

Sexual Abuse in Children

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Abstract

Sexual abuse is one of the most devastating types of child maltreatment, and estimates indicate that it has increased significantly during the past decade. As with all forms of child maltreatment, no universal definition of sexual abuse exists. There are various risk factors which lead to sexual abuse in children. The management of sexual abuse include Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

Keywords: Sexualabuse; Children.

Introduction

The term child abuse has different connotations in different cultural milieu and socio economic situations. The World health Organization defines child abuse or maltreatment as forms of physical and /or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Major types of child abuse by care giver or other adults include;

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect

Definition

Sexual abuse is one of the most devastating types

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RECEIVED ON 24.11.2017, ACCEPTED ON 08.12.2017

of child maltreatment, and estimates indicate that it has increased significantly during the past decade.

As with all forms of child maltreatment, no universal definition of sexual abuse exists. Definition of sexual abuse cover range of acts including involvement of children in sexual acts they do not understand, to which they cannot give consent or that violate social taboos. The child abuse and prevention act defines sexual abuse as "the use, persuasion, or coercion of any child to engage in sexually explicit conduct or producing any visual depiction of such conduct, or rape, molestation, prostitution or incest with children".

Sexual abuse includes the following types of Sexual maltreatment

- Incest; Any Physical sexual activity between family members; blood relationship is not required does not include sexual relationships between legally sanctioned partners such as spouses.
- Molestation; A vague term that includes indecent liberties such as touching, fondling, kissing, single or mutual masturbation or oral genital contact.
- Exhibitionism; Indescent exposure, usually exposure of genitalia by an adult man to children or women.

- Child Pornography; Arranging and photographing in any media, sexual acts involving children alone or with adults or animals, regardless of consent by child's legal guardian, also may denote distribution of such material in any form with or without profit
- Child prostitution; involving children in sex acts for profit and usually with changing partners.
- Paedophilia; Literally meaning Love of child and does not denote a type of sexual activity but rather preference of an adult for prepubertal children as the means of achieving sexual excitement.

Risk Factors of Victimization

The Risk Factors Include;

- Female sex
- Unaccompanied children
- Adopted children and step children
- History of past abuse
- Poverty
- War/armed conflict
- Single parent home/broken families
- Social isolation
- Parents with mental illness or alcohol or drug dependency
- Physically or mentally handicapped children

Methods Used to Pressure Children into Sexual Activity

- The child is offered gift or privileges or has privileges withheld.
- The adult misrepresents moral standards by telling child that its ok to do.
- Isolated and emotionally and socially impoverished children are enticed by adults who meet their needs for warmth and human contact.
- The successful sex offenders pressures the victim into secrecy by describing it as a secret between us than other people would take way if they found out.
- The offender plays on the child's fears, including fear of punishment by the offender, fear of repercussions if the child tells, fear of abandonment or rejection by family.

Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse

Symptoms of sexual abuse in children are similar

to those of depression or severe anxiety and nervousness.

Physical symptoms include;

- Trouble walking or sitting usually as a result of pain in genitalia
- Displays knowledge of interests in sexual acts inappropriate to his or her age ,or even seductive behaviour
- Victim is always hiding and avoiding a specific person for no reason
- Doesn't want to change clothes in front of others or participate in any physical activities
- Sexually transmitted infections especially in teens
- Pregnancy
- Run away from home

Health Symptoms Include;

- Encopresis
- Anorexia nervosa
- Sleep Problems
- Stomach aches
- Genital or rectal symptoms such as pain during a bowel movement or urination or vaginal itch or discharge
- Repeated headaches

Social Behaviour Include;

- Engaging in alcoholism or high risk sexual behaviours
- Have excessive fears
- Poor school performance and class participation
- Withdraw from normal and regular activities.

Diagnosis

History Collection

- Last occurrence of alleged abuse. When do you say this happened?
- First time the alleged abuse occurred. When is the first time you remember this happening?
- Nature of the assault, i.e. anal, vaginal and/or oral penetration. What area of your body did you say was touched or hurt?
- Whether or not the child noticed any injuries or complained of pain.

- Vaginal or anal pain, bleeding and/or discharge following the event. Do you have any pain in your bottom or genital area? Is there any blood in your panties or in the toilet?
- Any difficulty or pain with voiding or defecating. Does it hurt when you go to the bathroom?
- Any urinary or faecal incontinence.
- First menstrual period and date of last menstrual period (girls only).
- Details of prior sexual activity .
- Have you had sex with someone because you wanted to?
- History of washing/bathing since assault

Physical Examination

- Record the height and weight of the child
- Note any bruises, burns, scars or rashes on the skin. Carefully describe the size, location, pattern and colour of any such injuries.
- In the mouth/pharynx, note petechiae of the palate or posterior pharynx, and look for any tears to the frenulum.
- Check for any signs that force and/or restraints were used, particularly around the neck and in the extremities.
- Record the child's sexual development stage and check the breasts for signs of injury Collection of specimens for diagnostic purposes

Management

- *Trauma Focussed Cognitive Behavioural therapy*

Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) developed by Cohen, Mannarino, and

Deblinger, is a psychosocial treatment model designed to treat behavioural problems in children and adolescents; initially developed to address the psychological trauma associated with child sexual abuse.

- *Group Therapy*

Group therapy has been identified as the treatment of choice when working with sexually abused adolescents. It creates an environment where survivors of sexual abuse can meet and interact with other individuals who faced with similar presenting problems.

- *Eye movement Desensitization and Reprocessing*

It is also used to treat other conditions and children. It reduces the long-lasting effects of stressful memories by developing more adaptive coping mechanisms.

Acknowledgement

I express my sincere thanks to my colleagues and friends who supported me in writing this article.

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