Original Article

Suicide and the Publicly Exposed Pedophile

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Abstract

Background: **Current clinical wisdom is that the vast majority of those who complete suicide suffer from a mental disorder. Uncritical adherence to this belief may limit our understanding and restrict the full range of prevention activities. We aimed to examine the public record for accounts of suicide by men who had been, or were about to be, investigated or apprehended for "sex only" child sex offences, with a view to presenting a collection of case histories, and identifying examples of suicide in the apparent absence of mental disorder other than pedophilia.**

Method: **The public record (hard and electronic copy) was examined.**

Results: **Twenty case histories were identified of men with no apparent mental disorder (other than pedophilia) who completed suicide shortly after exposure or threatened public exposure and/or early or potential legal punishment.**

Conclusion: **This evidence strongly suggests that exposure or threatened public exposure of pedophilia and/or early or potential legal punishment creates a predicament, which may lead to completed suicide.**

Keywords: *communications media, mental disorders, suicide, pedophilia, prevention*

Introduction

For the last half century, the prevailing medical theory has been that all or almost all of those who complete suicide are suffering a mental disorder (1,2). While people with mental disorder are at greater risk of suicide than those without, exclusive application of the "mental disorder is necessary" model of suicide may diminish the importance of life context and the preventive potential of considered social actions.

Recent studies from China reporting mental illness in less than 50% of suicide completers have raised important questions (3). Reports from India (4,5) have found mental disorder in less than 40% of completers, and a report from the West (Faroe Islands) has found evidence of psychiatric or drug disorders in only 61% of those who completed suicide (6). In a recent psychological autopsy study across several countries (7), up to two-thirds of suicide cases remained without psychiatric diagnosis in those studies that only examined Axis I disorders.

Adverse life events, independent of mental disorder, can contribute to suicide (8). A recent "sociological autopsy" found that relationship breakdown was the main trigger in 34% of cases (9). The seminal work of Emil Durkheim (10) is also relevant. Durkheim did not deny that mental illness was a cause of suicide. However, he regarded social factors as the major cause, stating, "The individual yields to the slightest shock of circumstances because the state of society has made him a ready prey to suicide".

We have argued that while mental disorder may be sufficient for suicide, it is not necessary, and suicide may be a consequence of 'predicaments' such as slow, painful and undignified death, reputation damage, shame and financial loss (11–14).

The suicide rate (after apprehension) of male child sex offenders who engaged exclusively in sex (as distinct from those who performed multiple types of crimes and those who were violent to children), is reported to be 183 times higher than that of members of the general population (15).

This high suicide rate has been noted in the blog, "Sex Offender Suicides and Other Deaths", where the deaths have been considered "unintentional burdens of punishment" (16).

We were interested to examine the public record of suicide by men who had recently been investigated or apprehended for "sex only" (15) child sex offences, in search of evidence that suicide can occur as a consequence of a 'predicament'. Such results may be

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complementary to, and take our knowledge beyond, epidemiological understanding.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the public record for accounts of suicide by men who had recently been investigated or apprehended for "sex only" child sex offences, with a view to presenting a collection of case histories of men, with no apparent mental disorder other than pedophilia, who apparently completed suicide in response to their predicament. [We note here that the question arises as to whether pedophilia should be regarded as a mental disorder. From the DSM-IV-TR perspective, pedophilia is a clinical condition, but that "does not imply that the condition meets legal or other non-medical criteria for what constitutes a mental disorder". Our background is clinical, thus we accept pedophilia as a mental disorder and refer to the "absence of mental disorder other than pedophilia".]

Methods

The public record (hard and electronic copy) was searched, cases were documented, and a summary made. We have an extensive collection of newspaper reports of suicide covering the last 32 years, and employed electronic search methods using the words "suicide", "pedophilia" and "suicide child sex offence". The summary took the form of a table and simple calculations.

Results

Case histories

Lewis Harcourt, 1st Viscount Harcourt (59 years; 1922) has been described as a sexual predator who attempted to rape both males and females. His behavior was tolerated and kept private. However, after he attempted to rape a 12 year old boy, the boy's mother made the matter public. Harcourt died by overdose in his study at his London home. He was born to a well connected family and educated at Eaton. His father, Sir William, had been Home Secretary. Harcourt married at 33 years and fathered four children. He had been a liberal MP (1904–1916), and had held various ministerial positions, including Secretary of State to the colonies (17).

Neil Hocquart (40 years; 1991) was a photographer associated with Nichols Rabet (see later) and a large group of other pedophiles at a privately funded children's activity center, "The Stables". He died of a drug overdose in London, after police raided his house and confiscated 300 pornographic videos and 100 pornographic photographs. Hocquart, born Foster, took the name from a Guernsey sailor. Captain Hocquart willed considerable wealth to Foster, and soon after, died of an apparent heart attack. At this time, Rabet fled to Thailand (18).

William Lucan-Roberts (61 years; 2000), was facing 67 child sex charges, and was dreading his picture appearing in the newspaper. He left a suicide note, "...I felt it was better I go..." and drowned himself in a private swimming pool in Sydney, Australia. Lucan-Roberts was a classics teacher and cricket coach at a prestigious Sydney secondary school (19).

William Brown (52 years; 2004) was charged with child sex offences in Indonesia and jailed for 13 years; within days, he hanged himself at Police Headquarters, Karangasem, Bali. He had once worked in the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. However, "his overt homosexuality had led to his dismissal as a diplomat" in 1984. He then worked as an English teacher in a tourism school in Bali (20).

Bruce Crosby (59 years; 2006) was an educated US citizen living in Panama. His computer was confiscated by the Panamanian police. Four days later, while charges were being prepared, he asphyxiated himself with butane cooking gas in his bathroom, on the island of Bastimentos. He was believed to have been an active pedophile, using local boys, and made a living by selling pornography and arranging pedophile sex tours of Panama to clients from around the world (21).

Louis Conradt (56 years; 2006) had been Texas district attorney for more than 20 years and at the time of his death he was Rockwall County chief felony assistant district attorney. He shot himself in the head when a SWAT team entered his home. Conradt had been investigated by an anti-pedophile group, Perverted-Justice, which arranged for actors pretending to be under-aged children to make email and telephone contact with him. Perverted-Justice was associated with the television show, To Catch a Predator. The police were informed of various findings; they obtained a warrant, broke down Conradt's front door and entered. After Conradt died, pornographic material was found on his computer. There was subsequent criticism of aspects of police and media staff behavior. Conradt graduated in law from the University of Texas, and lived alone (22).

Wolfgang Priklopil (44 years; 2006) abducted 10-year-old school girl, Natasha Kampusch, near Vienna, in 1998. He kept her prisoner in the basement of his house for 8 years. When she escaped and the police were alerted, Priklopil

suicided by jumping in front of a train. Details of actual sexual offences have not been reported, and Natasha Kampusch has remained silent on the subject. Priklopil was a communication technician with a good work history. He owned his own house (which he inherited from his grandfather) and a luxury car (23).

Nichols Rabet (57 years; 2006) handcuffed his hands to his ankles, taped a plastic bag over his head and died of suffocation, in Pattaya, Thailand, days before he was to appear in court on multiple pedophile offences, including sex acts with children as young as six years. He had been on bail for 10 months. Rabet was a British citizen. He had been the deputy head of a council-run children's home in London but left after being accused of child molestation. His name was placed on a register of people deemed unsuitable to work with children. He then financed and operated a children's activity center in Sussex, called 'The Stables' (his money was left to him by an elderly woman he had befriended-events similar to those by which his colleague, Neil Hocquart, came into money). Rabet fled to Thailand in the 1980s, when accused of molestation of children. His suicide note read: "Sorry I have to leave like this but it is the only way to escape the stress of my life" (24).

J D "Roy" Atchison, (53 years; 2007) was an assistant United States prosecutor living in Florida. He was married to a school teacher and had three children. Atchison was president of the Gulf Breeze Sports Association for soccer, t-ball and other activities. He was snared in a police operation and charged with traveling from Florida to Michigan to have sex with a 5-year-old girl. He pleaded guilty. He was moved from one Michigan gaol to another because of suicide concerns and was placed on suicide watch. Authorities found he "demonstrated no evidence of despondency", but before sentence was passed, he hanged himself (25).

Helmet Nehls (64 years; 2007) was being held in gaol in Udon Thani (Thailand). He had been arrested and charged with having abducted and raped a 12 year old girl, a crime punishable by life in prison. He stuffed socks in his mouth, cut his wrists and died in custody. Nehls was a computer technician, a German national, from Zeppernick, East Germany. He had frequently visited Thailand over a period of 15 years and was fluent in the language. Police claimed he was in the habit of paying families to have the use of pre-pubescent children for weekends, and produced pornographic material which they found at his home (26).

Bob Collins (61 years; 2007) died of an overdose of medication and alcohol in Northern Territory, Australia, following a battle with bowel cancer, and three days before he was to face a committal hearing on 21 charges of sex with children dating back 30 years. Other charges were in preparation, including possession of child pornography images. Collins lived a high profile political life. At 35 years of age, he became a member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. At 41 years, he was elected to the Australian Senate and was soon elevated to the Cabinet. His party lost power in 1996, and Collins retired from parliament two years later, at 52 years of age. He then held senior government positions, until he was charged with child-sex offences. He had received a civil decoration for his community work (27).

Elliott Lash (26 years; 2009) was a pediatric nurse who jumped to his death from the 4th floor of a building in Nashville, Tennessee. His wife had discovered pictures on his computer, of him molesting a male child, and informed the police. A police officer contacted Lash by telephone and asked him to come to the police station and to bring his lawyer. Later that day Lash died; he had the name and telephone number of the detective who spoke to him written on his hand. The police confiscated three of his computers and a large quantity of videos and still photographs. Lash was married (but recently separated) and had four children. He was a Navy veteran and had spent a short period at Austin Peay State University (28).

David Dewees (32 years; 2009) had been teaching English and Latin at Jarvis Collegiate Institute (Toronto, Canada) for six years. He was charged with sex offences involving two children in Ontario. He was released on bail, and lay on a railway track (in clear view of witnesses) and was killed by a train. "He was an excellent teacher, he was very popular with the kids," said a representative of Toronto District School Board (29).

William Evans (57 years; 2009) was charged with sexual offences claimed to have been committed against a young female nearly 30 years previously. Minutes before he was found not guilty on technical grounds (a statute of limitations issue), Evans, who had not returned to court after the lunch break, shot himself at his Florida home. He had written to the woman apologizing for his actions 8 years before he died. He had been supported in court by his wife, daughter, son-in-law and brother (30).

Ivan Bennett (64 years; 2010) hanged himself in jail in Nevada while awaiting a court appearance on charges of possessing child

pornography. He had been convicted seven years earlier for possession of child pornography and eighteen years earlier for molestation of a child. Bennett had served 22 years in the US Army and was married with three children (31).

Richard Dyde (47 years; 2010) was born and gained his first degree in the UK, before emigrating to Canada in 2001. He was arrested on charges of child pornography, arising from Project Sanctuary, a year-long investigation into child pornography which saw 57 men arrested world-wide. The day after he was released on bail, he jumped to his death. Dyde was married, held a PhD in neuroscience, and worked as a researcher at York University, Toronto. He was popular, witty and multitalented - he had recently written a biography of the pioneer aviator, George Cayley (32).

Chad Hunt (42 years; 2011) was a well-regarded family man, who had been employed as an athletics coach at the Clear Creek High School (League City, Texas) for 5 years. He was interviewed by police due to an allegation of "improper contact" with a young (16 years old) female, and placed on administrative leave by his employer, pending the outcome of the investigation. He was interviewed by police and was to be interviewed again the following day. The police found that he did not appear to be emotionally unstable. Before the second interview, he shot himself in his car. There were many expressions of sympathy and students and staff have stated that Hunt was popular and will be greatly missed (33).

Melvin Levine (71 years; 2011) was a famous pediatrician with a special interest in learning disabilities. His book, "A Mind at a Time", had been number one on the New York Times bestseller list, and he had frequently appeared on radio and television. Married, Levine died in the woods near his Rougemont, North Carolina home, of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, a day after a class-action sexual abuse and malpractice suit was filed against him. The lawsuit charged that Dr Levine performed unnecessary genital examinations on 40 boys while at Children's Hospital, Boston from 1966 to 1985 (34).

Robert Carlson (68 years; 2011), founder and president of Penobscot Community Health Care, was a married, highly respected figure in the Greater Bangor area. Three days before plunging to his death from a bridge above the Penobscot River, police had commenced investigating an allegation that Reverend Carlson had sexually abused a young boy while he was pastor at East Orrington Congregational Church, a position he had held from the late 1970s for 25 years. Hours before his death, Carlson had met with the alleged victim, now a middle-aged adult living in the area (35).

Andrew Bourne (46 years; 2012), married with two children, was a surgeon at Mammoth Lakes Hospital, California. Bourne's body was found in the region of a fish hatchery near his home in the Eastern Sierra resort area, a fortnight after bail had been posted for alleged sex crimes against a 14 years old girl. His attorney stated, "I believe these (sex) charges led to his suicide." Bourne's body was located by his GPS tracker bracelet after he had gone missing. The method of suicide was not revealed (36).

Analysis

Twenty case histories were identified from 8 countries (Table 1). The average age was 53 years, with an age range from 26 to 71 years. Details of how long these men had been conducting illegal actions is not clear in every case, but in 4 cases evidence suggests this was in the order of 30 years (Harcourt, Lucan-Roberts, Brown, Collins and Levine), and in another 4 cases, for at least 15 years (Hocquart, Rabet, Nehls and Bennett). In no report, was there mention of mental disorder, but in every case there had been actual public exposure, threat of public exposure and/or legal punishment/threat of legal punishment.

Discussion

Critics of the use of the public record for this type of study claim that journalists are not clinicians and may overlook clinical material. However, journalists have a responsibility to discover all relevant facts and are keen to expose failings of clinicians and health systems. They actively seek evidence from relevant health authorities and it is reasonable to accept that, generally speaking, if mental disorder is present, some evidence will be discovered and presented. The alternative method of assessment, the 'psychological autopsy', is also retrospective, and conducted by researchers who may find it difficult avoiding bias (37). There are various types of psychological autopsy, leading to the belief that one cannot be compared with another (38). Further, some authors have raised concern about the validity and reliability of psychological autopsies (39–41) and "the vast majority have used ill-defined instruments" (42). In these circumstances, it is reasonable to admit 'evidence' from other sources. While perhaps lacking in some regards, journalists may be less

Table 1: Details of 20 "sex only" child sex offenders who completed suicide, 'Year' and 'Location' refer to the death

Case	Year	Family name	First name	Age (years)	Location	Method
1	1922	Harcourt	Lewis	59	London, UK	Overdose
2	1991	Hocquart	Neil	40	London, UK	Overdose
3	2000	Lucan-Roberts	William	61	Sydney, Australia	Drowning
4	2004	Brown	William	52	Karangasem, Indon	Hanging
5	2006	Crosby	Bruce	59	Bastimentos, Panama	Suffocation
6	2006	Conradt	Louis	56	Terrell, USA	Gunshot
7	2006	Priklopil	Wolfgang	44	Vienna, Austria	Train
8	2006	Rabet	Nichols	57	Pattaya, Thailand	Suffocation
9	2007	Atchison	J D "Roy"	53	Michigan, USA	Hanging
10	2007	Nehls	Helmut	64	Udon Thani, Thailand	Suffocation
11	2007	Collins	Bob	61	NT, Australia	Overdose
12	2009	Lash	Elliott	26	Nashville, USA	Jumping
13	2009	Dewees	David	32	Toronto, Ca	Train
14	2009	Evans	William	57	Florida, USA	Gunshot
15	2010	Bennett	Ivan	64	Reno, USA	Hanging
16	2010	Dyde	Richard	47	Toronto, Canada	Jumping
17	2011	Hunt	Chad	42	League City, USA	Gunshot
18	2011	Levine	Melvin	71	Rougemont, USA	Gunshot
19	2011	Carlson	Robert	68	Bangor, USA	Jumping
20	2012	Bourne	Andrew	46	Mammoth Lakes, USA	Not stated

prone than some clinicians to medicalize suicide (43).

Care was taken to exclude violent individuals. For example, Urs von Aesch (67 years, 2010, Switzerland) was excluded because he is believed to have murdered his victim. We also excluded cases of mass murder-suicides involving sects or cults (e.g. the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas), where suspicions of child sexual abuse have sometimes surfaced but have played a very minor part in a complex set of factors bringing about the group's demise. The case of Priklopil may be challenged because, while the public record clearly states he imprisoned a 10 year old girl for 8 years, specific details of actual sexual acts have not been reported. The case of Collins may be challenged because while it is clear that he was facing extremely damaging accusations, he was also dealing with cancer. These two cases could be withdrawn without significantly altering the weight of the evidence presented. In the case of Collins, the 'predicament' may have been public humiliation and cancer, rather than public humiliation alone.

Many of these individuals were gainfully employed shortly before their deaths (Hocquart, photographer; Lucan-Roberts, teacher; Brown, teacher; Priklopil, IT specialist; Atchison, prosecutor; Conradt, prosecutor; Collins, bureaucrat; Lash, nurse; Dewees, teacher; Carlson, administrator; Bourne, surgeon), counting against the possibility of serious mental disorder other than pedophilia.

If pedophilia is accepted as a mental disorder, the question arises as to whether the pedophilia or the exposure/punishment (actual or likely) is the more telling predicament/factor in the suicide. As the described individuals appear to have 'suffered' pedophilia for years, but completed suicide within days of exposure (or threat of exposure), it is reasonable to suggest that the exposure/punishment was a potent influential factor. This is consistent with Durkheim's conception that social factors account for most cases of suicide (10). While the suicides described in this study have prominent social triggers, they do not fit snugly - individually or collectively - into any one subtype in the classification offered by Durkheim

("anomic" suicide would perhaps be closest) (10) or the classifications described by later theorists like Baechler ("escape-type" suicide is the most relevant of Baechler's subtypes) (44).

Conclusion

Without downplaying the prominent role of underlying mental illness in many cases of completed suicide, it would appear that sometimes there are other pathways to this event. Predicaments alone – in this case series, publicly exposed pedophilia – may be a sufficient trigger, and therefore warrant further attention and study.

Authors' Contribution

Conception and design, analysis and interpretation of the data, drafting of the article, critical revision of the article for important intellectual content, final approval of the article, provision of study materials or patient, statistical expertise, and collection and assembly of data: GW, SP

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