

## Chapter 26

# Childhood Sexual Abuse: Prevention and Intervention

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on various assessment tools, interventions and preventive measures which could help children cope up with the trauma. It also extends its focus on few particular therapeutic measures especially designed for children in order to help them cope with the experience. Data from recent researches helps in creating awareness for preventive measures aimed for families, schools and communities in general.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse with any individual whether young or adult is a traumatic experience and is an important area of concern. The effects could be long term in many cases as it impacts the individual physically and psychologically. The most alarming type of sexual abuse is the one committed with children. Experiences of sexual abuse faced during childhood can have negative effects into adulthood like mood and anxiety issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance disorders, low self-esteem, depression and an overall unhappy image of self and other relationships. It may also lead the child in developing sexual behaviour issues as the child may not have witnessed appropriate sexual behaviour. It may also be associated with sexual identity confusion, sexual dysfunction and sexual risk-taking behaviour in later life (Kathleen, 2001).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines child sexual abuse as involvement of a child in sexual activity that he/she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or is not developmentally prepared for and cannot consent to, or that violates the laws or social taboos of the society. How children cope with sexual abuse depends a lot on the kind of attachment they have with

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5598-2.ch026

their significant others. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, children with secure attachment styles are more likely to trust that if they shared about their sexual abuse experience then they will be helped by others whereas children who believe that they have no one to share it with, may end up being confused about what happened and even think that they themselves would have been at fault. Thus, it becomes extremely important as to how adults especially parents create a sense of security and trust building in the children in order for them to be able to seek help when needed. Thus, there are different sources from which children can receive help like parents, school, community and the like.

The present chapter focuses on preventive measures and various interventions which could help children cope up with the trauma. It is important to know what child sexual abuse is and how it affects the child but equally important is to know that how we can further prevent such negative experiences and have interventions to help them on a psychological level.

## **Overview**

Sexual offenders are mostly people who are already arrested or convicted for sexual offense. In most of these cases this number represents only a fraction of the actual data. One major reason for this low number is lack of reporting. Many people due to a number of reasons do not share such information. It is also important to note that many incidents are reported directly to the police and/or may come to the attention of the staff of social service agencies and thus may not generate any official report regarding the same.

Researches in the United States gained momentum in the 1960s and became a matter of greater urgency after incidents of day care centre child abuse cases in 1980s started coming up on the surface.

- 27% of the females and 16% of the males disclosed a history of childhood sexual abuse; 42% of the males were likely to never have disclosed the experience to anyone whereas 33% of the females never disclosed (Finkelhor et al., 1990).
- 12.8% of the females and 4.3% of the males reported a history of sexual abuse during childhood (MacMillan et al., 1997).
- 15.3% of the females and 5.9% of the males experienced some form of sexual assault (Moore, Nord, & Peterson, 1989).
- Only 5.7% of the incidents were reported to the police; 26% of the incidents were not disclosed to anyone prior to the study (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995).

Thus, when compared with their male counterparts, females were more likely to have been sexually abused during childhood. Furthermore, females were more likely than the males to disclose such information; however, disclosure rates are quite low regardless of the victim's gender.

Finkelhor and Jones (2004) have used data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to gather an estimate of child sexual abuse cases for the period from 1992-2000. Researchers used data from more than forty states and stated that the number of substantiated sexual abuse cases had risen at approximately 1,49,800 in 1992 which later followed annual declines of 2 to 11 percent every year until 2000 wherein the number of cases hit a low figure of approximately 89,355. Reasons for this drop in number of cases could indicate towards a reflection as to how much of the drop reported is actually real or has been affected by factors like changes in definitions of child sexual abuse, reporting and investigations. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) investigates about rape and sexual as-

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