

Chapter 1

Influence of Concept, Definitions, Assessments Methods, and Sources of Data on Prevalence of Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this chapter is to examine how the conceptual differences influence the definition and prevalence of sexual abuse among children, adolescence and adults. Attempting to understand measures, sources of data and special groups influences on prevalence rates is a challenge. It was observed that the prevalence of sexual abuse varies according to the type of concept and definitions, legal criteria, method of data collection, like interview methods, questionnaires, or self reports, and the source of data such as general population or specific groups such as prisoners, and individuals with disabilities are used for the study. In some studies, the rates are exaggerated because of the definitions. The chapter concludes that it is important to evaluate prevalence studies of sexual abuse on different dimensions and criteria to make final conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse occurs all over the world and it is actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. The word sex is considered taboo in many culture, hence the occurrence of sexual violations, especially towards children and women were always underestimated. The stigma associated with sex is equally or more applied to sexual abuses, and it always considered to be an isolated incident even it is reported, and many societies denied the presence of sexual assaults and it is considered to be an insult to their cultural beliefs. Until 1970's, active research on sexual abuse did not happen among scientific community. Focus of this paper is to examine how conceptual differences influence the definition and prevalence of sexual abuse among children, adolescence and adults. Also attempted to understand measures, sources of data and special groups influence on prevalence rates.

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Defining Sexual Abuse

The definition of sexual abuse varies in terms of legal, social and Psychological viewpoints. The term interchangeably used to describe sexual abuse such as rape, sexual assault, sexual violations and molestation. According to Collins English Dictionary, if a child or other person suffers sexual abuse, someone forces them to take part in sexual activity with them, often regularly over a period of time. Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health(2003) defined sexual abuse as any act of a sexual nature performed in a criminal manner, as with a child or with a nonconsenting adult, including rape, incest, oral copulation, and penetration of genital or anal opening with a foreign object. The term also includes lewd or lascivious acts with a child; any sexual act that could be expected to trouble or offend another person when done by someone motivated by sexual interest; acts related to sexual exploitation, such as those related to pornography, prostitution involving minors, or coercion of minors to perform obscene acts.

As per WHO (2002) sexual violence is defined as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats – for instance, the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought. It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent – for instance, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation. Sexual abuse comprises several types of inappropriate abusive “interactions” including physical body contact (e.g. unwanted touching, fondling, masturbation, frottage, oral/genital contact, vaginal or anal penetration by whatever object) or not including physical body contact (such as sexual comments, voyeurism, exhibitionism, exposing a child to pornography, or involving him/her in making pornography) (Putnam, 2003). It occurs in various setting such as home, school, public places, prison, and old age homes.

The serious form of sexual violence is rape and it is sometimes used interchangeably with the term sexual assault (Pettrak, Jenny; Hedge, Barbara, eds. (2003). Rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person's consent. The act may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent, such as one who is unconscious, incapacitated, has an intellectual disability or is below the legal age of consent. Rape is also defined as physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape. Sexual violence can include other forms of assault involving a sexual organ, including coerced contact between the mouth and penis, vulva or anus (WHO, 2002). The use of a child, or other individuals younger than the age of consent, for sexual stimulation is referred to as child sexual abuse or statutory rape (Peer commentaries on Green,2002 and Schmidt,2002).

The differences in the definitions also can be noticed in the definition of child sexual abuse. World health organization defines child maltreatment as the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development and dignity (WHO, 2016). It also defines child sexual abuse (CSA) as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give

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