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# A COMPARISON OF INCESTUOUS BIOLOGICAL AND STEPFATHERS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Biological and stepfathers who committed incestuous acts on their daughters were compared on sexual history and preference and on personality, using the Phallometric Test of Erotic Preference (Freund & Blanchard, 1989), the Clarke Sex History Questionnaire (Langevin, et al, 1990), and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The cases were drawn from a data base of 200 incest offenders seen for psychological assessment. Results showed that the two groups of fathers did not differ significantly in their penile responses to pictures of men, women, boys, and girls, and most showed largest responses to adult females. However a significant percentage of both groups showed largest responses to children, indicating pedophilia. Although there was considerable individual variation in sexual history, offenders in both groups had most of their sexual experiences with adult females. Experiences with males were infrequent and limited to adults. The two groups showed few differences in personality. Nevertheless substantial numbers of offenders in both groups showed anxiety, disturbed family background and confused thinking. The results overall showed few differences between incestuous biological and stepfathers in sexual history and preferences and in personality. Similar dynamics appear operative in the two groups, i.e., pedophilia, limited sexual history, and personality pathology are present in selected cases. Possible group differences in other factors prominent in sexual offenders, e.g., substance abuse or neuropsychological impairment, have yet to be examined.

**Langevin, R., & Watson, R. (1991). A comparison of incestuous biological and stepfathers. *Annals of Sex Research*, 4, 141-150.**

Biological and stepfathers who commit incest on their daughters have been compared only in a few studies, none of which examine sexual history or penile responses to adults and children. Comparative demographic studies, reviewed by Gordon (1989) indicate that stepfathers are more likely than biological fathers to sexually abuse their children, especially their daughters. This finding has been noted by other authors (cf. Vander May & Neff, 1986; and Cicchetti & Carlson, 1990). Finkelhor (1979) reported that girls with stepfathers are 150% as likely to be victims of incest as are girls living with their natural fathers. Russell (1984) found that not only was stepchild sexual abuse more likely than biological child sexual abuse, but the types of abuse committed by stepfathers are more serious, i.e., involve more intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, analingus and anal intercourse, and are more violent. Gordon and Creighton (1988) however found the opposite, that is, biological fathers were more likely to engage in intercourse with their daughters than stepfathers were.

Gordon (1989) argued that biological fathers have stronger emotional links to their children and also have a greater commitment to the father role. He found in his study of 4132 cases of sexual abuse by biological fathers and 2241 cases by stepfathers that 67.0% of the biological fathers' victims compared to 45.6% of stepfathers' victims were under 11 years of age, a significant difference. Gordon theorized from this finding that there are more pedophiles among biological incestuous fathers. However, pedophilia may be used here in a behavioral sense of acting out with physically immature (prepubescent) children as opposed to exhibiting a sexual preference for children. Phallometric study of the cases would be more informative in determining whether the offenders have an erotic preference for children over adults. Of the penile plethysmographic studies available, results suggest that, for the most part, incest offenders are sexually aroused more by adult females than by children (cf. Frenzel & Lang, 1989; Freund & Watson, 1991; and Quinsey, Chaplin, and Carrigan, 1979). These studies, however, have not differentiated biological and stepfathers.

Gordon also found that there was a small difference in the percentages of alcohol and drug dependent fathers (23% biological and 17% stepfathers) in his study, a finding that was statistically significant by virtue of the large sample sizes used. Further, 26.4% of biological fathers' and 23.2% of stepfathers' families suffered stress due to 'mental/emotional health of caretaker'. However, the nature of these stressors were not specified.

Faller (1989) compared 55 biological fathers with 56 stepfathers and found that 38% of biological versus 18% of stepfathers has experienced sexual abuse as children in their family of origin. The rate for both groups combined is close to the rate for nonsex offenders in general, as computed by Hanson (1988), at 28%. However when cases with no information on this question are excluded, the results are even more dramatic with 58% of biological and 23% of stepfathers

experiencing sexual abuse themselves as children.

A number of personality traits have been ascribed to incest perpetrators, but little data is available on differences in biological and stepfathers. Meiselman (1984), for example, noted that incest fathers are seldom pedophiles nor are they mentally retarded, but they suffer from some sort of personality disturbance that interferes with the temptation to commit incest. Abuse of alcohol is often a factor, but criminal history is not. Although most incestuous fathers do not fit any psychiatric diagnosis, they may be shy and inhibited in social relationships. They tend to be very dependent on their family and at the same time they are arrogant and domineering. They may have difficulties approaching the opposite sex and suffer from an 'inferiority complex'. Gordon and Creighton (1988) argued that, based on existing information, sexual abuse of children within a natal family would be symptomatic of a higher level of social and psychological pathology than the same behavior in a non-natal family. However, they found few differences between biological and stepfathers; rather they were similar and it was noncustodial males who showed more pathology.

In the present investigation, biological and stepfathers were compared for the first time, to our knowledge, on standard measures of personality, sexual history, and sexual preference.

## METHOD

### Research Participants

A data base of 200 incest offenders was examined for cases of biological and stepfathers sexually involved with their daughters. After exclusion of men not fitting these categories and of men who completed the MMPI-2 versus MMPI-1, or who were unable to complete tests because of illiteracy, neuropsychological impairment, or lack of cooperation; a total of 122 cases remained. There were 79 biological fathers and 43 stepfathers. On the basis of chance, a higher proportion of stepfathers should have been obtained since stepfathers are reported as more likely to sexually abuse their daughters. Thus, the sample may be biased in unknown ways, reflecting referral practices of community agencies and lawyers to our clinic.

### Procedure

The men in the two groups were referred to our clinic for assessment and/or treatment. Most were referred by lawyers pretrial. As part of the assessment,

the men were administered, wherever possible, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-1), the Clarke Sex History Questionnaire for Males (Langevin, Paitich, et al, 1990), and a phallometric test of erotic preference, originally developed by Freund et al. (1972) and reported in a number of previous studies (c.f. Freund and Blanchard, 1989). Essentially the client is shown pictures of men, women, boys and girls while changes in penile volume are monitored (penile plethysmography). Other measures were also examined but are not discussed here (cf. Langevin, 1990, for more details).

## RESULTS

### *Age & Education*

The age and education of the two groups are shown in Table 1. There were no significant differences in the two groups. Both groups were in their late thirties on average and were high school dropouts.

**Table 1**  
**Age and Education of Incest Perpetrators**  
**And**  
**Number And Sex of Their Victims**

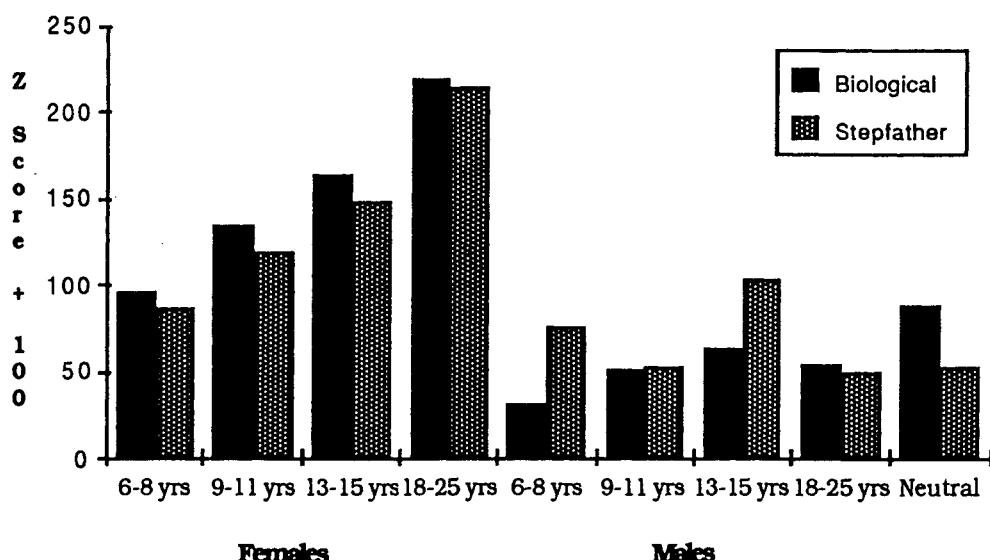
	Biological Fathers (N=79)	Stepfathers (N=43)	t Value/Chi Square
Age in years	37.04	37.49	0.29
Education in years	11.46	10.72	1.06
Number of Victims			1.60
Percent of group with:			
1 Victim	79.7	72.1	
2 Victims	12.7	18.6	
3 Victims	3.8	7.0	
4 Victims	3.8	2.3	
Sex Of Victims			3.42
% Female	88.6	90.7	
% Male	8.9	2.3	
% Both	2.5	7.0	

### Number & Sex of Victims

Also shown in Table 1 are the number and sex of the incest victims. There were again no significant group differences. The majority of both groups had molested a solitary female, however, up to 4 victims were noted in a few cases and 6.6% had molested males with 4.1% molesting both their male and female children. Only cases who sexually assaulted their daughters were analysed further.

### Sexual History & Preference

The results of phallometric testing were Z-scored within person and the two groups were compared on penile reactions to the stimulus categories, using multivariate analysis of variance. The results are shown in Figure 1. The results for stimulus categories were significant, as expected (Wilks Lambda = 0.24345, df = 8, 43, exact F = 16.70, p < .001). Reactions were larger to females than to males in both groups. Within responses to females, largest reactions were to adult females and became progressively smaller as the female subject in



**Figure 1**  
**Penile Reactions of Biological and Stepfathers**  
**to Sex and Age Stimulus Categories**

the pictures became less physically mature. Responses to males were essentially at the level of sexually neutral materials as were reactions to the youngest age group of females.

When the two groups were compared, there were no statistically significant differences (group by stimulus interaction: Wilks Lambda = 0.85243, df= 8, 43,  $F = 0.93$ ,  $p > .05$ ). These results indicate that, as groups, both the biological and stepfathers react more to physically mature females than to children.

To provide an index of sex preference, the sum of penile responses to males was subtracted from the sum of penile responses to females (cf. Freund, Watson, & Dickey, 1991, for a discussion of this index). The resulting Sex Preference Index (SPI) did not differ significantly between biological and stepfathers. All men reacted more to females (positive SPI) than males with the exception of 2 (5.4%) biological and 3 (20.0%) stepfathers who were low responders.

A comparison was made of responses to adults and pubescents versus children for male and female stimuli separately. Two indices were computed 1) Heterosexual Pedophilic Index (Sum of responses to adult and pubescent females minus sum of responses to female children ages 6 - 11), and, 2) the Homosexual Pedophilic Index (Sum of responses to adult and pubescent males minus sum of responses to male children ages 6 - 11). Again, neither index significantly differentiated biological and stepfathers. Nine (24.32%) biological and 2 (13.33%) stepfathers reacted more to female children than to female adults, suggesting that 21.15% of the incest offenders overall were pedophiles but the two study groups did not differ significantly in the incidence of this sexual anomaly. The groups did not differ on the homosexual pedophilic index.

Results of the Clarke SHQ Scales are shown in Table 2. Overall there was considerable variability in the sexual history and experience within the two groups but there were no significant differences between the groups. Most men in the two groups had their sexual experiences with females and any contacts with males tended to be restricted to adults. For the most part they denied any unusual sexual behavior with the exception of contacts with female minors. Compared to community controls using the SHQ standartization, only Pubescent and Child Female Frequency scores were higher and noteworthy. Of the 190 SHQ items, only one was statistically significant, when 9 would be expected by chance at  $p < .05$ . Therefore the following should be considered with caution. Stepfathers reported more than biological fathers having one time intercourse with more women ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 2**  
**Clarke Sex History Questionnaire Results for**  
**Biological Versus Stepfathers**

	Biological Fathers (N=50)		Stepfathers (N=35)		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Female Adult Frequency	166.18	114.88	205.40	143.34	1.84
Female Child Frequency	17.18	32.03	21.70	37.89	0.58
Female Pubescent Frequency	7.79	19.24	15.59	31.64	1.30
Male Adult Frequency	2.71	10.88	1.54	4.82	0.67
Male Child Frequency	0.80	0.44	0.26	1.20	0.84
Male Pubescent Frequency	0.32	1.01	0.60	1.69	0.87
Crossdressing	1.63	4.51	1.16	3.27	0.56
Peeping	2.45	5.32	1.26	2.76	1.35
Obscene Calls	0.75	3.81	0.39	1.53	0.61
Toucheurism & Frottage	0.11	0.53	0.13	0.61	0.15
Sasism, Masochism, & Rape	1.10	6.51	0.19	0.64	1.00
Exhibitionism Frequency	1.38	6.90	0.40	2.37	0.93
Exhibiting Behavior	3.08	12.93	2.73	12.03	0.13
Sexual Dysfunction	7.94	7.57	7.87	5.43	0.05

### Personality

The MMPI scales were examined in two ways. First, uncorrected raw scores were compared by t-tests for the two groups. Second, K-corrected T scores were compared for T over and T under 70 in the two groups to provide an index of *clinically significant results*.

Of the raw scale scores, only K and Hysteria showed a trend to significance ( $p < .10$ ). Stepfathers scored higher in each case (Table 3). When T scores were examined, stepfathers significantly more often had T scores for the Lie Scale over 70 (32.0% vs 7.1% for biological fathers). There was a trend ( $p < .10$ ) for stepfathers to score higher on the Psychopathic Deviate Scale as well, with almost all having T scores over 70 compared to 78.6% of biological fathers.

Collectively the incestuous fathers often showed significant clinical anxiety (Hs, Hy, and Pt), disturbed family backgrounds (Pd), and confused thinking (Sc).

The MMPI was also examined for 125 derived scales which may be important in sex offenders i.e., sexual deviance, substance abuse, violence, defensiveness, personality and brain damage (see Langevin et al. 1990 a & b). Whereas 6 scales would be expected to be significant by chance at  $p < .05$ , only 3 were. Two measures

**Table 3**  
**Mean MMPI Scale Scores for**  
**Incestuous Biological and Stepfathers**

Scale	Biological Raw Scores	Step Raw Scores	Biological %t =70+	Step %t=70+
Lie	6.24	7.12	7.1**	32.0
F	7.00	6.76	11.9	8.0
K	16.79+	19.24	9.5	16.0
Hypochondriasis	6.43	6.44	38.1	48.1
Depression	22.86	24.16	23.8	28.0
Hysteria	23.83+	26.28	19.0	36.0
Psychopathic Deviate	19.43	26.88	78.6+	96.0
Masculinity-Femininity	26.40	26.60	..	..
Paranoia	12.33	12.00	26.2	8.0
Psychasthemia	12.19	10.04	59.5	68.0
Schizophrenia	12.76	10.20	69.0	72.0
Mania	15.64	15.04	11.9	8.0
Social Introversion	27.40	24.92	14.3	16.0

**Note: For K scale, t = 1.90, p < .10, and for Hy, t = 1.77, p < .10; df = 65 in each case. Raw scores are not K corrected but t scores are. %t = 70+ is percent of t scores that are equal to or greater than 70. For % t = 70+, L scale  $\chi^2 = 7.06$ , df = 1, p < .01; Paranoia,  $\chi^2 = 3.31$ , df = 1, p < .10.**

of alcoholism (Dahlstrom #56 and #57) and one defensiveness measure, Suspiciousness (#77) were significant. The alcoholism measures were conflicting, with more alcoholic biological fathers on Scale #56 and fewer on Scale #57. Biological fathers were also more suspicious than stepfathers.

## DISCUSSION

Remarkably few differences were found in comparing biological and stepfathers. For the most part, both groups preferred the adult female over female minors and all ages of males. A significant fraction (21.15%) were pedophiles nonetheless, a result similar to that reported by Freund, Watson, & Dickey (1991). Although the groups did not differ significantly in number of pedophiles there were more pedophiles among the biological fathers.

There were no group differences in sexual history or in the presence of other sexual anomalies, as measured by the Clarke SHQ.

Similarly, personality did not differ remarkably between the two groups, although anxiety, confusion, and family pathology were evident.

The results overall suggest that biological and stepfathers are similar, although the latter outnumber the former among incest perpetrators. Other factors need to be examined, e.g. substance abuse, family history, and neuropsychological impairment, among other measures, to fully examine the two groups for possible differences. However sexual history and preference and personality did not differentiate the two groups in this study.

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