

Women and childhood sexual abuse essay

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



In the early 1970's it was thought that child sexual abuse was rare and existed only in the poor circles of society. Extensive research in the field has shown that child abuse has not only existed for a very long time but it is still present in various parts of the society, be it high or low in terms of socio-economic matters. There is a significant difference in reported cases of child abuse in modern times.

Though this indicates a rise in the rate of childhood abuse but the reporting of an abuse case is much more important. The abuse occurred even in years before the 1970's but went unnoticed or unreported due to lack of awareness on the issue. As people become more aware of childhood abuse the number of reported cases increases but there are still many incidents which go unreported. Public welfare, social service and awareness programs have tried to increase the level of awareness among children and families regarding this matter. In the later part of the previous millennium many cases went unreported as many women and children did not realize they had been sexually abused.

In the early 1970's even psychologists did not realize the significance of the issue and later research and studies revealed the extent to which women and children were subject to sexual abuse. Michele Elliot a child psychologist states in her book that even she did not realize the severity of the issue at that time and thought that step fathers could not engage in such an act. But she suggests that after much research and working on this problem motivated numerous women to come forward and report incidents of sexual abuse (Elliot, *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*, 1994). There are still very large number of cases that go unreported especially in the developing

countries where much work is needed to be done to increase awareness among women and children.

The causes and reasons for a person to sexually assault and abuse women and children has to be researched more extensively to limit the frequency of such acts. A research study showed that almost 70 percent of sex offenders molest or abuse between 1 to 9 victims and about 20 percent victimize between 10 to 40 women or children. These incidents can be reduced if the person is reported and stopped at the very first time but if the matter goes unreported the perpetrator may be encouraged to engage in this act again (Elliot, Browne, & Kilcoyne, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 1995). The victims of childhood abuse are also vulnerable to diseases such as HIV and to early pregnancies. The victims of childhood abuse are affected by various physical, emotional and sociological problems.

Children who do not report abuse are even more vulnerable to these problems. Statistics show that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys is abused sexually before the age of 18 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). The awareness of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators requires more work and research as the number of incidents involving female perpetrators have increased. The fact that people do not usually consider females to act in such a manner shadows the crime they commit. Children usually feel more betrayed when they are sexually assaulted or abused by a female as they think that the female should have cared for them instead of abusing or assaulting them. The amount of research done in this area is quite minimal as compared to the research being done on sexual abuse of women and

children by male perpetrators. Until recently it was hard to find any articles or reports of male victims of sexual abuse.

The large number of unreported cases of child abuse implies that a lot of work in this regard has to be done and extensive research is required to increase the awareness in this regard and prevent future incidents of women and childhood sexual abuse. Causes, Effects, Prevention and Therapy of Sexual Abuse Childhood sexual abuse involves any sexual activity concerning children by an adult. Physical sexual abuse may include sexual activities of inappropriate touching or fondling, raping or attempting to rape or making pornographic material using children whereas nonphysical sexual abuse may include talking about sexual activities with a child, motivating or forcing a child to view pornographic or sexual material and inappropriate sexual exposure. Children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse from the people they trust rather than strangers.

Usually they are molested by members of the family or the people they highly trust such as relatives, teachers, babysitters and other care takers of the same nature. A research study carried out by the U. S Department of Justice explains that 90% of children are abused by the people they trust and only 10% are abused by strangers (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1997). These people may abuse children sexually through bribes, coercion and cheating or in other ways by gaining trust of a child. There has been considerable research in the area of child molestation and abuse by male pedophiles but the same amount of research has not been done involving female perpetrators.

The need for research in this area is very important as more awareness needs to be created and the misconceptions be removed. Thorough research and psychiatric analysis of child abusers has been done to find out the main reasons of child abuse but there has not been much favorable result in this area. The reason why people sexually abuse children is not lucid but research has shown that people who were personally molested in their childhoods tend to sexually abuse others. A survey of men sentenced for child molestation carried out in New Jersey prisons revealed that 95% of these people were abused or molested in their childhoods (Allaboutcounseling. com, 2008). It is believed that child abusers generally apply some artificial attributes on children which are the creation of their own minds and abuse children. There are also some other psychological and mental illnesses that can cause individuals to sexually abuse women and children.

Some child abusers are also identified with emotional problems and their desire to control others which may motivate them in physically and sexually abusing children. Low self esteem is also a very strong part of child abuse reasons and abuse of alcohol and drugs may also result in an individual abusing a child which later on may turn into an iterative desire. Sexual abuse can affect children in various ways both physically and emotionally almost immediately after the abuse has taken place. The children abused sexually may experience long-run emotional and physical pain and the society as a whole is also affected by the change in behavior of these children when they grow up to become active members of the society as adults.

Children who have been sexually abused may experience more health problems than usual children which may include disturbed menstrual cycles, early pregnancy and other health issues and disorders. These children are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted disease such as HIV. Children who have been sexually abused display a larger extent of emotional break down and sadness and are more prone to stress, loneliness and boredom.

Research studies show that children who have been sexually abused display greater signs of deliberate self-harm than people who have not been victimized by molestation and are at a higher risk to repeat such behavior than non-victims of sexual abuse (Yeo & Yeo, 1993). The victims of child abuse may encounter eating disorders and sleep disorders like insomnia in the age of adolescence and experience a higher rate of depression and other psychological disorders as adults. Apart from psychological and physical problems sexual abuse victims may also develop habits of alcohol or drug abuse.

As discussed earlier most child abusers have been personally abused sexually which means the children victimized by molestation may abuse other children when they grow up. Domestic violence, sexual and physical assaults and property endangerment are some of the violent behaviors expressed by people who have been molested as children. The most dangerous effect of child abuse is violence as 50% of women in prisons and 75% of serial rapists accept that they were sexually assaulted or molested as children (Darkness To Light, 2009). The technological developments in the field of information technology and the useful resource of the World Wide Web though are quite outstanding but have various negative aspects

connected with them. The internet has made sexual abusers and people with psychological disorders more active in contacting children and sexually abusing children. In many circumstances these people sexually abuse children online and both offline. An article on the vulnerability of sexual abuse on the internet shows that adolescents with a history of child abuse are more vulnerable to sexual abuse through the internet and are more expressive using the internet which could be misinterpreted by pedophilic individuals and they could sexually harass or abuse these adolescents (Noll, Shenk, Barnes, & Putnam, 2009). Sexual abuse can be prevented in various ways with the help of parents, teachers and facilitators.

The first step of abuse prevention is to be aware of the facts of abuse and the implications related to sexual abuse. The second step to prevention is limiting instances of individual child and adult contact and the third step is to talk with children regarding sexuality and making the children more open to discussion. The fourth step is to stay alert and look for sexual abuse signs which may not be obvious at first. Proper planning should be done to cope with situations which may lead to sexual abuse and provisions should be made for such circumstances. If there are any suspicions they should be dealt with promptly.

The last step is to engage properly in issues related to child sexual abuse and stay updated on the resources of child abuse and any research being carried out on the issue (Darkness To Light, 2009). There are various medical and psychological therapies to deal with the trauma and pain of sexual abuse. The child should be given moral support and any medical assistance if

required. If the child is not given emotional and moral support following an incident the effects of the abuse may be long lasting and could alter the behavior and personality of the child.

The child should be given psychological support by seeking professional help to avoid any negative impacts on the child. If the time has passed considerably then psychological therapies are present for individual effects of the sexual abuse such as alcohol or drug abuse, deliberate self-harm, psychological and emotional breakdown and violence orientation. Research studies reveal that the cognitive-behavioral therapy for deliberate self-harm was much successful for children with a history of child abuse as compared to usual treatment and therapy (Spinhoven, Slee, Garnefski, & Arensman, 2009). Conclusion A considerable amount of research has been done in the field of women and childhood sexual abuse to find out the reasons, causes, effects and therapies for sexual abuse. Through these studies it is found that most sexual abusers have been personal victims of sexual abuse in their childhood and some of them have psychological or emotional disorders. The effects of sexual abuse can be very long lasting and could affect the behavioral patterns of individuals in the long run. Though considerable amount of research has been done regarding male sexual abusers but extensive research has to be done where female abusers are involved to change the perception of society regarding such incidents.

People are generally aware of sexual abuse but they have to be informed how to prevent sexual abuse and how to identify any individuals and situations that may be a threat to children. Future researches in this area

should focus on the identification of sexual abusers and the reasons behind their actions. Women who indulge in sexual abuse should not be considered safe to children as they may also leave a long lasting effect on both boys and girls. Awareness programs should be launched with the focus of dealing with issues related to sexual abuse and creating an awareness of how to prevent and deal with sexual abuse.

Children should be guided on sexual issues and programs should be implemented in schools and facilitation centers for children to help them identify the difference between affection and sexual abuse. They should be taught how to identify perpetrators and how to inform appropriate adults for any potential dangers concerning physical or nonphysical sexual assault or abuse.