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Editors' Code Committee, c/o News Media Association
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Dear Editors' Code of Practice Committee,

Child Sexual Abuse Code Recommendation

We write as a group of sexuality professionals, including clinical psychologists, sex therapists, researchers, journalists, and child sexual abuse prevention practitioners, to suggest how the press could use more accurate terminology when discussing child sexual abuse, and in particular, not to use the word pedophilia as a synonym for child sexual abuse.

Pedophilia and child sexual abuse represent two different phenomena. Pedophilia is a clinical term for when someone has a primary sexual attraction towards prepubescent children. Not everyone with a pedophilic attraction offends. In fact, 40-60% of child sexual abusers do not qualify as having pedophilia and many people who do have never offended and will never offend.¹² To provide more clarification, pedophilia is just one type of age interest. Other types include hebephilia and ephebophilia. Hebephilia characterizes attraction toward pubescent children, while ephebophilia is the attraction towards post pubescent adolescents.³ Minor attracted people, or MAPs, is an accurate depiction to describe any of the above chronophilias.

The current misuse of the word pedophilia instead of child sexual abuse leads to a dangerous fallacy that puts children at risk. The misconception that people who sexually abuse children are all pedophiles provides the public with a false sense of security that hinders effective preventive measures. Research shows that 40% of children who have experienced child sexual abuse have been abused by other youth, while 60% of people who commit a sexual offense are someone who

¹Seto, M. C. (2008). *Pedophilia and sexual offending against children: Theory, assessment, and intervention*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11639-000>

² Cantor, J.M., McPhail, I.V. Non-offending Pedophiles. *Curr Sex Health Rep* 8, 121–128 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-016-0076-z>

³ Craig, L., Bartels, R. M., & Lievesley, R. (2021). Understanding Minor Attraction. In *Sexual deviance: Understanding and managing deviant sexual interests and paraphilic disorders* (pp. 132–140). essay, Wiley-Blackwell.

the family knows and trusts.⁴ Using the term pedophile in place of child sexual abuser can obscure the reality of how most child sexual abuse happens.

Another issue with this word choice is that it further produces stigmatization of pedophilia. The media seldomly reports cases about non-offending individuals with pedophilia. This leaves the consistent reporting of child sexual abuse being described as pedophilia to be what guides public opinion⁵. One study showed that individuals feel fear and anger towards nonoffending minor attracted people because they didn't believe that someone with pedophilia wouldn't act out on their desires⁶. Another study shows that the use of the word pedophile when discussing minor attracted people leads to more punitive attitudes among the public.⁷ The dominant narrative that people who have sexual attraction towards minors are miscreants who deserve chastisement makes it harder, if not impossible, for people to seek professional intervention and help with managing their desires. For minor attracted people, this stigma also leads to social isolation and internalized shame, factors that actually increase the risk of offending.^{8,9}

Therapy and support groups are a secondary preventative measure for minor attracted people that helps them to not offend.¹⁰ Even when minor attracted people are able to overcome this stigma and receive help, ongoing discriminatory attitudes continue to act as barriers, discouraging the number of professionals willing to work with this population.¹¹ The typical developmental period of the onset of pedophilia is in adolescence¹², so it is especially important to ensure that adolescents with sexual attraction to children have access to competent and caring support services.⁸

There is also research that suggests that scientifically correct media coverage of pedophilia can help overcome these barriers to seeking therapy.¹³ So while conflating child sexual abuse and pedophilia can be harmful, reporting on pedophilia based on up to date literature and credible experts can help destigmatize help-seeking by minor attracted people, which contributes to prevention of offending. Indeed, there is even evidence that suggests reporting minor attraction using an accurate portrayal (separate from child sexual abuse) or personal stories form

⁴ https://www.d2l.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Statistics_2_Perpetrators.pdf

⁵ Stelzmann, D., Jahnke, S., & Kuhle, L. F. (2020). *Media Coverage of Pedophilia: Benefits and Risks from Healthcare Practitioners' Point of View*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(16), 5739. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17165739>

⁶ Jahnke, S. Emotions and Cognitions Associated with the Stigma of Non-Offending Pedophilia: A Vignette Experiment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47, 363–373 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1073-7>

⁷ Imhoff, R. (2014). *Punitive Attitudes Against Pedophiles or Persons With Sexual Interest in Children: Does the Label Matter?* *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(1), 35–44. doi:10.1007/s10508-014-0439-3

⁸ Lievesley, R., Harper, C. A., & Elliott, H. (2020). *The Internalization of Social Stigma Among Minor-Attracted Persons: Implications for Treatment*. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-01569-x>

⁹ Grady, M. D., Levenson, J. S., Mesias, G., Kavanagh, S., & Charles, J. (2019). "I can't talk about that": Stigma and fear as barriers to preventive services for minor-attracted persons. *Stigma and Health*, 4(4), 400–410. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000154>

¹⁰ Knack, N., Winder, B., Murphy, L., & Fedoroff, J. P. (2019) Primary and secondary prevention of child sexual abuse, *International Review of Psychiatry*, 31:2, 181-194, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2018.1541872>

¹¹ Levenson, J. S., & Grady, M. D. (2019). "I Could Never Work With Those People . . .": Secondary Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse Via a Brief Training for Therapists About Pedophilia. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(20):4281-4302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519869238>

¹² Shields, R., Murray, S. M., Ruzicka, A., Buckman, C., Kahn, G., Benelmouffok, A., & Letourneau, E. (2020) Help wanted: Lessons on prevention from young adults with a sexual interest in prepubescent children. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104416>

¹³ Stelzmann, D., Jahnke, S., & Kuhle, L. F. (2020). *Media Coverage of Pedophilia: Benefits and Risks from Healthcare Practitioners' Point of View*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(16), 5739. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17165739>

nonoffending individuals can further reduce societal stigmatization towards this group^{14,15}, which subsequently has the positive effects of increased access to (and uptake of) preventative support services.

The current code's guidance notes on pedophilia states that "it is essential that newspapers take the utmost care about the accuracy of any allegations that they are making given the scale of problems that could be created for innocent parties by inaccuracy".¹⁶ By updating the code to reflect accurate information about pedophilia and child sexual abuse, reporting could be more accurate, and unintended harms could be avoided.

Lastly, we would advise that any reports done on child sexual abuse or minor attracted people included support services for individuals who are attracted toward minors. Potential resources to include would be Prostasia Foundation, Stop it Now!, Help Wanted, B4U-ACT, and Virtuous Pedophiles. Providing these resources would be a helpful preventative measure.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we may assist you any further in relation to the development of appropriate revisions to the Editors' Code of Practice.

Yours sincerely,

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¹⁴ Harper, C. A., & Bartels, R. M., & Hogue, T. E. (2018). Reducing stigmatization and punitive attitudes about pedophiles through narrative humanization. *Sexual Abuse*, 30, 533-555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063216681561>

¹⁵ Harper, C. A., Lievesley, R., Blagden, N. J., & Hocken, K. (2021). Humanizing pedophilia as stigma reduction: A large-scale intervention study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-02057-x>

¹⁶ http://www.editorscode.org.uk/guidance_notes_10.php

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