

Chapter 2

Etiological Factors and Theories of Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how sexual abuse could be simply put as an unwanted sexual activity, with the perpetrators using force and/or making threats or taking advantage inability of victims to give consent. Sexual abuse is an extremely common and very serious problem affecting millions of people each year all over the world, but unfortunately in most countries there has been very little research conducted on the problem. Rationally speaking, to prevent or stop social evils like sexual abuse, the scientific method would be arguably one of the most powerful methodology in critical thinking and towards this, understanding causes of sexual abuse is extremely important. In this backdrop, this chapter addresses various psycho social factors, environmental factors and theories of sexual abuse to understand and appreciate the causes of sexual abuse. This concludes that with this aid in developing appropriate legal and policy reforms and interventions that would work on strategy to prevent sexual abuses in the society.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse is a common and serious problem affecting millions of people each year throughout the world. Although in most countries there has been little research conducted on the problem, available data suggest that in some countries nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner (Hakimi et al., 2001; Ellsberg, 1997; Mooney, 1993). The estimation of cases of sexual abuse in the general population is a very difficult task even in the advanced countries of the world. Most estimates of the distribution of sexual offences in the general population are derived from forensic sources, that is, samples of those who are arrested or convicted for sex offenses. All researchers acknowledge that those who are arrested or convicted represent only a fraction of all sexual offenders. Sexual abuses have the lowest rates of reporting for all crimes. Not all potential participants in such studies can be

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known or contacted, not all would use the same language to describe their experiences, and not all are willing to share information. As a result, in most countries there has been little research conducted on the problem. Even United Nations continues to “grapple” with sexual exploitation by members of its ranks; the Associated Press says it has uncovered 2,000 allegations of abuse against personnel working as peacekeepers. Sexual abuse continues to be a pervasive problem in the United States (Black et al., 2011), and the victimization of men is rarely explored. Historically, research on sexual abuse has generally focused on children, girls and women as victims of sexual violence with very little focus on the peer victimization of boys and men, as most state laws defined rape as a crime against women until the 1980s (Weiss, 2010). More recently, significant strides have been made in assessing a range of sexual victimization among adult men. For example, national studies in US found 1 in 71 adult men reported being raped, predominantly by men (93.3%); however, 22% of men experienced other forms of sexual victimization perpetrated by females, including being made to penetrate, coerced sexual intercourse, and unwanted sexual contact (Black et al., 2011). These rates are likely under-estimates given the stigma of sexual victimization among males, fearing revenge, being perceived as gay, the desire to be self-reliant, and the loss of independence after disclosure (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008; Finkelhor, 1984; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). These reports clear the air around the myth regarding the gender bias in victims of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse has a profound impact on physical and mental health. Besides physical injury, it is associated with an increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems, with both immediate and long-term consequences. Its impact on mental health can be extremely serious, and may be long lasting. It is driven by many factors operating in a range of social, cultural and economic contexts.

ETIOLOGY OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- **Early Childhood Environments:** There is evidence to suggest that sexual abuse is a learnt behavior in some adults. *Watkins and Bentovim (1992)* had noted that around one in five sexually abused boys continued in later life to become sexual abuser themselves. Such experiences may lead to a pattern of behavior where the man regularly justifies being violent, denies doing wrong, and has false and unhealthy notions about sexuality. *Borowsky et al (1997)* had found that Childhood environments that are physically violent, emotionally unsupportive and characterized by competition for scarce resources have been associated with sexual violence. Sexually aggressive behavior in young men, for instance, has been linked to witnessing family violence, and having emotionally distant and uncaring fathers.

Societal Factors

- **Social Structure and Socioeconomics:** Men raised in families with strongly patriarchal structures are also more likely to become sexually abusive, than men raised in homes that are more egalitarian. *Silberschmidt M (2001)* had studied on societal structure in rural and urban E. Africa and had noted that patriarchal structures and stereotyped notions of gender did hide the increasing disempowerment of many men. Socioeconomic change had left many men with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities. Unemployment or low income prevented men from fulfilling their male role as head of household. This affected notion of is men’s social value,

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