

**CREDIBILITY OF ASSERTIONS OF HISTORICAL CHILDHOOD SEXUAL
ABUSE: DO ADULTS DISMISS SUCH ASSERTIONS?**

BY

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine how adult testimonies about childhood sexual abuse (CSA) are perceived, focusing on the impact of the victim's age at the time of abuse, the cultural and gender background of the evaluator, and how these factors, along with preexisting attitudes towards CSA, influence credibility judgments cross-culturally. This study was conducted with a sample of adults from Bangladesh (N = 94) and Canada (N = 249); and investigated the perceived credibility of historical CSA scenarios by exploring these three different factors. The age at the time of abuse (age: 3, 6, & 9) was manipulated to determine its effect on the perceived credibility of the scenarios. The study also investigated attitudes towards myths about CSA in the context of cultural and gender differences of the evaluator using two novel scales. It was found that Canadians find historical CSA more credible and have a more pro-victim attitude regarding CSA myths than Bangladeshis. The study also showed that people found a historical CSA allegation less plausible when the alleged abuse happened at age- 3 compared to age- 6 and age- 9. Moreover, female evaluators found historical CSA more credible and had a more pro-victim attitude than male evaluators. Finally, people's pre-existing attitudes towards CSA myths were related to their perceptions of the credibility of abuse, regardless of culture and gender differences. This study is the first to quantitatively compare credibility ratings and attitudes in CSA cases across Bangladeshi and Canadian cultures, revealing age-related credibility perceptions and the influence of CSA myths on credibility judgments, irrespective of cultural and gender differences. The findings of this study can potentially improve the criminal justice system in both Bangladesh and Canada regarding historical CSA.

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Credibility of Assertions of Historical Childhood Sexual Abuse: Do Adults Dismiss Such Assertions?

Recently, the delayed disclosure of sexual abuse experienced during early childhood has emerged as a significant concern for the criminal justice system (Bunting, 2014; Chenier et al., 2021; Somer & Szwarcberg, 2001). The Canadian Department of Justice has established a definition for sexual abuse of children and youth, which encompasses instances where an older individual, such as an adolescent or adult, exploits a younger child or youth for sexual purposes (Department of Justice Canada, 2007). This definition includes instances where the younger individual is coerced into participating in prostitution, pornographic performances, or the production of pornography. In many cases, children who are victim of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) often come forward in later phase of their life. According to Kendall-Tackett et al. (1993, as cited in Cromer, 2006), one in three girls and one in six boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18; nevertheless, most victims do not come forward with their stories until years after the incident, if ever (London et al., 2005, as cited in Cromer, 2006).

The legal definition of CSA varies globally. For example, The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as the participation of a child in sexual activity that is beyond their comprehension, where they cannot provide informed consent and are developmentally unprepared for such activity (WHO, 1999). According to WHO, a child is a person between the ages of 0 to 9 years. However, unless a country's laws set the legal age for adulthood lower, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person under 18 (World Health Organization, 2021). For example, in Bangladesh, a man engaging in sexual intercourse with his wife above the age of 13, but under the age of 18, is not considered to meet the country's legal definition of rape or sexual abuse according to the Penal Code, 1860 of

Bangladesh. Situations like this create a profound legal ambiguity in terms of child exploitation (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2022).

The recognition of CSA as a significant issue in Canada did not occur until the latter part of the 1970s with the introduction of the Badgley Report, also referred to as the *Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth* which initiated a change in the understanding of CSA from a legal perspective. According to the report, frontline professionals believe that CSA is not exclusively a matter of mental health but also a criminal act. According to Wells (1990), the Badgley Report recommended imposing severe criminal sanctions on offenders to deter future offenses and facilitate victim rehabilitation. The report served as a catalyst for Canada to take on a pioneering role in the prevention of CSA, leading to a significant increase in research studies, including investigating the effects of CSA, profiling the offender, initiating effective educational programs, and legal reformation. As a result, increased research and documentation exist in contemporary times related to CSA (Hickey & McDonald, n.d.).

The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, conducted in 1998, for example was a nationwide investigation of child maltreatment cases that the Canadian Child Welfare Service examined. They reported that among 135,573 child maltreatment investigations, one in ten involved CSA; 21% of these cases were substantiated, 15% remained suspected, and 64% remained unsubstantiated (Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, 2012).

Similar findings emerged from the General Social Survey on victimization indicating that approximately one-third of Canadians aged 15 and above have encountered maltreatment during their childhood, and 8% of this maltreatment includes cases of CSA. In 2017, 5% of individuals

reported encountering physical and sexual abuse during their developmental years (Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, n.d.).

Before the late 1980s, Canada dismissed child witnesses based on inherent unreliability. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that judges must provide cautionary instructions to juries regarding child witnesses (Bala, 2018). With the advancement of women's rights during the 1970s, numerous individuals who experienced CSA in the past began to disclose the encounters. In the aftermath of the late 1980s, Canadian courts were confronted with the formidable task of resolving cases of historical CSA that transpired several years prior to an allegation (Connolly & Read, 2003). The 1984 report from the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youths pointed out that instances of child sexual assault are predominantly concealed, with only a limited number of victims of sexual offenses seeking aid (Badgley, 1986). According to Connolly and Read (2003), delayed disclosure of CSA can be attributed primarily to the legal system's framework and inherent elements in individual cases. This means that CSA is influenced by the complexities of the legal system and unique factors within individual cases, such as the victim-abuser relationship and societal stigma. Established legal procedures and protocols potentially impede or delay the disclosure of CSA. Furthermore, the victim or their caretakers may be apprehensive about retaliation, there may be disruption of familial unity, or there may be skepticism regarding the child's reliability in a judicial context. Inherent to this, are abuse specific factors, such as the child's comprehension of the inappropriate nature of the conduct, the relationship between the perpetrator and the child, and personal and psychological motivations. Until 1988, historical CSA would be difficult to prosecute due to the court's emphasis on the potential hazards of convicting individuals based solely on the uncorroborated testimony of an unsworn child. The commonly held stereotype that the testimony of children is

inherently less dependable than that of adults has functioned as a structural impediment to the prompt reporting of cases of CSA. Adults might be more prone to false memories due to their reliance on the interpretation of events rather than the events themselves (Forty percent of people have a fictional first memory, 2008). Concern about this impediment resulted in increased recognition of the challenges linked to accusations of child abuse, prompting scholarly investigations into pertinent topics such as memory and susceptibility to suggestion (Denne et al., 2020).

Up to this point, discussion has been focused on the historical development for the context of CSA, some major issues concerning its reporting in the criminal justice system and the problematic nature of its credibility assessment. One of the major focuses of this study is to understand how people perceive the credibility of child sexual abuse allegation that had happened some time ago. Existing literature in this domain points to multiple factors related to child that can influence this perception.

Factors Related to the Child

Assessing the credibility of allegations about CSA is a multifaceted issue influenced by myriad factors. Considering the substantial amount of research devoted to evaluating the reliability of CSA allegations and testimonies, a discernible gap persists in exploring how factors such as age at the time of event occurrence, gender, culture, and attitudes about sexual abuse influence the perception of credibility of these allegations. This gap applies to a wide range of contexts encompassing historical, hypothetical, and legal cases (Alcantara et al., 2019; Argo et al., 2012; Bottoms et al., 2007; Connolly et al., 2009; Everson & Sandoval, 2011; Golding et al., 2007; Pozzulo et al., 2010; Rogers et al., 2009; Starling et al., 2013).

Previous studies have yielded valuable insights into various factors linked to the credibility of CSA allegations. The impact of a victim's disability status (physical or intellectual) on the perceived credibility of their story is one possible factor that has been investigated (Rogers et al., 2009). Rogers et al. found that the degree of resistance exhibited by the disabled victim in response to the abuse was a crucial element in attributing blame to the offender. Their study found that after adjusting for biases against disabilities, it was observed that men tend to place more blame on a 12-year-old girl who has been sexually abused compared to women. Victim resistance and disability interacted with gender in such a way that male observers attributed less responsibility to perpetrators if victims failed to resist, regardless of the victim's disability status. Similar to this, the form of victim resistance impacted believability judgments by male observers, as perpetrators were held more accountable when children showed physical resistance as opposed to verbal or no resistance. This pattern was not seen among women observers.

Emotional expressions too are regarded as a pivotal element in the judicial process. The courtroom behavior of the child victim is often the primary evidence as they are frequently the only witness. Researchers recruited 119 student participants from a Norwegian University to view a video of a simulated police interview. The interview featured an 11-year-old female child actor who provided an account of instances of sexual abuse. The juvenile performer conveyed a range of affective states, specifically anger, sadness, neutrality, or positivity while revealing information. Participants thought the child's perceived credibility was diminished when they exhibited anger or positive emotions. According to Wessel et al. (2016), credibility ratings were generally higher for individuals who exhibited expressions of sadness or neutrality, while those who displayed anger (Hedge's $G = -0.91$) or positive emotions (Hedge's $G = -0.46$) tended to receive

lower ratings. In reality, the reactions shown by child victims of sexual abuse may appear counterintuitive to conventional expectations, which could give rise to skepticism regarding the truthfulness of their testimony (Voogt et. al., 2019).

In Wessel et al.'s study (2016), the participants perceived the child actor as more credible when expressing sadness or neutrality. Emotional responses with societal expectations of how a trauma victim should respond can make the victim seem more credible. This highlights the potential impact of anticipated behaviors on the comprehension of youngsters' affective responses within the framework of allegations of CSA. Wessel et al. found that the child's emotional expression did not directly correlate with the perceived likelihood of the accused's guilt and the readiness to deliver a guilty verdict. Instead, these assessments were associated with the comprehensive evaluation of the child's believability, underscoring the crucial significance of perceived believability in the scrutiny of CSA instances. Specific emotions, such as sadness and neutrality, might amplify the perceived credibility of victims while the opposite can be seen for those who exhibit different emotions.

Wood et al. (1996) conducted a study to assess whether the gender of a child victim in a case of CSA could significantly impact the assessment of credibility during an interview. The study showed that women victims are frequently perceived as more trustworthy than their male counterparts, indicating a gender-based partiality in the evaluation procedure. To conduct a more comprehensive analysis of this occurrence, Wood et al. employed the Child Abuse Interview Interaction Coding System to assess 55 recorded interviews about cases of sexual abuse with a high-risk factor. They utilized the Child Abuse Interview Interaction Coding System (CAIICS) by analyzing through behavioral coding of 55 video-recorded interviews from cases of high-risk sexual abuse. This coding system offers a comprehensive approach for coding. It analyzes the

behavior of both the interviewer and the child during the interview process, thereby facilitating the investigation of the interview dynamics. The researchers found no specific differences between the behaviors of the child victims or the interviewers that could account for the observed gender differences in credibility assessment. That is, neither the children's behavior during the interviews nor how the interviews were conducted showed any distinct variation between boys and girls that might explain why girls were deemed more credible. The results indicate that the perceived credibility of child victims is not contingent upon their conduct or the approach employed during the interview. Instead, they may be impacted by societal biases or preconceived notions regarding gender. Acknowledging this aspect is of utmost importance in guaranteeing fair and impartial evaluation protocols in instances of CSA.

The experimental factor of victim age in assessment of hypothetical scenarios at the time of abuse and its impact on perceived credibility has received limited attention in research. It is typically considered a default variable in most studies, as noted by Golding, Sanchez et al. (1999), Pozzulo et al. (2010), Rogers et al. (2009), and Wessel et al. (2016). However, some studies have been conducted on the credibility of hypothetical CSA cases involving children who were of a very young age at the time of the alleged abuse.

Davies and Rogers (2009) investigated the influence of the victim's age, the perpetrator-victim relationship, and the gender of the respondent on the formation of perceptions of credibility. The age of the victim was experimentally manipulated, with a particular focus on comparing the reactions elicited by victims who were 5 years old versus those who were 15 years old. The respondents (U.K.'s general public) tended to perceive younger victims, aged 5, as more credible than their older counterparts with $\eta^2 = 0.16$. Thus, the researchers found an intrinsic

age-based prejudice in evaluating credibility. Additionally, participants tended to assign lower culpability to younger individuals who were victimized than to older individuals.

Tabak and Klettke (2014) investigated the impact of a child's age during purported abuse (6, 11, and 15 years old) on the credibility evaluations made by simulated juries. Juries (22 females and 12 males) perceived a younger child as more credible than an older child when supporting evidence was missing. The findings of this study align with prior research indicating that younger children are often perceived as more truthful but less cognitively proficient (Connolly et al., 2010, Goodman, 2006; Melkman et al., 2017). Although most research on credibility has centered on cases involving older children, specifically those aged 10-15, a consistent trend across studies indicates that younger victims of CSA are generally perceived as more credible than their older counterparts.

Evaluator Factors

CSA cases often do not include extensive physical evidence, shifting the focus of court investigations to perceptions of the accuser's credibility. The examination carried out in the legal setting, which frequently relies heavily on the plaintiff's perceived credibility, assumes a pivotal function in such instances (Denne et al., 2019). Denne et al. (2019) investigated the credibility assessment process by analyzing 134 transcripts of victim testimonies from children aged 5 to 17. They also included evaluations from attorneys regarding the credibility of these testimonies. Evaluation showed the primary emphasis of prosecutors was typically placed on assessing the feasibility of the victim's narrative to establish the veracity of their testimony. This process entails evaluating the logical coherence of the testimony and its degree of conformity with the established circumstances and facts about the purported occurrence. The evaluators assess the plausibility of the child's testimony concerning the alleged abuse, specifically considering the

information presented and its consistency with the overarching storyline. In this particular context, the potency of the case is contingent upon the degree to which the victim's testimony coheres with the anticipated or feasible consequences of abuse.

In contrast, Denne et al.'s evaluations showed the defense counsel responsible for advocating for the defendant prioritizing aspects such as susceptibility or deceitfulness and incongruity within the juvenile's testimony. The defense counsel is inclined to investigate extrinsic factors that may have impacted the child's testimony, such as suggestive questioning, social influence, or adult manipulation. The testimonies are scrutinized to identify potential contradictions, inconsistencies, or modifications that may have occurred over time or across various narrative iterations. As a result, defense attorneys tend to pose a more significant proportion of inquiries centering on credibility in contrast to their counterparts in the prosecution. The divergence in emphasis observed between prosecutors and defense attorneys can be attributed to their distinct functions and tactics within the legal arena. The prosecutors' objective is to establish the integrity of the case and concentrate on the credibility of the victim's testimony. In contrast, the defense counsel endeavors to test the strength of the allegation by focusing on plausible incongruities, susceptibility, and deceitfulness in the victim's testimony.

Everson and Sandoval (2011) explored the credibility assessment of 1106 professionals specializing in CSA by utilizing the Child Forensic Attitude Scale (CFAS) which is a survey consisting of 28 items that evaluates three forensic attitudes expected to affect professionals' (police officer, lawyers, social workers etc.) assessments regarding allegations of child sexual abuse (CSA). The tool measures three specific attitudes: emphasis-on-sensitivity, emphasis-on-specificity, and skepticism. The prioritization of sensitivity emphasizes a child's emotional well-being, often resulting in the acceptance of abuse reports without further investigation, which may

result in unfounded accusations. The emphasis-on-specificity approach prioritizes verifying a child's account through empirical evidence, potentially averting spurious charges while presenting a challenge to cases lacking tangible proof. Skepticism casts doubt on the integrity of the child's testimony, pointing out that it may be influenced by extraneous variables such as suggestibility, potentially invalidating credible allegations of abuse. Differing attitudes had a notable impact on the exercise of professional judgment, and their divergent attitudes contribute to disagreements among evaluators. Everson and Sondoval's findings indicate that evaluators' inclination towards sensitivity and skepticism can influence their perception of the credibility of allegations. Specifically, a tendency towards sensitivity may lead to a greater likelihood of viewing allegations as valid. In comparison, a predisposition towards skepticism may result in a greater chance of viewing allegations as invalid. Notably, skepticism may particularly bias evaluators against accounts of abuse involving children and adolescents.

Skepticism is not completely unwarranted. The literature suggests that the ability to form dependable memories is present in children as young as 2 to 3 years old (Peterson & Parsons, 2005) and that these memories have the potential to persist over extended periods (Peterson et al., 2018). Nevertheless, research has also demonstrated that these memories are susceptible to manipulation and distortion (Leichtman & Ceci, 1995). Despite this, in contemporary times, the Canadian legal system has acknowledged the notion that each individual who provides testimony in a court of law, regardless of their age, is a distinct entity whose credibility and evidence must be evaluated based on criteria that are suitable for their cognitive development, comprehension, and communicative capacity (R. v. W. (R.), 1992). The evaluation of credibility, however, is subject to significant reliance on the interpretation and comprehension of judges and juries.

Social dominance orientation is a psychological construct that refers to individuals' preference for hierarchical and unequal relationships among social groups which may encompass diverse manifestations of power and control, such as sexual dominance exerted over a specific gender (Rosenthal et al., 2012). Alcantara et al. (2019) examined the association between Social Dominance Orientation and the perceptions of credibility in cases of CSA. Alcantara et al. employed the Social Dominance Orientation-7 scale, a 16 item tool that evaluates individuals' inclination towards group hierarchy and inequality. The measurement instrument comprises two primary constituents: half are associated with the construct of dominance, while the remaining items are linked with the construct of anti-egalitarianism. Dominance items gauge an individual's inclination towards favoring particular groups over others, whereas anti-egalitarianism items evaluate an individual's resistance to group equality. According to Alcantara et al., individuals (undergraduate students and general people) who exhibited a high degree of preference for group hierarchy and anti-egalitarian values, as measured by the Social Dominance Orientation scale, demonstrated a decreased likelihood of accepting allegations of CSA. On the other hand, individuals who scored lower on the Social Dominance Orientation scale, indicating a lesser inclination towards dominance and inequality, exhibited a greater tendency to perceive allegations of CSA as credible (Alcantara et al., 2019). The proposition above accounted for 44.3% of variation in credibility assessment and points out that the fundamental social attitudes of individuals, specifically those about power dynamics and group disparities, can impact their discernment and construal of allegations concerning CSA. Furthermore, this suggests that societal norms and attitudes significantly influence the evaluation of credibility in cases of CSA.

Hicks and Tite (1998) conducted a credibility study with professionals suggesting that portraying victims of CSA in a negative light substantially impacts professionals' attitudes

toward their credibility. According to Hicks and Tite's (1998) study, professionals such as police officers, social workers, and school personnel maintain that they don't have any anticipation bias from a victim of sexual abuse. However, when presented with hypothetical scenarios depicting a child in a negative light, such as being promiscuous, a drug user, or a thief, these professionals were less likely to believe them as victims. Additionally, men were less likely than women to believe children's allegations of abuse.

Empirical research has extensively focused on the impact of gender on credibility assessment in cases of CSA. A recurring observation in these studies is that gender functions as a significant independent variable. Research has indicated that women generally perceive individuals who have experienced CSA as more credible than men (Bottom et al., 2014; Everson & Sandoval, 2011; Goulding, Seago et al., 1999; Goulding, Sanchez et al., 1999; Goulding et al., 2007; Rogers & Davis, 2007; Rotigen, 2002; Wessel et al., 2016). Various factors, including heightened empathy, psychological tendencies, and social and cultural influences, may impact the perception of credibility differences based on gender (Bottoms et al., 2014; Najdowski & Weintraub, 2020). The observed inclination of women to assign greater credibility to individuals who have experienced CSA may be attributed to an enhanced empathetic connection with the victim's encounter and the perception that female are more prone to victimization, and likely to be subjected to sexual abuse. Cultural norms assign women to nurturing and protective roles, which may result in heightened sensitivity towards individuals who have experienced CSA (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Pereda et al., 2009).

Moreover, the influence of societal gender norms and expectations on the formation of unique viewpoints regarding credibility is an important aspect that cannot be disregarded (Block et al., 2010; Fischer & Manstead, 2000). Similar findings are also found regardless of

professional association. Page and Morrison (2018) pointed out that women psychologists, irrespective of their personal trauma history, exhibited higher perceived credibility ratings toward allegations of CSA than male psychologists who had not undergone emotional trauma, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. However, this study also indicated that male psychologists who had experienced personal trauma were as equally inclined as their female colleagues to endorse allegations of CSA, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. This shows a multifaceted interplay between gender and individual experiences of emotional trauma as they concern the perception of credibility.

Study also indicates that women jurors tended to offer equitable reparation to both male and women victims of CSA (Bottom et al., 2014). Moreover, the gender composition of mock juries affected the conviction rate in CSA cases when fictional trial summaries were involved. Golding et al. (2007) investigated six-person jury composition with different ratios of men and women: two female majority juries (5 women/1 man & 4 women/2 men), two male majority juries (5 men/1 woman & 4 men/2 women), and one with an equal number of women and men. This study differed from prior mock jury research because previous studies were conducted on individuals. Golding et al. found that women were likelier to change their vote from the start of deliberations to the final deliberation ($\eta^2 = .25$). Furthermore, female majority mock jurors changed from a not guilty to a guilty verdict more often than did mock jurors on juries that did not have a majority of women ($\eta^2 = .10$). Conversely, when there was no female majority, mock jurors changed from a guilty to not guilty verdict more often than those on female-majority juries. The study also found that men and women had different opinions before deliberation in that men were more pro-defense-oriented and women were more pro-prosecution oriented.

Historical CSA

Evaluations have rarely assessed perceptions for instances of CSA that occurred in the past. The extant literature on historical CSA primarily centers on the topic of repressed memory concerning historical CSA, even though the overwhelming majority of cases from the past involve continuous memories with no indication of repressed memory (Connolly & Read, 2006). Connolly and Read pointed out that although several prior studies have examined various factors' effects on CSA credibility, there is a scarcity of research that has specifically investigated the evaluations of credibility associated with historical CSA, as evidenced by the limited number of studies conducted on this topic (Arata, 1998; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Roesler, 1994; Smith et al., 2000 as cited in Connolly & Read, 2006).

Central findings of these studies suggest that women participants, similar to what has been seen in research assessing CSA in general, attributed more credibility ($b = 0.95$) to accusers than male participants did (regardless of having repressed memories or not - Sugarman & Boney-McCoy, 1997), participants perceived alleged child victims as more credible ($b = .74$) than adult victims regardless whether the adult reported having repressed memories or not (Golding et al., 1995; Sugarman & Boney-McCoy, 1997) and defense expert witness testimony led to lower perceived credibility ($b = .50$) if there were repressed memories compared to when defense experts did not testify (Sugarman & Boney-McCoy, 1997).

Golding, Seago et al. (1999) explored the dynamics of historical cases of CSA, when the abuse had taken place during the individual's sixth year of life. The disclosure of the abuse did not occur until a considerably later point in time. Findings suggested that delayed reporting led to fewer decisions in the plaintiff's favor and lower perceived credibility. A different study by Golding, Sanchez et al. (1999) wherein the reporting age was systematically altered to 7, 26, and

45 years enabled a direct evaluation of the influence of reporting delay on the perceived credibility of the information. The credibility of reports was found to be significantly higher when made by individuals at the age of 7 compared to allegations made at the ages of 26 and 45, which implies a preference for quick reporting when evaluating the reliability of CSA cases.

Read et al. (2006) conducted regression analysis to examine the predictors of verdicts among 466 Canadian juries and 644 Canadian judges, specifically emphasizing historical CSA. The research examined multiple factors, including but not limited to testimony regarding repressed memory, therapeutic engagement, duration of delay, age of the accuser, expert witness involvement, frequency and length of abuse, the nature of the relationship between the accuser and the accused, and any associated threats. They found a relationship between familial relationships and increased possibility of CSA, meaning that familial relationship between the victim and perpetrator can predict the verdict by pointing out that the likelihood of a guilty verdict is 1.9 to 2.8 times greater in cases involving parent/family relationships compared to those involving community connections. The presence of expert witness testimony results was associated with a decrease in conviction rates as compared to cases where expert testimony was absent. As well, judges were shown to exhibit greater receptiveness towards repressed memory claims than juries who often disregarded the credibility of a complaint in cases where repressed memory was a factor.

Read et al. (2006) found the presence of continuous memories (no evidence of memory repression or periods during which the one would not have been able to recall the memory) did not appear to have an impact on the complainant's credibility. The jury viewed young children (ages 1-12) as more credible than their older counterparts (ages 13-19). Additionally, the study revealed that hostile factors like the presence of threats within the allegedly abusive relationship

heightened juror compassion towards the injured party, thus amplifying the validity of the plaintiff's allegation. Regarding delay duration, judges and juries provided different interpretations. Long delays ($M = 14.03$ years, $SD = 8.68$) before allegations were associated with decreased conviction rates (2.5 times) by judges which was ascribed to the assumed reduction of memory. On the other hand, commonly held cultural assumptions (e.g. victim will always remember a traumatic event) regarding the permanence of memory seemed to influence the jury's evaluation of witness statements, leading them to disregard the significance of the duration of time elapsed.

Connolly et al. (2009) explored jurors' perspectives regarding CSA cases within the Canadian judicial system. The researchers systematically evaluated 4,827 juror comments on CSA cases that had undergone trial, using the Quicklaw database as a resource to detect recurring trends and shared characteristics in the reactions and assessments of jurors. The study found that the most commonly referenced elements in jury comments were 'inconsistency' and 'corroboration,' suggesting that these factors hold considerable weight in juror assessments.

In a separate study, Connolly et al. (2010) investigated the standards employed in judicial rulings, emphasizing the evaluation of truthfulness and cognitive aptitude in the assessment of credibility in cases of CSA. The investigation included an in-depth examination of 52 cases involving juvenile accusers who reported the incident promptly and 49 cases involving adult accusers who reported the incident after a period of time had elapsed. In their findings, the authors argued that adults who serve as complainants are typically perceived as more credible than children due to children's perceived susceptibility; this contradicts the previous findings (Davies & Rogers; 2009; Golding, Segó et al., 1999; Read et al., 2006).

Pozzulo and colleagues (2010) explored the decision-making mechanisms employed by jurors in cases involving historical CSA in Canada. The objective of the research was to investigate the complex interconnections between the timing of reporting abuse, the dynamics of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and the frequency of occurrences of abuse. A shorter time between the alleged abuse and reporting was linked to elevated evaluations of culpability and harsher judgments than was seen in cases that involved a prolonged delay in reporting maltreatment. When perceived credibility was assessed, the length of delay in reporting did not affect evaluations of the plaintiff and the defendant, despite previous research indicating that delayed disclosure of abuse is typically associated with decreased perceived credibility (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Golding, Seago et al., 1999).

Culture and Perceived Credibility:

One of the primary objectives of the present study was to investigate CSA within the distinctive cultural settings of Bangladesh and Canada through a comparative analysis of the perceived credibility and attitudes toward CSA in these two cultures. Canada has demonstrated its commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 Agenda, with a specific focus on target 16.2 of the SDGs, which includes eradicating all forms of violence, exploitation, trafficking, and abuse against children by 2030. Canada is also collaborating with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (End Violence) to increase political determination, allocate resources, and encourage practitioners to take action against childhood violence globally (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). Because of this enhanced awareness of national policies, scholarly research in this field is more common in Canada.

By contrast, the issue of CSA in Bangladesh is primarily shrouded in taboo, which can be attributed to a pervasive culture of silence. Perhaps as a result of this, there is a dearth of qualitative and quantitative data, rendering CSA a crucial issue that has not been adequately addressed. The shortage of comprehensive research and awareness surrounding the issue of CSA in Bangladesh is a matter of concern, given the high incidence rate of such cases (Child abuse, deaths, higher in 2021: Study, 2022). Despite some progress in addressing CSA through legal and policy measures in recent years, the issue persists as a deeply entrenched problem predominantly hidden from public scrutiny due to its sensitivity. Victims often exhibit reluctance in disclosing their experiences owing to feelings of shame, guilt, and apprehension of retaliation from the perpetrator or societal stigma, making the ability to assess the credibility of CSA more complex (Anik et al., 2021).

CSA is alarmingly prevalent in Bangladesh, with a notable gender disparity in which girls are more susceptible to such maltreatment than boys (Fattah & Kabir, 2013; Shilpi, 2016). As an example of attitudes towards children and sex, according to a report by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2017, the prevalence of early marriage among girls in Bangladesh is significant, with 59% being married before the age of 18 and 22% being married before the age of 15. Despite the implementation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 in Bangladesh, which aims to prohibit the marriage of women before the age of 18, exceptions exist in the form of special permissions granted to parents, resulting in a staggering 38 million child brides in the country (UNICEF, 2020; Zahangir & Nahar, 2021). But the presence of CSA is much broader than simply the number of child brides. However, the reporting and conviction rates for CSA cases in Bangladesh are meager. Only a tiny proportion of CSA cases were brought to the attention of law enforcement authorities in 2019, with the

belief that 3% of cases were reported (, 2018). In addition, it has been reported by Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) that the conviction rate for cases related to CSA was below 1%, suggesting a lack of effectiveness on the part of the justice system in handling this matter (“Child rape increased 76.01pc in Bangladesh last year”, 2020; Tahmina & Bhowmik, 2018). This statistical representation may be highly distorted due to factual reality as the prevalence of CSA may exceed the reported figures due to cultural taboos and the reluctance to disclose incidents, which often results in underestimation (Hadi, 2000). Holding victims responsible for their victimization, as opposed to attributing responsibility to the perpetrators, negatively affects the victim's willingness to report such abuse. Significant structural impediments exist in Bangladesh's absence of mental health professionals and services. The nation, with a population exceeding 160 million individuals, confronts a dearth of proficient psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers competent to deliver trauma-informed care to survivors of CSA (Hasan et al., 2021).

Moreover, the alleged perpetrator frequently takes advantage of their privileged status, often avoiding legal consequences due to institutionalized corruption, limited resources, and inadequate enforcement of extant legislation (Tahmina & Bhowmik, 2018). As a result, the negative connotations associated with sexual abuse and an apprehension of retaliation are substantial deterrents to disclosing such occurrences (Das, 2021). Other factors include poverty, inadequate education, firmly established social conventions, and deeply ingrained cultural values responsible for CSA in Bangladesh (Ferdous et al., 2019). The economic predicament and the shortage of education exacerbate the issue, as does the dominant patriarchal culture.

In Bangladesh, significant legislation such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017, the Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act of 2000, and the well-

established Penal Code of 1860 are intended to safeguard against such violence against children. However, implementing these legal provisions faces significant obstacles, undermining these laws' efficacy (Islam, 2021). Moreover, the Child Right Advocacy Coalition brought to light a concerning pattern of violence against children in 2019, adding nuance to this disturbing reality by pointing out that of the 826 reported incidents, a staggering 70% were categorized as attempted rapes. These statistical data highlights the necessity for implementing protective measures and a comprehensive reformation of the justice system in Bangladesh. The necessity for conducting credibility research in Bangladesh is urgent due to the lack of prior research in this area. Moreover, it is imperative to investigate the potential impact of cultural diversity on research outcomes, which may vary across nations.

Impact of Myths on Historical CSA Credibility

Generally, myths related to historical CSA are characterized by stereotypical assumptions and inaccurate beliefs regarding the victims and perpetrators involved. The prevalence of misbeliefs and misunderstandings surrounding historical CSA hinders the capacity of survivors to access help and support. Studies also indicate a dearth of accurate comprehension among the general population regarding the characteristics of CSA and historical CSA (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Shackle, 2008). For example, the perception of rarity regarding CSA is a commonly held belief that suggests a lower prevalence of this form of abuse in the past (de Tychey et al., 2015). Despite the misconception, literature demonstrates that CSA has been a severe and persistent issue throughout history (Mintz, 2012).

Another example is the general assumption that the credibility of victims should be questioned in cases of historical CSA based on the perceived unreliability of their testimony because of possible memory lapses (Connolly et al., 2009). However, studies show that such

memories, especially recollections of trauma, can be exceptionally accurate and long-lasting (Fivush, 1998; Peterson & Bell, 1996; Peterson et al., 2018).

Studies assessing the influence of individual beliefs and the acceptance of misconceptions on attitudes and evaluations in cases of CSA underscored the impact of factors such as sexism, gender, culture, and personal history of trauma on the formation of stereotypical attitudes towards CSA (Cromer, 2006; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Moreover, these studies support the claim that there is a high prevalence of myths and misconceptions among healthcare professionals and people in general. However, no study has been conducted between myths and historical CSA according to researcher's knowledge. Myths related CSA includes but are not limited to broader aspects like understatements or overstatements regarding the severity of harm, refutations regarding extent of CSA, dispersals of blame away from the perpetrator and, stereotypes of the perpetrator (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010).

The evaluation of a child victim's believability is influenced by elements unique to the child and those assessing the child, which becomes more complex in cases of past CSA. The potential impact of cultural disparities, such as those between Canada and Bangladesh, regarding child-related terminology and attitudes, appears relevant yet remains uninvestigated. Similarly, the influence of cultural context on the correlation between myths and credibility judgments has not been thoroughly examined. The current research aims to address these gaps.

Overview of this Study

This study assessed how people rate the credibility of accusations of CSA in cases of a woman where the evidence is solely based on an adult's testimony about abuse that she says happened when she was a child. Female victims were chosen because of greater incidence of CSA for females than males (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020) as well as their existence as

comparable hypothetical protagonists in existing literature (Rogers & Davies, 2007).

Specifically, the effects of her age at the time of the alleged incident on perceived credibility judgments was examined. Furthermore, the impact of culture and gender of the rater on perceived credibility was explored. Another aspect of this study was to better understand people's attitudes and beliefs about CSA and to determine how culture and gender of the rater have an impact on people's attitudes. Finally, the possible relationship between preexisting attitudes towards CSA and people's perceptions of credibility cross-culturally were examined.

The following six hypothesis were tested:

1. There would be a significant effect of culture on perceived credibility, with Canadians demonstrating higher perceived credibility scores than Bangladeshis.
2. There would be a significant effect of age of the alleged victim at the time on perceived credibility, specifically, the younger the age of the child at the time of abuse, the higher perceived credibility scores would be.
3. There would be a significant effect of gender of the participant on perceived credibility with women having higher perceived credibility scores than men.
4. There would be a significant effect of culture on attitudes towards the victim, with Canadian participants viewing the victim more positively than Bangladeshi participants.
5. There would be a significant effect of gender of the participant on attitudes toward the victim, with women viewing the victim more positively than men.
6. There would be a significant relationship between perceived credibility and attitudes toward the victim regardless of the participants' gender or culture meaning that those who showed more positive attitudes towards the victim would rate the victim as having higher perceived credibility.

Method

Study Design

The study is experimental and between subjects in nature. The experiment involved manipulating one independent variable (age of the victim during the alleged abuse) and observed differences related to two other quasi-independent variables (culture of the participant and gender of the participants). Two customized scales (The Perceived Credibility Scale and The Pro-Victim Attitude Scale) were used to see if different levels of the three independent variables differed significantly from each other. Finally, the relationship between these two scales was measured for the different levels of culture and gender.

Participants

Using G*power Version 3.1.9.7, an a priori power analysis for a fixed effect $2 \times 3 \times 2$ full factorial ANOVA with an effect size of .25 (to ensure modest but detectable difference) and power of .8 generated a sample size of 158. To ensure that the sample size had enough power for the analyses, we over-recruited participants to avoid low-quality data. A total of 343 individuals participated and following the removal of participants based on exclusionary criteria, 239 people (79 men and 160 women) remained in the sample and their data were analyzed. Among them, 92 individuals (51 men, 41 women) were from Bangladesh, and 147 individuals (28 men, 119 women) were from Canada. The mean age for Bangladeshis was 21.9 years (range= 18-36 years), and the mean age for Canadians was 24.8 years (range= 18-37 years). For the Canadian group, 101 students from an Atlantic Canadian University participated as a part of the Psychology Research Experience Pool (PREP), and the remainder were recruited via posters, email, and verbal invitations using convenience and snowball sampling methods. For the Bangladeshi group, all the participants were recruited via posters and verbal invitations using

convenience and snowball sampling, and participants were interviewed online using the Zoom platform. All the Canadians participated via an online survey using *Qualtrics*. Ethics approval from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) was secured before participant requirement.

Participants were entered into a draw for a \$200 gift card relevant to their respective country upon participating in the study. This was done through the completion of a form with basic information, which was then entered into a randomized draw.

Participants who met one or more exclusion criteria were excluded from statistical analysis: (a) age below 18 years and above 39 years old, $n = 9$; (b) individuals who selected the option “Other” for the question “Country of origin” from the Canadian sample, $n = 40$ (c) individuals who identified their gender as something other than “Women” and “Men” $n = 9$ (d) individuals who did not complete the study, $n = 48$. In total, 104 participants (2 Bangladeshi and 102 Canadian) were excluded out of 343 due to these criteria.

Materials

Vignettes

Six hypothetical Historical CSA vignettes created by the researcher were used. The vignettes varied according to the time of the alleged abuse (age 3, 6 & 9) and cultural context (Bangladesh & Canada). For example, the Canadian vignette with a 3-year-old read as follows:

“Rebecca was a 3-year-old girl who lived in the city of Hamilton with her parents. Both of her parents worked for a multinational corporation. Rebecca’s Nanny took care of her most of the time. Most evenings, Rebecca went for a small walk in the park with her Nanny. One evening, Rebecca’s Nanny got a phone call that her son had an accident and was in hospital and she had to leave Rebecca’s house immediately. Before leaving, Rebecca’s Nanny arranged for

the next-door neighbor Mr. Bolton to look after Rebecca. When Rebecca's parents came back that night, they thanked Mr. Bolton for looking after her. Years later, at the age of 18, Rebecca came forward to report a case of sexual abuse against her neighbor, specifically saying that he sexually molested her that night. According to Rebecca's allegation, when she was 3 years old Mr. Bolton undressed her and hurt her private parts, and she remembers that it still hurt a lot when she walked the next day. However, she did not say anything to her parents or her Nanny at that time because she was afraid they wouldn't believe her."

In order to ensure that the vignette fit with the participants' experiences in their own culture, the cultural context (e.g., names of people and town) was changed to match culture of the participants, leaving everything else identical. Each participant read a vignette specific to their culture, with the age condition randomly assigned (See Appendix A). The six vignettes are one scenario described in 6 versions: One Canadian, One Bangladeshi with three varying ages for each.

Scales

Perceived credibility scale. Because there are no pre-existing generalized scales that can be used to measure the credibility of historical CSA, we constructed one that is relevant for a cross-cultural context to measure how credible people find a hypothetical CSA case that is historical in nature. The Perceived Credibility Scale is a novel measure consisting of 11 items. To evaluate credibility, we used a 4-point Likert scale, representing each choice as follows (*1 = Strongly Believe, 2 = Believe, 3 = Do not Believe, 4 = Strongly do not believe*). There were nine items where higher scores meant lower credibility, and two items where higher scores meant higher credibility. For data coding purposes, we reverse-coded the abovementioned nine items so that there was a unified direction regarding credibility rating. Sample items include: "Given the

amount of time that has passed, how strongly do you believe the victim is being honest with her accusation?” and, “If those who knew the victim during her childhood claimed she was an ordinary child growing up, with no signs of stress or anxiety, how strongly do you believe this would be consistent with her assertion that she was molested?”. To see all the items, please see Appendix A, Part A. Following these 11 questions, the participants answered two open-ended questions asking for their opinion on what would make the scenario more credible and what would make it less credible. The internal reliability in the present study for the Perceived Credibility Scale was $\alpha = 0.833$, which is a very good reliability indicator (Field & Field, 2018). [See Appendix A].

Pro-Victim Attitude Scale. The Pro-Victim Attitude Scale is a customized 4-point Likert scale consisting of 25 items. Eleven of these items were selected from the *CSA Myths Scale* (CSAMS; Collings, 1997 cited in Collings et al., 2009)¹, 10 of the items were chosen from the analysis of online myths by Cromer and Goldsmith (2010), and the remaining four items were developed independently. The CSAMS was a 5-point Likert scale that was adapted in this study to a 4-point scale (eliminating the central selection of ‘neither agree nor disagree’)². It consisted of 15 items which included three dimensions: blame diffusion (e.g., allegations of sexual interactions with adults made by children are often fabricated to get revenge or attention.), denial of abusiveness (e.g., if a child experiences pleasure from an unwanted sexual relationship with an adult, it cannot really be described as being “abusive.”) and restrictive stereotypes (e.g., CSA only takes place in big urban cities and not in rural areas). The Google (online) myths analysis by Cromer and Goldsmith (2010), used 119 myths which was originally divided into four sub-

¹ Of the original 15 items; 11 items were selected based on the relevance of cross-cultural perspective of the current research, 3 of the items were similar with the other source of myths that was introduced in the current scale and one item (item no. 12 of CSAMS) was removed because it was irrelevant in context of current research.

² The 4-point Likert scale was adopted to remove central tendency bias and avoid undecided position.

groups (minimizations or exaggerations of the extent of harm CSA poses, denials of the extent of CSA, diffusions of perpetrator blame, and perpetrator stereotypes). The four independent items were added to include questions which were considered appropriate for our cross-cultural setting (e.g., child marriage occurs in some parts of the world, and as a result, sexual intercourse with a child is acceptable). To evaluate the attitude score, we used a 4-point Likert scale, with choices as follows (*1 = Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Do not Agree, 4= Strongly do not Agree*). On this scale, there were 23 items where higher scores meant higher pro-victim attitudes and two items where higher scores meant lower pro-victim attitudes. For purposes of coding, we reverse-coded the abovementioned two items to have a unified direction in terms of attitude rating. Internal reliability in the present study for the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale was $\alpha = 0.911$, which is a very good indicator of reliability (See Appendix A).

Statistical Analysis

Data was combined from the online interviews via Zoom (v. 5.0) and Qualtrics. Data were analyzed using statistical software, Jamovi (v. 2.2.22) and R (v. 2022.07.1)

Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, the Canadian participants completed the online survey via Qualtrics, and Bangladeshi participants completed an interview via Zoom. One of the major reasons for this procedural difference between these two countries was the literacy rate difference which we suspected could have affected the understanding of the questionnaire for Bangladeshi participants (i.e. there is a literacy rate of 74 percent; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Additionally, the technological platform, Qualtrics is not commonly used in Bangladesh and the researcher was concerned there would be a potential effect of this. There were three separate components of this study.

First, research participants were given a vignette to read (For Bangladeshi participants it was read to them by the researcher during an online interview). This vignette was specific to the participants' culture but the age at the time of alleged abuse (age 3, 6, or 9) varied. After participants read the vignette, they were asked to complete the Perceived Credibility Scale (for Bangladeshi participants it was read to them during the interview), which measured how credible they believed the allegation of historical CSA was. Participants were also asked the two previously mentioned open-ended questions: "What kinds of evidence would make this scenario more credible according to you" and "What kinds of evidence would make this scenario less credible according to you?" Participants then completed the evaluation of attitudes towards various myths of CSA, measured by the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale (for Bangladeshi participants it was read to them during interview). Finally, socio-demographic information about the participants, including age, gender, ethnicity, household income, place of living, and education level was requested. The questionnaire was not counter-balanced because existing literature in this domain did not observe any order effect (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010, Collings, 1997).

All the Canadian participant completed this study via Qualtrics whereas all the Bangladeshi participants participated in this study via zoom interviews. For Bangladeshi participants, vignettes and questions were translated into a "Bengali" version which was back translated by another bilingual person who speaks both Bangla and English and the back translation was satisfactory enough to be deemed equivalent to the original. For Bangladeshi participants, the questions and vignette were read to them and verbal responses from the participants were recorded by the researcher during the online interview.

Results

The results are divided into three sections:

Part A presents data on the effect of the age of the victim, culture and gender of the participants on their response on the Perceived Credibility Scale. It is their rating of the perceived credibility of the vignettes that they read. A 2 (culture: Canadian and Bangladeshi) x 3 (age of the alleged victim: 3, 6, and 9), x 2 (gender: men and women) between subjects ANOVA was completed with the mean perceived credibility scores for the 11 items on the Perceived Credibility Scale as the dependent variable. This analysis assessed Hypotheses 1 – 3.

Part B presents data on the effect of the culture and gender of the participants on their responses on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale. Part B addresses hypotheses 4 and 5 of this study. For that purpose, a 2 (Culture: Canadian and Bangladeshi) x 2 (gender: men and women) between subjects ANOVA with scores on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale as the dependent variable was conducted.

Part C presents the relationship between the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale and the Perceived Credibility Scale. Part C addresses hypothesis 6 of our study. For that purpose, a linear regression was completed that assessed the relationship between scores on these two scales and whether that relationship differed according to culture and gender.

Part A: Credibility Assessment of Historical CSA

Descriptives

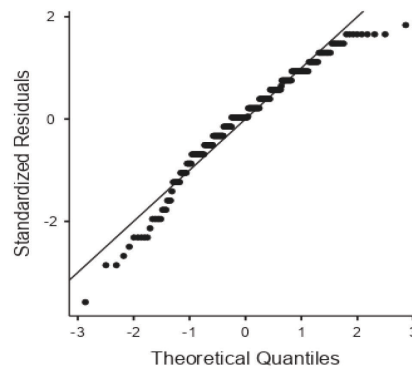
Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for the Perceived Credibility Scale. Each group is listed separately, and higher scores represent participants evaluating the hypothetical scenario or vignette as more credible. Prior to competing the planned ANOVA, analyses were done to ensure the assumptions of homogeneity and normality were met. Figure 1 presents the Quantile-Quantile plot (Q-Q plot) of the data.

Table 1. Perceived Credibility as a Function of Culture, Age Condition and Gender

Culture	Condition	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Canada	3-year-olds	Men	10	2.81	0.33
		Women	44	3.16	0.46
	6-year-olds	Men	7	3.29	0.48
		Women	39	3.34	0.30
	9-year-olds	Men	11	3.03	0.51
		Women	36	3.40	0.31
Bangladeshi	3-year-olds	Men	15	2.19	0.37
		Women	17	2.80	0.44
	6-year-olds	Men	21	2.83	0.41
		Women	10	3.09	0.64
	9-year-olds	Men	15	2.94	0.28
		Women	14	3.12	0.46

Note. Scores on this scale ranged from 1-4

Figure 1 Q.Q. plot of the Perceived Credibility Scale



Levene's homogeneity of variance test ($F = 1.27, p = .242$) and the assumption of Shapiro Wilk Normality test ($W = .964, p < .001$) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance had not been violated and data are normally distributed.

A 2 (culture) X 3 (age of victim) X 2 (gender) between subjects ANOVA was completed to test if there were any effects of these factors on the Credibility Scale Score. Results indicated a significant main effect for culture, $M = 5.23, F(1, 227) = 31.48, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.122$; a significant main effect for age of victim, $M = 3.11, F(2, 227) = 18.69, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.141$; and a significant main effect for gender, $M = 4.06, F(1, 227) = 24.44, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.097$. However, there were no significant interactions between the variables. Consistent with the first hypothesis, Canadians had significantly higher Credibility Scale Scores than Bangladeshis ($M = 0.43, p < 0.001$). Tukey's follow-up analyses were completed to assess the effect the age of the victim. Participants presented with the vignettes involving both the 6- and 9-year-old victim reported significantly higher credibility scale scores than those presented with vignettes involving the 3-year-old victim ($M = 0.28, p < .001, d = -0.972$ and $M = 0.33, p < .001, d = -0.940$), but those who read about a 6- or 9-year-old did not differ from each other ($p = .984, d = 0.032$). This contradicts the second hypothesis that suggested the younger the age of the child at the time of the alleged abuse, the higher credibility scores would be. With respect to gender, supporting hypothesis three, women rated the vignettes as significantly more credible than did men ($M = 0.33, p < .001, d = -0.747$).

Part B: Attitudes Towards Myths of CSA

Descriptives

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale for each group. Higher scores represent participants from a particular group demonstrating higher

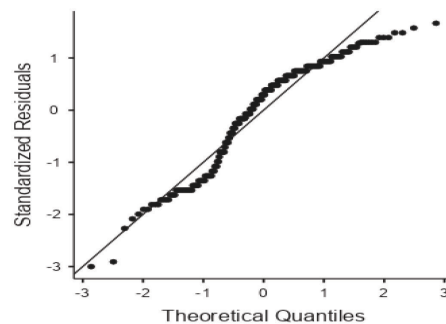
sensitivity towards victims of CSA. Again, prior to completing the planned ANOVA, analysis was done to ensure the assumptions of homogeneity and normality were met. Figure 2 presents the Quantile-Quantile plot (Q-Q plot) of the data.

Table 2. Pro-Victim Attitude Scale Score as a Function of culture and gender

Culture	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Canada	Men	28	3.40	0.26
	Women	119	3.54	0.18
Bangladesh	Men	48	2.70	0.32
	Women	41	2.85	0.25

Note. Scores on this scale ranged from 1-4

Figure 2 Q. Q. plot for the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale



The assumption check for homogeneity of variance (Levene's test) ($F = 9.11, p < 0.001$) showed the assumption of homoscedasticity was violated. Similarly, the Shapiro-Wilk Normality test ($W = .987, p = .027$) indicated that data were not normally distributed (See Figure 2).

However, the variance between men and women participants from Bangladesh and Canada was very similar which allowed us to assume equal variance. Consequently, Welch's one way ANOVA analyses in place of a classic ANOVA analysis was conducted.

The overall effect of culture was statistically significant, $F(1, 137) = 418, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = .0.682$ showing that Canadians demonstrated a higher score than Bangladeshis indicating higher sensitivity towards victims of CSA. The overall effect of gender was also statistically significant $F(1, 121) = 46.5, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.190$ (consistent with hypothesis 4 and 5) with women demonstrating higher scores than men.

Part C: Relation Between Credibility Assessment and Attitude Towards Myths of CSA

In this section, we explored the relationship between scores on the Perceived Credibility Scale, and scores on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale and assessed whether they differed according to different levels of gender and culture. At first, we conducted linear regression to determine the impact of the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale (predictor) on the Perceived Credibility Scale (criterion) using linear regression.

The relation between the Perceived Credibility Scale score and the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale score was significant, $r = .514, p < 0.001$ what direction?. Then, linear regression was used to compare the relation between the Perceived Credibility Scale and the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale score without the interaction of Culture and Gender in and with the interaction of Culture and Gender included.

Table 3. Regression Table

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
<hr/>					

Intercept	1.525	0.337	0.860	2.190	<.001
Pro Victim Scale Score	0.506	0.116	0.276	0.736	<.001
Culture: Canadian	-0.017	0.101	-0.218	0.182	0.861
Bangladeshi					
Gender: Men-Women	-0.224	0.066	-0.355	-0.0948	<.001

The relationship between the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale predicting the Perceived Credibility Scale did change based on different levels of Culture and Gender, $F(3, 231) = 4.11, p = 0.007, \Delta R^2 = 0.037$. This supports our sixth hypothesis that there is a relation between the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale and the Perceived Credibility Scale on different levels of culture and gender of the participant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was threefold: first, to understand the impact of age at the time of alleged childhood sexual abuse, as well as the gender and cultural background (Bangladeshi versus Canadian) of an evaluator, on credibility assessments of historical CSA. Secondly, the study investigated people's attitudes towards myths regarding childhood sexual abuse and how the gender and culture of individuals influence these attitudes. Thirdly, it explored how the degree to which one believes in myths about CSA relates to credibility assessment of vignettes about historical CSA. No known study has examined cross-cultural perception of historical CSA comparing Bangladesh and Canada.

Credibility Assessment of Historical CSA

This aspect of the study explored how people evaluated historical CSA cases using the Perceived Credibility Scale and examined whether there were differences according to the age of

the child at the time of the alleged abuse or the cultural background and gender of the evaluator. This section had three hypotheses: the younger the age of the child at the time of abuse the higher the score on the Perceived Credibility Scale, Canadians would score higher on the Perceived Credibility Scale than Bangladeshis, and women would score higher on the Perceived Credibility Scale than men. A higher score on the Perceived Credibility Scale indicates a greater tendency to believe an alleged victim of historical CSA. In contrast, a lower score indicates a lower tendency to accept such an allegation.

Consistent with our first hypothesis, results showed a significant main effect of culture as Canadians demonstrated higher perceived credibility scores than Bangladeshis. Only a couple of other studies have looked at culture's impact on CSA evaluations (Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Tishelman & Geffner, 2010, as cited in Cacuci et al., 2021). However, no known study has investigated the impact of culture on perceived credibility of historical CSA.

One of the possible reasons why for Bangladeshi raters scored lower than Canadian raters on the perceived credibility scale could be legal instruments surrounding CSA and differences in these two countries (The Penal Code, 1860; The Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, 2000, Criminal Code (R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46)). This can extend from legal provisions to the criminal prosecution system. Canada has much more awareness regarding the issue of CSA, which has led to reforming the laws and criminal justice system (Confronting The Many Faces Of CSA: Developing a Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy, 2012; Wells, 1990). Moreover, most Canadian provinces consider and evaluate the testimony of an adult who was a victim of alleged CSA when the victim was a child (for example, *R. v. W. (R)*, 1992). In addition, the legal system of Canada for most provinces is not confined by the statute of limitation, meaning that initiation of criminal cases is not subjected to time limitation (Zamani, 2023).

In contrast, legal prosecution is not straightforward in addressing historical CSA in Bangladesh. Article 118 of The Evidence Act of 1872 enables all persons competent to testify unless the court decides the person is incompetent to understand the question for various reasons, including early childhood, extreme old age, or disease of body and mind (The Evidence Act, 1872). This creates ambiguity regarding the acceptance of testimony for alleged abuse that happened long ago when the victim was a child. Moreover, child marriage is a prominent problem due to the exemption of the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017, which enables children to be married under exceptional circumstances. The Penal Code 1860 of Bangladesh allows impunity from marital rape if a wife is over 13 years of age. Limitation of these legal provisions allows generalizing and normalizing the exploitation of CSA in the societal context of Bangladesh, which might have contributed to lower perceived credibility when reading a vignette detailing historical CSA.

Factors that are specific to Bangladesh's cultural context could also explain a lower credibility assessment. It is culturally and legally acceptable from a religious perspective, especially in rural areas where sexual intercourse between adults and children is acceptable if it is supported by marriage (Chowdhury, 2004). Moreover, culturally normalized factors such as victim blaming, apprehension of retaliation, and societal stigma might have also contributed to this lower perceived credibility score. One other possible explanation for differences of score could be the differences in the data collection procedures, in that there might have been different social expectations caused by in-person interviews which in turn can generate socially desirable answers. Political orientation is another factor that can affect the score differences. Since historically, religion is not separated from politics in the perspective of Bangladesh and certain schools of religion do not perceive sexual encounters with a minor as abuse, a certain political

affiliation for Bangladeshi participant may have influenced the score differences. Finally, the lack of scholarly investigation in the context of Bangladesh can be another possible reason for a lower perceived credibility score. Up to this point, there has not been any research that investigated the perceived credibility of CSA or historical CSA in the context of Bangladesh, whereas there has been relevant research conducted in Canada (Connolly et al., 2009; Connolly et al., 2010; Pozzulo et al., 2010; Read et al., 2006). It can be assumed that a lack of academic literature may have contributed to skepticism towards the credibility of CSA, which impacted Bangladeshi participants in general.

In our investigation of credibility assessment, we manipulated the age of the alleged victim at the time of the abuse, while keeping the age of the reporting constant (age 18). In contrast to our hypothesis, the 3-year-old victims were seen as less credible than the older children, not more credible. One possible explanation could be that the prior research on which the hypothesis was based focused on children talking about recent experiences. However, in this study, the individuals were talking about events from long ago, when they were aged 3. So, one problematic issue that have may contributed to this finding would be the length of the delay. Although some studies have found that younger children, particularly school-age children, are considered more credible than older children or adults in terms of CSA (Connolly et al., 2010; Melkman et al., 2017) the impact of delayed reporting, which distinguishes historical CSA from CSA, may have had a negative effect on perceived credibility (Golding, Seago et al., 1999, Golding, Sanchez et al., 1999). Our results support the findings of Golding et al. in that the age-3 condition had the longest delay (15 years) in terms of reporting; this increased length of delay might have contributed to the lower credibility score. Despite not finding any significant age differences, Pozzulo et al. (2010) argued that studies that did find increased length of delay

contributing to lower credibility was justifiable, considering the commonly associated factors that arise with the delay of historical CSA, such as the loss or absence of evidence and witnesses, as well as the deterioration of memory.

There was no difference in credibility ratings between those aged 6 versus aged 9 which also does not support our second hypothesis as it was thought that victims at age 6 would have higher perceived credibility ratings than victims at age 9. This aligns with some of the existing literature in terms of reporting events that had happened very recently as that research did not find any age differences (Lashbaugh-Barney, 2020; Pozzulo et al., 2010). One possible explanation for this could be that the participants might have self-reflected on their own personal memories at the ages of both age 6 and 9 to measure if they could successfully retrieve memories. As memories start to stabilize by the age 5 and 6 for most people (Howe, 2015), it is possible that participants' confidence in their own memories after age 6 influenced the lower credibility score for those at age 3 but not for those at age 6 and age 9.

Another contributing factor could be the lesser likelihood of participants believing that a person can indeed remember accurately back to when they were only age 3. Because people might think that reporting an incident many years later about abuse that happened at the age of 3 is less believable, they are more likely to think those memories are fictional. Even researchers have labeled memories from age 3 or younger as fictional (Akhter et al., 2018), although this has been strongly challenged by other researchers in the field (Bauer et al., 2019). Nonetheless, memories from these early ages tend to be more fragmentary. This fragmentary nature of memory can be related to the phenomenon of childhood amnesia, which is the absence or scarcity of memory from early life events. According to theoretical models, lack of memory is found during the age range of 0-3 and memories continue to be scarce and sporadic during the

age range of 3-6 when adults try to recall their early memories (Courage & Howe, 2004; Hayne, 2004; Wetzler & Sweeney, 1986, as cited in Artioli et al., 2012). However,, the wholesale dismissal of memories from age 3 is not supported by existing literature as studies have found that people can successfully remember incidents from the age of 3 which are not fictional (Fivush, 1998, Peterson & Parsons, 2005; Peterson et al., 2018).

Finally, we investigated the influence of the gender of the evaluator on perceived credibility. Our results suggest that women evaluators find historical CSA to be more credible than male evaluators. This finding aligns with the existing literature related to the influence of the gender of the rater on perceived credibility assessment in the context of CSA in general (Bottom et al., 2014; Everson & Sandoval, 2011; Golding, Segó, et al., 1999, Golding, Sanchez, et al., 1999; Golding et al., 2007; Rogers & Davis, 2009; Rotigen, 2002; Wessel et al., 2016) and in the context of historical CSA (Sugarman & Boney-McCoy, 1997). In this context, this study adds generalizability to the existing literature by adding another culture. Possible explanations for women scoring higher on perceived credibility than men could be a heightened sense of empathy and societal gender norms of women being more protective (Eisenberg & Lemon, 1983; Pereda et al., 2009). It is possible that women are more sensitive because of their lived experiences or their shared experiences (e.g., hearing from other women about their experiences of CSA) where due to differences in socialization, men could be simply less aware and less likely to be exposed to the stories of women who have experiences with CSA.

It is also important to note that the lack of interaction between culture, age and gender for the Perceived Credibility Scale indicates that our independent factors are additive and effects of one of these factors does not depend on the level other factors. This also indicates that the

relationship between our dependent variables and independent variables are stable across other levels of independent variable.

Attitudes Towards Myths of CSA

This aspect of the study investigated people's attitudes towards different myths regarding CSA using the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale and assessed whether they varied according to the culture of the rater (Bangladesh versus Canada) and the gender of the rater (men versus women). A higher score on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale indicates a lower inclination towards believing myths of CSA, and a lower score on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale indicates a higher inclination towards believing myths of CSA. Myths surrounding CSA are related to overgeneralized beliefs, and the degree to which victims are held responsible for the abuse positively correlates with these beliefs (Sawrikar, 2020). In other words, the more people believe the myths about CSA, the more likely they are to blame the victim of CSA rather than the alleged offender and to take away the responsibility from the alleged offender.

Consistent with hypothesis four, Canadians scored higher on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale than Bangladeshis. So far, there has been only one cross-cultural study assessing CSA myths using the Child Sexual Abuse Myths Scales conducted in three countries: South Africa, South Korea, and Sweden (Collings et al., 2009). It was found that differences in acceptance of CSA myths exist in different cross-cultural contexts by pointing out that eastern cultures accepted more myths about CSA than western cultures. However, the researchers argued that CSA in different cultural settings might not be comparable due to a lack of construct comparability and noncomparable conceptualization (Sawrikar, 2020). Although the current study used the Pro-Victim Assessment Scale, which was generated experimentally based on previous research (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Lashbaugh-Barney, 2020), our

findings supported the only existing study, considering that Bangladesh is an eastern culture where Canada is a western culture. However, supporting the argument of Sawrikar (2020) and Collings et al. (2009), such simple inferences cannot be made as overlapping cultural influence can be a significant confound. One possible explanation for Bangladeshis scoring lower on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale with medium effect size could be the cultural context of Bangladesh in terms of victim blaming, patriarchal hegemony and societal stigma surrounding violence against women, as CSA is undeniably one dimension of such violence (Rahman et al., 2021).

Consistent with hypothesis five, women scored higher on the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale than men with low effect size, meaning men tend to believe/accept more myths about CSA than women. This finding was similar to that found in existing literature, which also indicated a gender-based difference in accepting the myths about CSA (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Magalhães et al., 2022). One possible explanation for this can be similar to that suggested to partially account for women scoring higher on the Perceived Credibility Scale than men due to a heightened sense of empathy and societal gender norms that emphasize women having nurturing and protective roles.

Relation Between Credibility Assessment and Attitude Towards Myths of CSA

This aspect of our research found sufficient evidence for the final hypothesis indicating that attitudes towards different myths can predict credibility of historical CSA, and there is a relation between the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale and the Perceived Credibility Scale. No previous study looked into the relationship between attitudes towards CSA myths and credibility assessment of historical CSA in the context of culture and gender differences. However, Magalhães et al. (2022) investigated gender differences in CSA attitudes by exploring the role of empathy, social dominance orientation, and moral disengagement. They found positive

associations between social dominance orientation, CSA myths, and propensity for moral disengagement. Their study found that male participants tended to have higher social dominance orientation, a higher propensity for moral disengagement, and lower levels of empathy associated with a higher acceptance of myths. This suggests that the gender difference regarding CSA attitude was observed regarding the desire to dominate other groups and the cognitive tendency to justify harmful behavior. Alcantara et al. (2019) found that individuals who exhibited a high degree of preference for group hierarchy and anti-egalitarian values, as measured by the social dominance orientation scale, demonstrated a decreased likelihood of accepting allegations of CSA. But no previous study explored relations between credibility assessment of historical CSA and attitudes towards myths of CSA. One implication of this finding could be that a person's pre-existing beliefs regarding different myths of CSA are influential above and beyond the effects of gender or cultural background when evaluating a historical CSA case.

Importance of these Findings

First, there has not been any prior study that included a cross-cultural investigation comparing Bangladesh and Canada to investigate historical CSA. This is the first quantitative study of its kind to compare credibility ratings and attitude evaluations and find a connection between these two measurements in distinct cultural contexts.

This study bridged the gap of perceived credibility according to age, as no study has yet investigated an age group earlier than age 6 for historical CSA to our knowledge (Pozzulo et al., 2010). The finding that 3-year-olds significantly differed from 6- and 9-year-olds in perceived credibility strengthens the idea that delay of reporting negatively affects the perceived credibility of a CSA allegation (Golding, Segó, et al., 1999; Golding, Sanchez, et al., 1999). This finding might also strengthen the idea of an age threshold for alleged abuse in terms of perceived

credibility about historical CSA. It is possible that before a certain age the victim is not seen as trustworthy but after a certain age threshold, age becomes a factor for consideration in terms of credibility. Both of these are fundamentally important for the criminal justice system in order to take justified action regarding historical CSA cases. Finally, the findings of this research provide a unique contribution regarding attitudes towards myths of CSA by suggesting they not only predict perceived credibility but do so regardless of the culture and gender differences of the rater, which opens a new direction for further investigation.

Limitations and Future Directions

Due to the nature of this study, the Perceived Credibility Scale and the Pro-Victim Attitude Scales were customized. The Credibility Assessment is a unique customized scale, as no other relevant and generalized scales have been used. The most pertinent similar scale was used by Golding, Segó, et al. (1999), which does not apply to the present study's design because it incorporated multiple ages in their scale, which we manipulated here as an experimental factor. On the other hand, the Pro-Victim Attitude Scale is a customized scale developed from the Child Sexual Abuse Myths Scale (CSAMS; Collings, 1997 cited in Collings et al., 2009) and 119 popular myths analysis (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). As well, four additional items were added that were appropriate to the cross-cultural context of the research. Although the internal consistency was high in the present customized scales, there were no pre-existing measures, so we had to develop our own and until other use it, we do not know how reliable it is.

Additionally, the differences of scores that we observed based on cultural differences can be due to methodological differences. The Bangladeshi group was not primarily sourced from academic institutions, unlike the Canadian group. Therefore, the observed discrepancies could be attributed to educational setting rather than nationality. Additionally, the methods used for

gathering data differed between the Bangladeshi and Canadian samples (Zoom interviews versus online surveys), which could also explain variations between the two groups as verbal response makes participant much more susceptible to socially desirable responding.

Conclusion

Historical CSA is a multifaceted issue that is a concern all over the world. In the criminal justice system, one of the challenging tasks is to evaluate historical CSA cases with no other evidence to support the allegations besides the victims' memories. In such situations, it solely depends on the judge and jury to assess the credibility of such allegations. This raises an important question regarding the factors that influence credibility evaluation. In the present study, we explored the culture of the rater, the age of the victim at the time of the alleged abuse, and the gender of the rater. We found significant differences in credibility ratings of historical CSA vignettes that were associated with these factors.

Our results suggested that Canadian raters find historical CSA allegations more credible than Bangladeshi raters do; a victim who was 3 at the time of the alleged abuse appears to be less credible to raters than a victim who was 6 or 9, and women find historical CSA more credible than men. Our research also suggests that Canadians have a lower inclination towards believing different myths of CSA that negatively portray the victim compared to Bangladeshis, and women compared to men have a lower inclination towards endorsing different myths of CSA that negatively portrays the victim. Our study also supports the idea that there is a relationship between people's attitudes toward various myths and the assessment of historical CSA. Moreover, people's inclination towards different myths of CSA can predict people's evaluation of historical CSA regardless of the culture and gender differences of the rater. This study adds

substantial evidence to the existing literature that will help the criminal justice system to consider the influence of such factors while giving a verdict related to historical CSA.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Canadian Questionnaire for age 3 condition:

Part A

Rebecca was a 3-year-old girl who lived in the city of Hamilton with her parents. Both of her parents worked for a multinational corporation. Rebecca's Nanny took care of her most of the time. Most evenings, Rebecca went for a small walk in the park with her Nanny. One evening, Rebecca's Nanny got a phone call that her son had an accident and was in hospital and she had to leave Rebecca's house immediately. Before leaving, Rebecca's Nanny arranged for the next-door neighbour Mr. Bolton to look after Rebecca. When Rebecca's parents came back that night, they thanked Mr. Bolton for looking after her. Years later, at the age of 18, Rebecca came forward to report a case of sexual abuse against her neighbour, specifically saying that he sexually molested her that night. According to Rebecca's allegation, when she was 3 years old Mr. Bolton undressed her and hurt her private parts, and she remembers that it still hurt a lot when she walked the next day. However, she did not say anything to her parents or her Nanny at that time because she was afraid, they wouldn't believe her.

Credibility Assessment

1. According to Rebecca's allegation, when she was 3 years of age, she was sexually molested by her neighbor Mr. Bolton. When this allegation came to court, Mr. Bolton's lawyer argued that a person can not remember a memory from age 3. However, Rebecca claims that she still remembers the event well. How strongly do you believe she could remember an event from this early age?

- A. _____ Strongly Believe She Remembers
- B. _____ Believe
- C. _____ Do NOT Believe
- D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe She Remembers

2. There is an argument in sexual abuse cases that there is a chance such abuse has been scripted and suggested by others. How strongly do you believe Rebecca's claim could be suggested by others rather than actually happening?

- A. _____ Strongly Believe It Was Suggested
- B. _____ Believe
- C. _____ Do NOT Believe
- D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe It Was Suggested

3. If Rebecca claims she always knew that Mr. Bolton molested her, but never felt comfortable coming forward with the accusation, how reasonable would that claim be?

- A. _____ Strongly Believe It Is Reasonable
- B. _____ Believe
- C. _____ Do NOT Believe
- D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe It Is Reasonable

4. If Rebecca claims she blocked the interaction with Mr. Bolton from her memory and only remembered it again recently when driving past her old home, how reasonable would that claim be?

- A. _____ Strongly Believe It Is Reasonable
- B. _____ Believe
- C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe It Is Reasonable

5. Given the amount of time that has passed, how strongly do you believe Rebecca is being honest with her accusation?

A. _____ Strongly Believe in Her Honesty

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe in Her Honesty

6. Given the amount of time that has passed, how strongly do you believe Rebecca could think this happened when it did NOT?

A. _____ Strongly Believe She Could Think This Happened Even if it did Not

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe She Could Think This Happened Even if it did Not

7. If those who knew Rebecca during her childhood claimed she faced lots of stress and anxiety when growing up, was anxious about meeting new people, and often locked herself in her room, how strongly do you believe this would be consistent with her assertion that she was molested.

A. _____ Strongly Believe This is Consistent with Her Assertion

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe This is Consistent with Her Assertion

8. If those who knew Rebecca during her childhood claimed she was an ordinary child growing up, with no signs of stress or anxiety, how strongly do you believe this would be consistent with her assertion that she was molested?

A. _____ Strongly Believe This is Consistent with Her Assertion

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe This is Consistent with Her Assertion

9. Given the amount of time that has passed, how strongly do you believe Rebecca could accurately recall the details of what happened?

A. _____ Strongly Believe She Is Accurate

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe She Is Accurate

10. How strongly do you believe it is possible that a 3-year-old would keep an interaction like the one Rebecca describes from their family?

A. _____ Strongly Believe This is Possible

B. _____ Believe

C. _____ Do NOT Believe

D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe This is Possible

11. If Rebecca's memory is the only evidence, how strongly do you believe that such evidence is reliable?

- A. _____ Strongly Believe such Evidence is Reliable
- B. _____ Believe
- C. _____ Do NOT Believe
- D. _____ Strongly Do NOT Believe Such Evidence is Reliable

12. What kinds of evidence would make this scenario more credible according to you?

Answer:

13. What kinds of evidence would make this scenario less credible according to you?

Answer:

* Please use extra page for question no. 10 and 11 attached with this questionnaire if necessary

Part B

Questionnaire about General Beliefs regarding Child Sexual Abuse

Please go through the following statements and indicate how strongly do you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. If sexual interactions between an adult and a child do not involve violent attacks, it means they are also non-damaging.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

2. If a child has sex with an adult s/he will experience trauma

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree

D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

3. If a child experiences trauma because of sexual interaction with an adult, s/he can naturally overcome that trauma.

A. Strongly Agree

B. Agree

C. Do NOT Agree

D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

4. Sexual interactions between a child and adult are not damaging or abusive if they are based on love

A. Strongly Agree

B. Agree

C. Do NOT Agree

D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

5. Adult-child sexual interaction occurs rarely

A. Strongly Agree

B. Agree

C. Do NOT Agree

D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

6. There is a universal taboo against adult-child sexual interaction which prevents its occurrence

A. Strongly Agree

B. Agree

- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

7. Allegations of sexual interactions with adults that are made by children are often fabricated to get revenge or attention.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

8. If the adult who has sex with a child is women then it cannot be sexual abuse

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

9. If children do not want to have sex with an adult, they can always say “stop”

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

10. Mothers who are not involved in child sexual abuse but know that their child is being sexually being abused often try to hide it.

- A. Strongly Agree

- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

11. Older children have the responsibility of not looking seductive if they want to avoid child sexual abuse

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

12. Children who don't initially report sexual interaction must want the sexual activity to continue

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

13. Children who don't initially report sexual abuse do not see it as abuse

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

14. Children raised by homosexual couples have a higher risk of being sexually abused than

children raised by heterosexual couples.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

15. Adolescent girls who wear very revealing attractive clothing are asking to be sexually abused.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

16. If a child experiences pleasure from an unwanted sexual relationship with an adult, it cannot really be described as being “abusive.”

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

17. Most children are sexually abused by strangers and not by the people they are familiar with

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

18. Sexual relationships between an adult and child that do not involve attempted or actual sexual intercourse they are unlikely to have serious psychological consequences for the child.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

19. Child sexual abuse only takes place in big urban cities and not in rural areas

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

20. Children who are being abused will show physical symptoms of abuse

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

21. Child sexual abuse is caused by social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and alcohol abuse.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree

- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

22. Child marriage (children aged 1-16 marrying an adult) occurs in some parts of the world. Do you think sexual intercourse with a child is acceptable if it is embedded within child marriage?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

23. Do you think child marriage is okay if the parents have approved of it?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

24. Suggesting that other countries end child marriage means interfering in their affairs.

Countries should decide for themselves.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

25. Child marriage only happens between young girls and old men

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Do NOT Agree
- D. Strongly Do NOT Agree

Part C

Demographic Questions

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Place of Current living

Rural: _____

Urban: _____

Highest level of Education Completed (Please Check one)

___ No formal Schooling

___ Primary School

___ High School

___ Post-Secondary Certificate/Diploma

___ University 1 year to 3 years

___ Bachelor

___ Postgraduate

What is your household average yearly income? _____

Appendix 2

Demographic Information of Participants:

Baseline characteristic	Bangladesh		Canada		Full sample	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender						
Female	41	17.2	120	50.2	161	67.4
Male	51	21.3	27	11.3	78	32.6
Age						
Age (18-28)	72	30.1	129	54	201	84.1
Age (29-39)	20	8.4	18	7.5	38	15.9
Highest Educational Level						
No Education	5	2.1	0	0	5	2.1
Primary School	2	0.8	0	0	2	0.8
High School	8	3.3	14	5.9	22	9.2
Post-secondary Certificate	10	4.2	2	0.8	12	5
University 1 year to 3 years	24	10	99	41.4	123	51.5
Bachelor	0	0	22	9.2	22	9.2
Graduate	26	10.9	0	0	26	10.9
Post-graduate	17	7.1	10	4.2	27	11.3
Accommodation						
Urban	56	23.4	114	47.7	170	71.1
Rural	36	15.1	33	13.8	69	28.9

Note: N = 239