

## Chapter 9

# Sexual Abuse Among Adolescents: Its Consequences and Therapeutic Interventions

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter addresses about the prevalence of sexual abuse of adolescents. The consequences, effects and treatment are discussed in this chapter. The chapter also focuses on the laws and amendment acts enforced for the protection of child and adolescents. The major objectives of this chapter are to bring into focus the consequences of sexually abused child and adolescents and how to help them by making them aware of the available treatments and laws enforced for their protection.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As all of us has been an adolescent and has experienced the same turmoil, pleasures and excitement that our adolescents experience today so can understand the most prominent issues that today's youth are facing. "Adolescence" is a dynamically evolving theoretical construct informed through physiological, psychosocial, temporal and cultural lenses (Steinberg, 2014). It is that crucial developmental period which covers the years between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence. Adolescent stage is marked as the most prominent phase of the developmental life cycle in humans and other animal species (Elliot et al., 1990; Spear, 2000). Among all the stages of human development, adolescence is the most complex stage that involves transition from immaturity and social dependence of childhood to adulthood with the goals and expectations of fulfilling developmental potential, personal agency, and social accountability.

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## **Sexual Abuse Among Adolescents**

Thus, during adolescent period an individual's physical development, may be said to have begun when the youngster shows the first sign of sexual maturity. The adolescent girls are more concerned about their body types with small waist and large breast that encourages them to maintain their sense of self-worth and sexual attractiveness. In a study Karniol (2001) observed the 13- and 15-year-old girls' reasons for hanging posters of media stars in their bedrooms. He reasoned that at this age girls experience some conflicting pressures as their sexuality emerges. During this period, they also seem to mature physically and develop emotional needs for attachments. Unlike girls, boys of the same age tend to be less mature as they enter the growth spurt later. However, there are strong societal values that limit young female's expressions of sexuality. All adolescents are at crossroad: these vital years offer an opportunity to transform this high-risk period into high hopes. If these youth are given an opportunity to develop their lives for greater satisfactions to themselves then they can become pride of their elders, communities and even their nation (Heckinger, 1992).

## **Defining Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse can be described as an act of violation committed by a person who holds, or is perceived to hold, power over someone who is vulnerable. It is an under-reported felony which has been spreading vigorously worldwide. Child sexual abuse is defined as "maltreatment that involves the child in sexual activity to provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator". (Child Maltreatment, 2001). The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services reported of collecting annual data since 1992 on child sexual abuse. These data are based on the reports gathered from state child protective services and agencies and are published in an annual report. The annually released publication which is on Child Maltreatment is based on the reports of incidences as per state along with census-based estimates of the population of children younger than 18 years.

Sexual violence toward children and adolescence can be understood in terms of an offence involving a child in the sexual activity with an adult or older person. It may take place in the form of contact or noncontact sexual acts. Contact acts encompass unwanted touching, masturbation, oral - genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal and anal rape. Noncontact acts encompass voyeurism, exposure, making sexual comments, and showing pornography to children (Deb, Bhattacharyya & Thomas, 2016). Sexual violence specifically includes touching of private body parts, fondling, oral - genital contact, penile -vaginal and penile - anal contact, penetration of the vagina and anus, and rape. These sexual violations may be performed in the form of rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, incest, and sexual molestation. The victim experiences sexual activity that is neither wanted nor agreed to. Thus, for these reasons non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also consider very early marriages as a form of sexual abuse.

## **Prevalence of Sexual Abuse Among Young Adults**

Children and adolescents sexual abuse is one of the global public health problems that require significant attention. Reports by U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2009) stated that it is one of the most eminent issues that today's youth are facing, as evidenced by the 3.2 million referrals in 2007 for child abuse and neglect in the United States. A study by the Child Protection Services determined that of those 3.2 million referrals, 10.8 percent experienced physical abuse, 7.6% experienced sexual abuse, 4.2% experienced emotional abuse, and 59.0% experienced neglect. Many of the victims who have ex-

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