

Study uncovers brain changes in offending pedophiles

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New research reveals that certain alterations in the brain may be present in pedophiles, with differences between hands-on offenders and those who have not sexually offended against children.

For the study, researchers conducted imaging tests of the brains of pedophiles with and without a history of hand-on sexual offences against children, as well as healthy non-offending controls, during an assessment of what's called a response-inhibition task. Activation patterns in certain regions of the brain distinguished between offending and non-offending pedophiles. The differences suggest that non-offending pedophiles might deploy a compensatory mechanism in the brain that provides greater self-control.

The findings indicate that interventions aimed at fostering basic inhibitory control abilities might help prevent child sex offences.

"In the community, pedophilia is often equated with child molestation but it is evident that pedophilia is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to engage in child sexual offending. This means that not all individuals with a diagnosis of pedophilia commit child sexual offences, just as many persons who sexually offend against children are not pedophilic," said Dr. Christian Kärger, lead author of the *Human Brain Mapping* study. "Our finding of differences in the neuroimaging profile during the assessment of a response-inhibition task underlines the importance to distinguish between pedophilic hands-on offenders and those who have not sexually offended against children in terms of

separate clinical entities."

The study is part of a large multisite collaborative project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany examining the neural mechanisms associated with pedophilia and sexual offending against children. "Though we are also interested to improve our understanding of the neurobiological mechanisms underlying such deviant sexual preferences per se, results of the present study improve our understanding of the mechanisms that may promote or preserve pedophiles from becoming a perpetrator," said senior author Dr. Boris Schiffer. "Such information is important in order to develop and evaluate effective abuse-preventive interventions, in particular for pedophiles who already engaged in child sexual offending or those at risk."

More information: Christian Kärgel et al, Evidence for superior neurobiological and behavioral inhibitory control abilities in non-offending as compared to offending pedophiles, *Human Brain Mapping* (2016). [DOI: 10.1002/hbm.23443](https://doi.org/10.1002/hbm.23443)

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