A quantitative study looking at the effect of victimisation history disclosure and gender on blameworthiness assessments of child exploitation.

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ABSTRACT

Within recent years, media and public interest has grown surrounding cases of child exploitation here in the UK. However, individuals attributing blame to the victims has been reported within previous research (Menaker and Miller, 2012). This study aims to investigate whether including victimisation history and the gender of a victim of child sexual exploitation influences participants blameworthiness assessments. The study used a volunteer sample of 100 Manchester Metropolitan University students, all over the age of 18. The study utilised vignette scenarios followed by a questionnaire assessing culpability attributions. The results suggested that although the gender of the victim, and the interaction between gender and victimisation history was not significant, providing participants with the victim's victimisation history did significantly reduce blameworthiness attributions. A belief in a Just World, Defensive attribution and the Culpable Control Model have all been used to investigate the mechanisms behind this change in blame assessment. Future research should aim to examine a selection of different victim and observer related variables, with reference to their effect on blame attribution.

KEY WORDS:	CHILD SEXUAL EXPLIOTATION	GENDER	VICTIMISATION HISTORY	BLAME ATTRIBUTION	STUDENT POPULATION

Introduction

Rotherham, Rochdale, Bristol and Telford. Three years ago, these locations would not have appeared to have any link, but they all now share a similar connection; the uncovering of wide spread child sexual exploitation (CSE). Mass media interest and increased public interest relating to this issue has led to multiple serious case reviews (SCR) that have focused on CSE within these cities. Although these locations have been at the centre of the widespread public interest into this misunderstood form of abuse, it unfortunately isn't a localised issue; instead they act as a microcosm to represent wider society, a world-wide silent epidemic. A report by The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in the UK has indicated that there has been a 16% year-on-year increase in reports of CSE, from 5,411 reports in 2008/9 to 6,291 in 2009/10 (CEOP, 2011). The severity of this silent epidemic was made clear in 2015, when the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, held a summit on child sexual exploitation with the aim to update policies and hold those that have failed vulnerable children accountable. Within his speech he spoke directly about the victims from Rochdale and how professional perceptions of victims of CSE had affected the treatment of survivors and the punishment of perpetrators (David Cameron, 2015). Unfortunately, although this is an area of key concern for the public and government officials, there is a startling lack of empirical literature and research investigating how individuals perceive and attribute levels of blame to victims of child sexual exploitation, which this study aims to investigate. This section begins with a broad overview of key terms that relate to the present study, followed by theory and research relating to blame attribution, and finally, specific research investigating blame attribution towards victims of CSE.

Throughout the years, a variety of terms have been used to describe victims of CSE. One of the most frequently used is 'child prostitute'. This inaccurate term, which wrongly implies an act of willingness (Lebloch and King, 2006), has itself fuelled the misconceptions, and increased blame attribution directed towards individuals that are in no way to blame. The large media and public interest that has grown surrounding CSE has in part resulted in many policies being updated, including the UK's definition for child sexual exploitation, which is as follows: '*Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for financial advantage. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.*' (Department for Education, 2017). In every case of child sexual exploitation, there is a huge misbalance of power that favours the perpetrator (Alderson, 2016).

In theory, the idea of blaming an individual, especially a child for the abuse they have suffered, appears to be ridiculous. However, it has been found to be a lot more common, and possibly more automatic, than one may at first think (Bridges and Steen,

1998). Culpability attributions, or attribution of blame is defined as 'ascriptions of blame, responsibility, and causality' to the victim personally and their exploitation (Menaker and Miller, 2012). The negative consequences on victims when individuals attribute blame on them has been well documented (Suarez, 2010; Fanflick, 2007). It not only isolates the individuals and leads to self-blame, it creates a barrier that stops them reporting the abuse and seeking help (Ahrens, 2006). It is for this reason that understanding the mechanisms that cause culpability attributions to this vulnerable population is of importance.

One of the most popular and extensively researched theories investigating blame attributions is The Just World Hypothesis (Learner, 1980). The Just World Hypothesis stipulates that individuals have a fundamental core belief that the world is a fair and just place, meaning that bad things should only happen to bad people, and vice-versa. This belief allows individuals to maintain a sense of control over the world, making it appear to be a more predictable place (Fetchenhauer, 2005). This therefore causes increased blame attribution towards victims of CSE, as individuals will blame the victim for what happened to them, simply to ensure that it couldn't happen to 'good' people. This increased blame attribution allows individuals to maintain their view of a just, righteous world. Stromwall (2013) found that blame attributions were generally higher for individuals with a strong belief in a Just World. Correspondingly, this links with blame attributions of victims of child sexual exploitation, as CSE itself violates individual's perception of fairness and justice within the world, as they are confronted with an innocent child to whom something awful has occurred. This should therefore mean that observers will naturally attribute more blame to these victims to maintain their core belief in a just world (Vonderhaar and Carmody, 2015).

A further interesting finding reported within Stromwall's (2013) study was that male victims were blamed significantly more than female victims. In relation to the present study, this provides further evidence for a discrepancy within individuals when the gender of the victim is disclosed, which has a significant impact on their levels of blame attribution. Within the last 10 years there has been a rise in investigating the difference in blame assessments for males and females, but it has focused on different victim populations, most commonly sexual assault victims (Bruggen, 2014; Davies and Pollard 2001). It has been suggested that male victims are attributed higher blame for their actions compared to female victims (Howard, 1984). Although this research is investigating blame attributions of victims of sexual assault not CSE, research conducted by Davies and Rogers (2009) investigating blame attributions of adolescent male rape victims found that the victims, who according to the DFE (2017) definition are still classed as children under age, were attributed higher levels of blame than female victims. This startling finding demonstrates that there is a serious lack of research investigating blame assessments with gender as a victim-variable in cases of CSE.

The theory of defensive attribution provides a further explanation as to why individuals may attribute blame to the victims of sexual abuse. It states that we have a tendency to attribute a 'cause' to events. This is due to it making us uncomfortable to think that bad events happen just by accident or chance. In regard to blame attribution to victims of different forms of sexual abuse, this theory states that the level of blame that is attributed to the victim depends on how much the observer identifies with the victim (Idisis, 2017). This means that if an individual identifies with the victim and finds similarities between themselves, there will be less attribution of blame. Research conducted by Bongiorno (2016) provides evidence for this theory's explanation of blame attribution. It was found that cultural similarities between the participants and the victims significantly affected the level of blame attribution. To further support the theory of defensive attribution more directly to the present study, Miller et al. (2011) found that when participants were provided with the victimisation history of a female victim of sexual assault, this significantly increased the participants perception of similarity to the victim, and subsequently reduced their blame attribution towards her. This therefore provides a theoretical framework as to why providing an individual's victimisation history may decrease blame attribution.

A more recent theoretical framework has been applied directly to blame attribution of victims of CSE; The Culpable Control Model (Alicke, 2000). This model proposes that for an individual to blame another, *blame-validation* (Alicke, 2000) is necessary. This is thought to have a direct role in an individual's judgemental biases. Blame-validation occurs when an individual tries to find evidence to validate their original blame attribution. This often results in a biased evidence collecting approach, and therefore means that individuals are more inclined to blame those whose behaviour in some way confirms their 'unfavourable expectations' (Alicke, 2000). This therefore means that blame, as a concept, is very subjective. This is due to perceiver variables having an impact on the level of blame attributed to the victim. For blame-validation to occur, one must already hold negative stereotypes/concepts towards the victim which they then try to validate.

Evidence has suggested that observers attribute an individual's behaviour to either internal or external causes (Bridges & Steen, 1998). When internal forces (appearance, moral values, characteristics) are attributed to the individual's behaviour, the individual is viewed as greater to blame for their circumstance. On the contrary, when behaviour is attributed to external (environmental/situational) causes, the victim is blamed significantly less for their behaviour (Carroll & Payne, 1977; Menaker & Miller, 2012). For this reason, it could be hypothesised that disclosing victimisation history results in observers attributing the individual's behaviour more to external causes, and thus reducing blame attribution.

There has been a handful of research that has specifically investigated factors that impact participants perception of culpability attributions to victims of CSE. Franklin (2014) used questionnaires and vignette scenarios to investigate whether disclosing

victimisation history and victim race had a significant effect of the attribution of blame towards victim of child sexual exploitation. In line with similar research (Reisel, 2016), observers that read vignettes that included victimisation history had significantly reduced blame attributions. Moreover, the race of the vignette youth was also significant in affecting blameworthiness attributions, as a Caucasian female youth was attributed significantly more blame than the African female youth. Nonetheless, when the participants where provided with the victim's victimisation history, the race of the youth had no significant impact on 'subjects blameworthiness assessment' (Franklin 2014). Thus, this suggests that victimisation history disclosure has an extremely significant effect on blame attribution, enough so that other factors that may have originally affected blame assessments are no longer relevant to such assessment.

The present study takes direct inspiration from Menaker and Millers (2012) study investigating 'culpability attributions towards juvenile female prostitutes'. This study draws directly from Alicke's (2000) Culpable Control Model as previously mentioned. This model is fundamental in terms of Menaker and Millers (2012) research and the present study, as it states that information participants receive about the CSE victim will either escalate or reduce blame attributions. Furthermore, this model predicts that reduced culpability attributions are assigned when the observer is made aware of external/circumstantial reasoning's for the victim's behaviour. This should therefore mean that providing victimisation history will decrease blame attributions. This was the exact finding from their study. Participants that received a vignette condition containing victimisation history were significantly less likely to attribute blame upon the victim as compared to the participants that didn't receive the victimisation history (control group). Comparatively, the participants that received the victimisation history were more likely to support the victim receiving a restorative criminal justice response, instead of a punitive response which those in the control group endorsed (Menaker, 2013). This finding demonstrates the real-world implication that this research may have. Historically, the criminal justice system requires the judge and officials to identify a person to 'blame' for an event (Franklin, 2008), and as research has demonstrated (Menaker and Miller, 2012; Idisis, 2017), just one factor, such as including a brief victimisation history, can dramatically affect an individual's blame assessment.

It is important to remember the previously mentioned serious case reviews conducted in Rochdale, Rotherham and Bristol. It is these case reports that have triggered the start of a selection of research and literature addressing the ongoing issue of CSE (Reisel, 2016). Within these reports, victims and officials discussed the many issues that allowed this exploitation to go unnoticed. A major theme within the reports was the impact of practitioners' perceptions of victims of CSE, and how these negative blame assessments directly impacted the children being exploited. In Bristol, the SCR concluded that professional decision making was affected due to individuals misunderstanding what CSE was, and a misconception that the children involved were doing so consensually (Myers and Carmi 2016). Similar issues were reported in the SCR for Rotherham and Rochdale (Jay, 2014; Griffiths, 2013). Professionals were

found to often describe victims of CSE as 'child prostitutes' and attributed their behaviour to internal causes (Reisel 2016). This shows the huge implication blame assessments can have on the victims, and the need for increased research investigating the factors that affect blame attribution.

There is an ever-increasing breadth of research investigating how and why children become victims of CSE (Dodsworth, 2014; Firmin, 2013; Pearce, 2010). Despite this there is a startling gap in research concerning the effect of victim-related variables on culpability attributions towards children involved in CSE (Melrose, 2002; Menaker and Miller, 2012). This lack of attention into this area is surprising as other victim populations (eg. sexual assault victims) have been at the forefront of research and theory investigating such negative, stigmatising attributions (Miller, 2011). This gap within research investigating factors that impact blame attribution of such a vulnerable victim population is an issue the present study aims to begin to address.

Drawing upon previous research (Menaker and Miller 2012), this study hypothesises that; (1) Information presented to participants concerning the young person's victimisation history will significantly decrease participants perception of blameworthiness for the sexually exploited individual; (2) Information presented to the participants concerning the young person's gender will differentially reduce blameworthiness for the sexually exploited individual.

Method

Design
This quantitative study used an experimental design. There were two independent variables within this study; the within subject's factor was the victimisation history disclosure, this was either provided in the vignette or left out. Secondly, the between subject's factor was the gender of the victim, either a female victim (Hannah) or a male victim (Mark). The dependant variable within this study was the level of blameworthiness attributed to the victim within the vignettes. This design has proven to be effective in previous studies also investigating the impact that several independent variables have on blameworthiness attributions (Menaker 2013).

Participants
In total, 104 participants were recruited to participate in this study. Due to incomplete data entries, 4 participants were excluded from the final sample. A volunteer sample was used to recruit suitable participants with the use of Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) internal participation pool, in which they gained module credits for taking part. It has been demonstrated in previous research that internal university recruitment pools have been successful in recruiting a volunteer sample for similar research (Menaker and Miller 2012). The exclusion criteria ensured that all participants where aged 18 or above and current university students. Participant

gender or age was not recorded as the current study was not focused on specific individual differences.

Ethical Considerations

The present study was granted ethical approval to conduct research through Manchester Metropolitan University (Appendix 1). The British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics, Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) was adhered to throughout the present study. This includes participant information sheet (Appendix 3) , consent forms and debrief forms (Appendix 4). Additionally, due to the sensitive topic area covered in this study, information to access support services was provided, including Manchester Metropolitans Counselling service (Appendix 3).

Materials

To access this study participants were required to have access to the internet and a Manchester Metropolitan University account, as the data was collected online with the use of a questionnaire created on Qualtrics which was only available on MMU's internal participation pool. This data collection method meant it was easy for participants to access the study where and whenever was most suitable for each individual, furthermore the use of the participation pool ensured only students had access to the questionnaire. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness on online questionnaires when researching levels of blame attributions towards victims of child sexual exploitation (Menaker 2013).

Before clicking the link to participate, an invitation letter was provided on the participation pool outlining what would be required and a brief overview of the study (See Appendix 2). Following this, once the participants clicked the link to take part, an information sheet (Appendix 3) was then provided online within Qualtrics. This explained that all results would be anonymous, along with the participants right to withdraw. Within the information sheet it was also explained that due to the sensitive nature of this study anyone with experiences of sexual assault and/or exploitation were advised not to take part. At the end of the information sheet the participants were required to give informed consent to take part, and could not progress further if informed consent was not given. At the end of the study a debrief form (Appendix 4) was provided online also on Qualtrics. This informed the participant of further details of the study and what was being investigated. They were also reminded again of their right to withdraw, and given contact details of the research supervisor if there were any further concerns or questions. Importantly, the debrief form also provided information to access counselling services due to the sensitive nature of the questionnaire.

Culpability Attribution

The Culpability Attribution Scale (Menaker and Miller 2012) was used within the questionnaire to assess blameworthiness. Menaker and Miller (2012) created this scale to assess culpability attributions towards 'juvenile female prostitutes'. This scale

consisted of a 3-item index ('to blame for circumstance', 'responsible for circumstance' and 'cause of circumstance'). Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*) (Appendix 5). Each of the participants scores for the 3 items were added to create a range from 3-18, with higher scores indicating higher culpability attributions/blameworthiness. Menaker and Miller (2012) found the Cronbach's Alpha for this scale to be 0.79 which suggests it has good internal consistency. This scale has been used successfully in research since (Menaker 2013).

Vignettes

The vignettes used in the present study were adapted from Menaker and Miller (2012). The original vignette was developed using information regarding 'juvenile female prostitutes'. It described a female, 16 year old run away, who entered prostitution to provide money for food, shelter and a drug habit. It then continues to explain that she lives with her pimp who controls her finances, along with living with other prostitutes and losing all contact with her family. In the scenario containing her victimisation history disclosure, there is further information concerning abuse she suffered within her family and the manipulation/abuse of her pimp. The present study used an adapted version of Menaker and Millers (2012) vignettes. In total there were 4 different versions; an adolescent female prostitute without victimisation history provided (Appendix 6), a female with victimisation history (Appendix 7), an adolescent male prostitute without victimisation history (Appendix 8), and finally a male with victimisation history provided (Appendix 9). Each participant would either get the two female vignettes, or the two male vignettes, allowing for both independent variables to be tested. The present study has made use of these vignettes as it has been shown that within questionnaire-based research, vignettes are significantly more reliable and realistic than just a set of questions (Alexander & Becker 1978).

Procedure

Participants were recruited using MMU's participation pool by logging on and clicking on the link to take part. Once the link was clicked which took them to the questionnaire on Qualtrics, they were greeted with an online participant information sheet and asked to give consent to have their results used for this study. They were unable to access the questionnaire without consenting first. Participants were then also required to make a unique 6-digit ID (Appendix 10) which would be used if they wanted to withdraw their results. Participants were then provided with either the male vignette or female vignette and asked to read each scenario before answering 3 questions to assess culpability attributes on a 5-point Likert scale. Once this was completed twice, once for the vignette with victimisation history and then once without, they were provided with an online debrief form and access to support services. The data collected was then stored privately on SPSS.

Results

Descriptive statistics for victimisation history disclosure and gender were created. The mean and standard deviation for gender and victimisation history disclosure is shown in Table 1 (N = 100).

	Male Victim			Female Victim		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Blame score No VHD	50	3.25	.93	50	3.19	.88
Blame score VHD	50	4.23	.85	50	4.27	.62

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for both Independent variables

A mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of two interventions (victimisation history and gender) on participants scores of blameworthiness across two different vignette scenarios. There was no significant interaction between victimisation history and gender, Wilks' Lambda = .99, $F(1,98) = .37$, $p = .58$, partial eta squared = .003. There was a substantial main effect for victimisation history, Wilks' Lambda = .44, $F(1,98) = 125.01$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .56, with both groups showing a reduction in blameworthiness scores in the condition with victimisation history provided (Table 1). The main effect of the between subject factor of gender was not significant, $F(1,98) = .003$, $p = .95$, partial eta squared = .000, suggesting no difference in the effect of gender of the victim in both conditions.
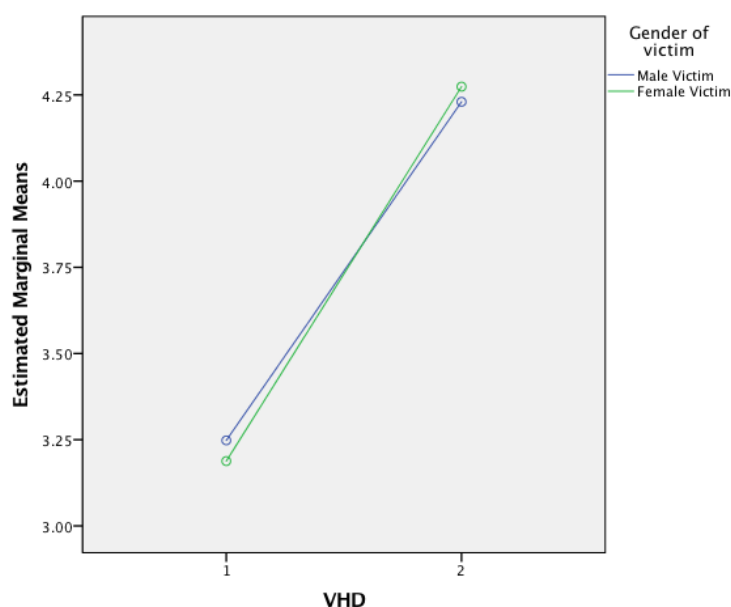

Figure 1. A graph to show the mean scores for victimisation history disclosure and the gender conditions.

The present study therefore shows that there was no significant interaction between both independent variables; victimisation history and gender. There was also no significant effect of the gender of the victim within the vignettes, meaning hypothesis 2 is rejected due to gender not significantly effecting participants blameworthiness scores. However, there was a significant effect for victimisation history disclosure ($p <$ .001). This shows that participants blameworthiness scores were significantly lower in the condition with victimisation history provided, compared to there being no victimisation history disclosure. This means that hypothesis 1 was supported as presenting the young person's victimisation history did significantly decrease the participants perception of blameworthiness.

Discussion

The current study aimed to address the gap in research investigating culpability attributions towards victims of CSE. It was found that there was no significant interaction between the victim-related variables, victimisation history disclosure and gender. Gender was also found to not be significant in affecting the participants blameworthiness score. However, the effect of including victimisation history was significant in reducing blameworthiness scores.

The present study hypothesised that information presented to participants, which concerns the young person's victimisation history, will decrease participant perceptions of blameworthiness. The results from the current study supports this hypothesis. Research has consistently shown that culpability attributions are significantly lowered when participants are provided with the victim's victimisation history (Menaker and Miller, 2012; Reisel, 2016; Menaker, 2013; Franklin, 2014). The results from the current study add to this previous literature, as disclosing the victim's victimisation history significantly lowered blameworthiness scores.

This finding from the present study also provides further theoretical support for the Culpable Control Model (Alicke, 2000). This model predicted that when an individual is made aware of external reasons for the victim's behaviour, (in this case providing victimisation history), blame attributions should be significantly lower (Carroll & Payne, 1977). This was exactly what the current study found. The Culpable Control Model provides a theoretical framework to the current and previous studies (Menaker and Miller, 2012; Miller, 2013). The model can also be applied to other victim populations in an effort to explain why individuals may victim blame and generates further research and evidence into factors that can reduce this. Previous research (Idisis, 2017) has also suggested that these findings may also support the theory of defensive attribution. This theory explains the significance of victimisation history disclosure on culpability attributions, as it states that individuals attribute less blame onto victims when they relate to them. This suggests that the victimisation history allows the observer to find similarities between themselves and the victim. It could also be suggested that the

participants go from viewing the victim as just a victim/stranger, to an individual with a personality and a life that the participants themselves may relate to. It is this shift in view that lowers participants culpability attribution.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the gender of the victim within the vignettes was not significant in effecting blameworthiness scores. This finding does not support previous research that reported individuals attributed higher levels of blame to male victims compared to female (Davis & Rogers, 2009; Howard, 1984). This result may appear positive as it suggests there are no gender discrepancies in regard to culpability attributions of victims of CSE. It does, however, mean that further research is needed to investigate if these findings are generalizable to the wider population, and if not, what factors lead individuals to blame one gender more than the other (Bruggen, 2014).

Implications
The findings from the current study suggest that making individuals aware of a victim's previous victimisation history has a huge impact on subsequent culpability attributions. These results have important implications not only for future research, but also for the criminal justice system and professionals working with vulnerable children that are victims of CSE.

A potential implication for this research would include court room decisions regarding victims of CSE, as the factors investigated within the current study may impact juror's real-world judgements. The results have suggested that including simply the individual's victimisation history has a significant impact on culpability attributions. As previously stated, the criminal justice system requires a level of blame attribution (Franklin, 2008). Someone has to be found to be at blame for an event. It could be suggested, that the current study supports the need for changes within this system, to include victim's victimisation history within the court rooms, to allow the jury to make more informed culpability attributions.

Additionally, the majority of literature surrounding culpability attributions are conducted in America, using American students (Menaker and Miller, 2012; Franklin, 2014; Miller et al. 2011). This therefore means that it is challenging to directly generalise the results to UK situations and policy. Given the rise in public and media interest in cases of CSE within the UK, the present study has broader applications within the UK to bring to light the issues surrounding culpability attributions of victims. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, to date the majority of research conducted looking at CSE has been done so by charities (Alderson, 2016). To further understand the mechanisms and factors behind blame attributions of victims of CSE, it is important for empirical literature to be discussed in relation to different disciplines, and a variety of observer-variables and victim-variables to be investigated. It is hoped that the present study will contribute to this ongoing investigation within the UK.

Another key point in relation to the current studies implications, regards the negative effects of victim blaming on the victims themselves. The negative impact of victim blame has been well documented (Stromwall, 2013). It can cause individuals to not only blame themselves but also not report or seek help for their situation, which with CSE already being so hidden is a huge issue. The current study is evidence that providing victimisation history significantly reduces culpability attributions, and therefore reduces victim blaming. With this in mind, it may be of use for public media outlets to be made aware of this effect, as often the first the public hears of cases of CSE is through mainstream media. If individuals are presented with previous victimisation history, these findings suggest that this may assist in reducing victim blaming on a broader scale.

<u>Limitations</u>
There are several limitations of the current study that should be acknowledged. First of all, this study only used a small student sample. This is important to note, not only because it is hard to justify generalising results from only 100 students to the wider population (Franklin 2014), but most importantly, young student populations may have very different culpability attributions than older generations. Younger generations are renowned for being more liberal and forward thinking than the latter, and within research looking at blame attribution, this could have a significant impact.

Secondly, because the present study did not collect the participants age, gender or ethnicity, these may have been factors that could have affected the results. Previous research has suggested a link between participant variables, like age and ethnicity. Jimenez (2003) found that Latino students, compared to white students, were more likely to hold negative stereotypes surrounding victims of sexual abuse, and therefore have increased culpability attributions. The same has been said for males and females. Schneider (2009) reported that males tended to attribute higher levels of blame to victims than females. This therefore means that the findings from the present study cannot be generalised to all ethnic or cultural populations.

The final limitation to be considered is related to the methodology. The current study used a quantitative design, which is effective in gathering a larger quantity of data, but it may not accurately show peoples real-world attitudes. It could be suggested that when looking at such a sensitive topic like CSE, and investigating such a subjective concept like blame, a qualitative approach may be beneficial in gathering richer accounts of the mechanisms surrounding culpability attributions (Given, 2008). Once a quantitative research study has been conducted to identify significant factors effecting blameworthiness, qualitative data collection could be suggested for future research to further investigate the specific factors.

Future research

In terms of the direction of future research, it would firstly be very beneficial to investigate other victim-related variables such as ethnicity. The current study found no significant effect of the gender of the victim on blame attributions, but other factors may play a more significant role. It is also important to note that participant-variables could also be further investigated, and their interaction with the victim related variables.

In addition, it would be beneficial for future research to use a broader and more varied participant population. This should also include practitioners and officials working with victims of CSE. Given the evidence that suggests a variety of factors effect blame attribution, it would be insightful to investigate whether the effect of factors, including victimisation history disclosure, can be generalised to individuals in direct contact with victims, as their perception could have a drastic impact on the victim themselves. To further this, future research may benefit from investigating which individual characteristics act as predictors for blame assessments. This could then be applied directly within the field, as it may be suggested that practitioners that are regularly in contact with victims of CSE should be made aware of characteristics that impact blame assessments.

Conclusion

To summarise, the present study intended to expand on previous literature examining the effect of victimisation history, and the gender of the victim on blameworthiness assessments of victims of child sexual exploitation. Although only victimisation history was found to be significant in reducing blameworthiness scores, throughout this study it has been made apparent that to address the issues facing victims as a result of increased culpability attributions, it is important to be aware of why individuals make such strong blame judgements. Defensive Attribution Theory, Just World Theory and the Culpable Control Model have all been used to gain a psychological understanding into the reasoning behind individuals blame assessments. The findings from the current study may be used as a preliminary foundation to help to expand on this developing area of research investigating culpability attributions to victims of CSE. It is hoped that future research within this area will begin to advance knowledge about the consequences and nature of these attributions.

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