Child Sexual Abuse: Understanding the Issues

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Overview

- definitions,
- healthy adult-child relationships,
- types of sexual abuse,
- prevalence,
- social forces that account for child sexual abuse,
- the effects of child sexual abuse,
- what sexual abuse means to child survivors,
- what sexual abuse means to perpetrators,
- do survivors become perpetrators, and
- factors associated with recovery from child sexual abuse.
Definitions

- Abuse of power
- Another person takes advantage
- Goal: gratification
  - Sexual
  - Emotional

- Not sexual play between consenting generational equals
Healthy Adult-Child Relationships

- Adults
  - sensitive, responsive
  - emotionally available
  - respects children’s capacities
- Children
  - reciprocal interactions
  - internalize type of caregiving received
  - respects adult authority
  - taught to resist abuse of authority
Types

- Incest
- Child molestation
  - By persons children/family know
  - By strangers (least common)
    - Direct contact
    - Through internet
- Child pornography
- Prostitution & child trafficking
- Sexualizing children
Prevalence

- World-wide Prevalence
  - At least 20% of all girls
  - At least 10% of all boys
  - More than 900 million survivors world-wide
Social Forces that Account for Child Sexual Abuse

- Children’s status
- Entitlement, often gendered
- Sexual and emotional gratification of perpetrators
- Minimization of effects on survivors
- Victim-blaming & silencing of survivors
- Taboos sexual abuse and healthy sexuality
- Myths about perpetrators
- Financial gain,
- Underfunded prevention efforts.
Effects

- Wide variation
- Depend on
  - Other adversities children have experienced
  - Resources available to survivors
  - Sensitive, responsive care providers
Do Survivors Become Perpetrators?

- Most do not have resources and protective processes that they put to work.
- Most perpetrators were not sexually abused:
  - Many use sexual stimulation to cope with stress.
  - Most experienced other childhood trauma.
  - All have beliefs that support their sexually abusive behaviors.
What Sexual Abuse Means to Children

- Do not understand sexual abuse and sexual behaviors
- Think they have to obey adults
- May love perpetrators but hate the abuse
  - Want perpetrators to get help
- Afraid they will be blamed
  - Often are blamed
What Child Sexual Abuse Means to Perpetrators

- Sexual Gratification
- Love
- Emotional High
  - Lifts mood
- Many believe
  - Sexual abuse is mutual love
  - What they are doing is not sexual abuse
Talking to Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused

- Emotional availability
- Under-react
- Use same words as the children
- Sit at children’s level
- Avoid multiple interviews
- Let children set the pace
- Inform children of legal implications
Treatment

- Treatment aids recovery
- Multi-Modal most effective
- Psychoeducation for entire family
- Parents have
  - to take care of own issues
  - be emotionally available to children
- Perpetrator accountability
Prevention

- Continue programs that help children protect themselves
- Add programs that prevent perpetration
- Deal with social forces that support child sexual abuse
  - Entitlement
  - Victim-blaming
  - Dismissal of effects
  - Demonizing perpetrators
Summary

- An abuse of power
- Sexual and emotional gratification
- Children do not understand
- Effects always serious but vary
- Multi-modal treatment
- Prevent perpetration
  - Acknowledge rewards of csa
  - Acknowledge how social forces support csa