in a way, yeah, it was provoked... I got carried away by the situation, and the boy said, "come on, I know you like it too".

Robson made a point emphasizing that he did not act without the adolescent's consent: "I would never insist on it, if there was any, the slightest demonstration of him saying: 'Oh, I don't... it isn't cool'".

Regarding the adolescents' feelings, Robson mentioned: "He had no idea, obviously no idea, that there was anything wrong there, and he wasn't even aware that if he'd tell it to someone, it would harm a person". He noted: "The case itself, I don't think it was inappropriate because there was reciprocity". When Robson considers his role, Robson says: "I got into it, as if I was another 12, 13-year-old boy, there together with them, I wanted to participate in a kind of game that was happening there".

The participant exposes his beliefs regarding his interaction with the adolescents:

Perhaps, the problem of those who think like this is that they are not able to see where evil is, or where the abusive situation is because there is not a power relationship [...] In the situations in which I got involved, I always had passive behavior in this relationship. So, I was never the agent, for instance, the one who took the initiative, or said, or did this or that.

Regarding children and/or adolescents (under 14 years old) giving consent to libidinous and sexual activities, Robson states:

Based on my experiences, I know it is possible. Obviously, a child will not consent like "Ah, I accept to participate, I accept to have sex or participate, or, I accept that this guy penetrates me" [...]. When it comes to sexual acts, what

sexual acts are these? Perhaps, this adult getting sexually involved with a teenager, he may not have reached maturity, or at that point, he treats the teenager as equal, [...] two teenagers exploring their sexuality together.

Robson adds:

What if someone becomes interested in asking this person's opinion, now that he's an adult... he'll say "Well, I was 13, 14 years old and had sexual intercourse with him and it was really good, it was very positive in my life, etc., etc. Now, I'm a better person because I met him and he was, perhaps, the most important person in my life", so people will dispute this study with tooth and nail saying, "Look, this is wrong, whoever wrote this, is defending pedophiles".

Regarding his case, Robson states that:

About living in society, I don't have self-control problems. [...]. We are not talking about 4, 5, or 6-year-old children. There are horrible cases in the news of guys who go and get these very young children and penetrate them. This differentiation is very important, only that there is no space in the media to debate it.

He also mentions: "I think that society needs to be less hypocrite; it requires more investigation, more studies, and over time, more opportunity to debate it".

Case 2 – Junior

Junior reports that he met his biological father when he was about to die. He reports that his mother worked as a prostitute and his grandmother raised him. About his family, he mentions:

I really missed a family... Until a solution appeared to me, a Bible camp. That's when I met John [fictitious name]. He was like a private father. John was a God's guy, who came to support me, and give me a north.

Junior mentions his grandmother used to attack him repeatedly and even hurt him, and he considered leaving home. According to him: "I was very angry, got really upset with my mother".

Junior was convicted of the rape of vulnerable persons. He performed libidinous acts with five boys aged 11 to 15. At the time, he worked with recreational activities. Regarding the case for which he was convicted, he considers that: "I don't feel like, for instance, in my case, that I'm sick, I don't feel that". Junior reported that the boys' families used to ask him to take care of them on the weekends:

I'd let them inside the hotel, and established the rules, only that I went to work while they'd have fun [...]. I sometimes caught them, sexuality issues, and they'd say 'hey teacher, you know about physical education' and all that, and there was one naughty boy, another one was very shy, and the thing kept going... Then, one time, going back home, I caught some of the cousins of one of the boys masturbating and doing stuff. So I pretended I didn't see it and overlooked it.

Junior had a perception that the boys admired him, an admiration that went beyond the fact that he was an instructor. He reported:

This boy, he didn't want to go only to have fun, he wanted to stay by my side wherever I'd go. Because it's... you might have heard that... teenagers have a crush on you [...] so, the teenager leaves the camp hugging you, crying and asking: "Father, would you take this guy to my birthday? Take him to my place. He's everything to me!"

Junior adds:

This first boy was the person who got more affectionate with me, to the point that he felt it was ok to walk naked into my room, you know? So, at a certain point, I established limits for him, but I allowed others to do it, and the others told him, and he was like "Why they can but I can't?" or "Why do you allow that one but not the other one?" and all that... So he started this story.

Junior also mentioned that the boys' families did not provide parental care:

The family was not really there... the guy had a child, but was not a father, was absent. So, this is what happens, someone comes around and gives them attention, the child gets close, and... a situation like this doesn't necessarily have to happen, you know? Obviously, it doesn't need to get to this point, but it ends up happening.

Regarding having sexual interactions with the boys, Junior, who was married for 9 years, notes:

I withdrew from my own wife. One day I'm working, and suddenly a kid caresses you, gives you affection, more than your wife and you... things start happening, and you are unable to say no... So instead of valuing my wife's sexuality, I started appreciating the boys.

Regarding his role in the sexual interaction with the boys, he mentions:

I never in my life, truly, never forced anything [...]. Sometimes, or most of the times, the boys would leave the bathroom naked and horny, and you know, aroused, and they'd go let's do it, let's do it, and I could never say no, and things ended up happening.

Regarding the boys' feelings, Junior noted:

I always saw, in my view, they were always satisfied... there was an embarrassment in the beginning. But there was not a fight, something like "Do not look at me again, I don't want to come here anymore". They always wanted it.

The oldest boy, who at the time was 15 years old, made the complaint, which according to Junior, was motivated by jealousy. Junior, however, mentioned that the boys testified that: "They said: 'my teacher never forced anything, everything happened because we asked him,' but the judge did not take it into account... I don't see it as a hell of a crime".

Junior reported that he was at work with his wife (they worked together) when they filed the complaint. He reported that he realized things were strange and fled when he saw one of the boys running away. Junior reported: "I wrote a letter telling what really happened. I put it in the car's glove compartment, left the car in a corner, and went over a bridge to commit suicide. I was in despair".

Regarding whether children and/or adolescents can consent to have sexual interactions with adults, Junior stated: "I guess that in my case specifically, it was really possible". Regarding the consequences of his acts: "I guess that when... not that it is acceptable, but I guess that it is a problem when it is forced. Because a rapist role doesn't fit me, everyone is different, right?" When he was asked whether what he did was inappropriate, Junior answered: "Many times! I was a lecturer, you know? I was a lecturer on biblical teaching... how do you look at God and ... 'ah... is God agreeing with what I'm doing here'... I'd pray, cry... 'No! It won't happen anymore!'" The participant pondered: "there is a very interesting thing about these boys, especially the 15-year-old boy, he was aware of the word pedophilia, they had searched it, they knew, but they'd tell me 'you are very special, you're nothing like this'".

Regarding his current situation, Junior highlights:

I'm here suffering, but overcoming all this, because I don't feel I'm a sick person, I don't feel crazy. And, also, I don't feel like a cold manipulator. I don't feel like it because I didn't manipulate anyone, you know? I know of people who did because I used to give lectures... I'd talk about pedophilia, and I ended up in the same case, right?!

Case 3 – André

André reported that he had sexual experiences at a tender age. His first experience occurred when he was eight years old with a neighbour. The neighbour was five years older than him: “I really felt like we’re playing, it always very cool, very funny, it didn’t hurt at all... It was a pleasure to have his attention. I felt like I conquered him; he was my friend!” André also reported that he had a sexual interaction with his middle brother, three years older than him: “He made me touch him, grab his parts. I thought that I had overcome it... I started seeing myself as a homosexual boy, but I could not show it to anyone”. Andre also reported that he was sexually abused on a bus when he was 14 years old.

André married and had two children. He had another long-lasting relationship, which was broken at the time of the complaint. He reports that he always lived his life within socially acceptable standards:

I spent my whole life having a relationship of love with all the children in my life. I was a father, an uncle, a godfather, all my life since I’ve known myself an adult, I never, never felt any different kind of desire.

However, he was arrested for the rape of vulnerable persons in five different processes:

This situation happened in my life when I was almost 50 years old... I ended up involving myself with very young girls; unfortunately, some were children. [...] I met some people who started having a relationship that I can’t call friendship, or affective because it was a relationship based on interests.

He reports the involvement of the families in the case:

The parents were absolutely permissible toward me, I could do anything... the children could kiss my mouth while I was sitting on their sofas, at their homes, total freedom, they could sit on my lap the way they wanted, and play the way they wanted.

He even notes “The father is also in jail because he effectively taught everything to his daughters”. He describes:

If a girl calls me and asks me to give her a ride, at night... and I go, with the mother’s or father’s consent... nobody is a fool, right? I’m not either! There was a point when the situation deteriorated, I didn’t know how to manage it, didn’t know how to get out, and it culminated in this sensualized involvement.

Regarding the situation that led to his conviction, André reveals that the victims were girls aged “9 to 12 years old on average”. He reports:

It was no one from my family. Over time, I ended up nurturing affection, a great affection, until it became distorted by this promiscuity that emerged gradually... Suddenly, you start seeing sexuality in a child... and something inside you explodes... it ends up... it snaps.

Regarding the pedophilic disorder, André notes:

I try to imagine someone who is pedophile since the beginning of life. I can't, no matter how hard I try to find some trace of it in me; I can't... because I did not have this life. I never had this predilection in my life. I was a normal young man. On the contrary, I sought older women to acquire some experience.

He was shocked with the accusations against him: “That monster they portrayed, I wasn't a monster all my life. These girls had already been abused by their grandfather, by an uncle, and their father”.

Regarding the crime of rape of vulnerable persons, Andre reports:

I was not a confessed defendant, but my lawyer made it clear that I didn't deny what I had effectively done. My processes contained things there were not true; perhaps 40 % of it was not true... My crime was effectively the 214, libidinous act, I didn't have sexual intercourse with any of the girls... everything included in the 214 was considered rape, and rape presumes violence.

Andre describes his difficulty in seeking help: “There were some situations that led me to start seeking help, but unfortunately I didn't have time. Obviously, you can't seek someone and say: ‘look, I'm having pedophile behavior and I don't know what to do with it!’”

Regarding the victim's resistance, André notes:

When it happened, when I had a situation with one of the younger girls, it took me a while to realize that she was uncomfortable, and it causes me much embarrassment, much remorse... It took me a while to realize, poor thing, she was trying to hide it... She cried in silence once or twice, she didn't make any facial expression, but I saw a little tear on her face and I stopped. [André cries]. I hope that God forgives me because I know that people will never understand.

André believes the children consented to the sexual practices and were harmed only if they didn't consent. “I say that perhaps a child may want to overcome barriers out of curiosity. But, when there is no consent, surely it is a bad thing”.

Discussion

Each case is individually discussed (vertical analysis), and later an integrative synthesis is provided (horizontal analysis).

Vertical analysis of Robson's case

Robson reported sexual attraction for boys and sexual interactions with a cousin at a tender age. He considers sexual interactions with adolescents to be spontaneous and non-violent interactions the boys conducted. From his perspective, these interactions resulted in positive and pleasant experiences, and for this reason, he should not be considered a sexual molester because he did not use violence nor attacked young children (Schinaia, 2000). He believes adolescents are sexual beings who are not mature enough to give explicit verbal consent but show through their behaviors that they desire to have sexual interaction (Reis & Cavalcante, 2019b). His perception of the pedophilic disorder only highlights immaturity; a trait constantly emphasized in the literature (Castro et al., 2009; Demidova et. al., 2020; Etapechusk & Santos, 2017).

Vertical analysis of Junior's case

The fact that Junior met his father only at the time of his death stands out among Junior's experiences with his family of origin. He sought rapprochement with paternal figures until he met John in a camp and developed a kind of platonic love, a feeling that, as an adult, he wanted the adolescents to nurture for him. He describes sexual interactions as something that happened naturally, "by chance", as it was a game for both the involved (Schinaia, 2000). It shows a confusion of roles because he often describes himself as having a paternal role toward the adolescents, without realizing that a father's role does not include sexual interactions, which is a relevant aspect not reported in the literature. He believes the adolescents were satisfied with what happened, despite some initial embarrassment, corroborating Schinaia's (2015) understanding that individuals with pedophilic disorder consider children and adolescents to be sexual beings. For this reason, sexual contact only awakens pre-existing urges and fantasies. Junior's perception of the pedophilic disorder shows that he was aware that what he did was wrong; he even gave lectures about the subject but considers that a pedophile uses physical violence to obtain personal pleasure, which he believed was not his case.

Vertical analysis of André's case

André minimized the severity of his acts concerning what is reported in his judicial process, which includes video proof of his sexual interactions with children. This denial is probably due to a difficulty in assuming abusive acts. He was very cautious with his words, considering that the interviews were recorded in the prison's premises, and making any revelations could be configured as another crime or even an aggravating factor.

André's childhood was marked by sexual experiences, which corroborate the literature reporting sexual violence as a predictor for the pedophilic disorder (Aebi et al., 2015; Baltieri, 2013; Williams, 2012). André's marital relationships throughout his life indicate he is a non-exclusive type (APA, 2013). André had difficulties understanding his sexual attraction for children and manifested a desire to seek treatment. From this

perspective, the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) notes that there may be distress, considering that an individual with pedophilic disorder suffers stigmatization given the little understanding about the phenomenon (Jahnke, Imhoff & Hoyer, 2015). André became emotional when he reported that he found it challenging to realize the victim was distressed. Baltieri (2013) notes that individuals with pedophilic disorder usually do not present cognitive deficits and can recognize the severity of their abusive acts. However, compromised volitional control (Marsden, 2009; Stein et al., 2000) leads them to commit violence.

Horizontal analysis of the cases

The literature emphasizes that exposure to violence may be considered a risk factor for developing pedophilic disorder (Aebi et al., 2015; Baltieri, 2013; Williams, 2012). Even though the participants analyzed here did not have an affectionate and protective family, only one participant reported sexual victimization during his childhood. Although early sexual interaction is verified in the three cases, which were considered natural, but can lead to cognitive distortions (Ramírez Torres & Vanegas Garcia, 2021).

Two cases (Junior and Andre) constituted long-lasting marital relationships with adult women, whereas Robson reported a significant but brief romantic relationship. These situations reveal non-exclusive pedophilic disorder, i.e., at some point, all the participants established sexual relationships with adult individuals. The literature shows that most sexual child molesters form a family at some point in life (Seto et al., 2015).

Regarding having sexual interactions with children and/or adolescents, note that all the participants believed that their victims consented, even though each participant manifested different forms of consent. They believe that a child can consent to have sexual interactions with an adult, provided that it is the child's desire and there is no imposition or violence. The cognitive distortions involving the cases of Robson and Junior stand out as they made mistaken judgments (Marafiga & Falcke, 2020; Muse & Frigola, 2003), and libidinous interactions with adolescents are confused with paternal relationships and an act of promoting care and fun, revealing the participants' emotional immaturity, as reported in the literature (Castro et al., 2009; Etapechusk & Santos, 2017).

Regarding the pedophilic disorder diagnosis, both Junior and Robson did not see themselves as pedophiles. Instead, both referred to this disorder as something that includes violence and imposes suffering on the victims. Contrary to this understanding, even though somewhat reticent, André identifies himself with the disorder. Although, like the other two participants, André does not see himself as “a monster that preys on young children”, as these individuals are often portrayed in society. Studies focusing on individuals with pedophilic disorders are relevant, considering there is a lack of understanding and difficulties recognizing this disorder and these individuals' social and functional maladjustment, and the possibility of these individuals relapsing into sexual abuse against children and/or adolescents (Baltieri, 2013; Etapechusk & Santos, 2017; Marafiga et al., 2017; Reis & Cavalcante, 2019b).

Final considerations

Child molesters are individuals convicted by the rape of vulnerable persons and meet the pedophilic disorder criteria. In addition to punishment provided in law, psychological assistance is required to treat the disorder. The psychological support provided to pedophiles is intended to enable future social reinsertion, and mainly prevent the relapse of child molestation.

It is essential to consider that if the pedophilic disorder is seen as a treatable psychological condition, shame and social stigma, which prevent individuals who identify themselves with the disorder from seeking treatment, may decrease. The production of scientific knowledge to ground psychological practice is crucial for obtaining effective results. The challenge faced by professionals working with sexual violence is to stand against violence rather than against those who commit it. These professionals need to develop the ability not to reject victimizers and develop empathy to understand them, revealing a professional understanding of their sexual experiences. Only through empathy and profound knowledge of these individuals' experiences is it possible to re-signify cognitive distortions.

Therefore, this study deepened understanding of the life history and sexual crimes committed by men with pedophilic disorder convicted of the rape of vulnerable persons currently serving their sentences. One of this study's limitations refers to the difficulty in collecting information as the participants were interviewed in the prison premises, preventing more spontaneous answers. Additionally, this study's results cannot be generalized because of the small number of participants, though they can support a more significant understanding of the experiences of individuals with the pedophilic disorder. Further studies are needed to deepen understanding from a longitudinal perspective.

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