A STUDY OF CHILD-ON-CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN UNDER 12 YEARS

An Analysis of the Phenomenon

Presented By:
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**INTRODUCTION**

• Child-on-child sexual abuse in South Africa has been recognized only recently as a significant social problem, reflected in the dearth of research on it.
  – It is, however, estimated that 42% of sexual offences reported to *Childline*, are committed by other children (Vanzant, 2004).
  – It was reported in the *Pretoria News* that in South Africa a daily average of 82 children were charged for indecently assaulting or raping other children (Maughan, 2006, p.1).

• It is clear that “sexual abuse of children by other children or adolescents constitutes a significant proportion of sexual offending against children” (Grant, Indermaur, Thornton & Stevens, 2009, p. 1).

• According to the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008:
  – Children below the age of 10 years lack criminal capacity.
  – Children between 11 and 14 years will not be tried in a court of law unless it can be proved that they have the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong.

• The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 recommends that, where possible, children be diverted from the criminal justice system to prevent them from having a criminal record. Currently, the only option for dealing with child offenders below 10 years is informal cautioning, intended to deter them from repeating the offence.
MOTIVATION

This study was motivated by the lack of theory and practical knowledge, specifically in relation to the assessment of children and how this leads to purposeful intervention which could prevent or minimize re-offending.

According to Richter, Dawes and Higson-Smith (2004), very little rigorous knowledge currently informs theory or recommended practice in South Africa.
AIM

To develop an understanding of the phenomenon of child-on-child sexual abuse and make recommendations to inform assessment and intervention for children in conflict with the law.

The research attempts to develop a detailed picture of the respondents by presenting the research findings in relation to key characteristics of the child respondents in the study, with particular emphasis on:

1. their maturational stage of development
2. their family context (the role of the family in the development of the child as well as relationships between the child and his or her attachment figures)
3. identifying social and environmental influences and risk factors for child on child sex offending.
METHODOLOGY

• Design:
  – An exploratory descriptive research design was followed.
  – mixed methods study using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.
  – Qualitative data was used to clarify and confirm the quantitative findings.

• Sampling:
  – A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used for the study.
  – Selection criteria:
    • The offending child must be male
    • The child must have sexually abused another child
    • The child must be 12 years and younger
    • The child must be currently involved in a form of intervention at the research site.
    • The child had to be referred by the court (external control)
    • These criteria ensured that suitable cases were selected from the population to form part of the sample.
METHODOLOGY

• Data collection:
  – For the purposes of this study a *self-administered questionnaire* was applied.
  – Three parts to the questionnaire – mother, child and researcher, in which the child was classified according to O’Brien and Bera’s (1986) typology conceptual framework for assessment purposes which is applied at the *Teddy Bear Clinic*.
  – Selected case files with detailed information

• Analysis:
  – Quantitative data: descriptive and frequency analysis
  – Qualitative data: thematic content analysis

• Methodological Challenges:
  – Use of the social auxiliary worker as an interpreter may have lost some vital information as there was no forward or backward translation used in the study.
  – Although the respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any stage, they were probably afraid to withdraw and may have provided socially acceptable responses.
  – The questionnaires elicited fixed answers or responses.
  – The study was gender-specific, with only male children, because very few females were referred to the research site.
The majority of the boys (96%) ranged between the ages of nine and 12, and a minority (4%) were between six and eight years old. This is consistent with statistics generated in a study at the *Teddy Bear Clinic* of over 1000 children treated in the past eight years it was found that the perpetrators’ ages ranged between six and 12 years.
Maturational stage of development

AGE

Children in the pubescent group were high risk because they were more frequently engaging in more severe and intrusive forms of abuse.

Figure 1: Age of Offender and the Type of Abuse
RESULTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDREN ABUSING OTHER CHILDREN

EDUCATION

• All the children in the study came from mainstream schooling.
• These findings concur with Blankenship and Winokur who found that most of the sexual offences committed by the youth occurred mostly between seventh grade and high school (2010) which corresponds to senior primary and junior high school in South Africa.
• Although other authors (Concepcion, 2004; Graves et al., 1996) stipulate that children who sexually abuse may have learning disabilities, this was difficult to ascertain in the study because of the challenges in the schooling system.

Figure 2: Education Levels of the Respondents

Figure 3: Performance at School
HISTORY OF VICTIMIZATION

- The findings are not sufficient to draw any conclusions around the cycle of abuse and the victim-victimiser theory. However, children did experience other forms of victimisation, which were more strongly supported in this study.
- Only 4% of the boys had been sexually abused in the previous year, however it is not known whether sexual abuse occurred prior to that.

“My older brother used to hit me and punch me because my ma told him to”,

“Come you moffie show us you are a real boy”

“My son only told us about his abuse after he was caught touching the neighbors daughter on her privates”

Figure 4: Adverse Experiences During the Past Year

Figure 5: Hidings During the Past Year
RESULTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDREN ABUSING OTHER CHILDREN

OFFENDER’S CHOICE OF VICTIMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of relationship</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Relationship of the Young Offender to the Victim

- The great majority of victims were known and had a relationship with the perpetrator.
- Both male and females were victimized, so not to exclude the potential risk of males.
- The majority of the victims were younger than the offender, and very few were older.

OFFENDER’S MODUS OPERANDI

“I gave her sweets”, “we played games and I did it when no one was around”.
RESULTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD AND THE FAMILY

Paternal Presence
- Only 48% of the fathers were present in the child’s life at the time of data collection.
- Lack of contact after the age of 5 years - paternal absence is a risk factor.
- It is likely that their masculine identity would be largely formed by modelling males in the community and the media particularly, in areas where crime is valorised.
- The majority of youthful sexual offenders come from single-parent families, with the most prominent being female-headed households (Wedge, Boswell & Dissel, 2000).
- The young sex offender is viewed in relationship to parents, siblings and other family members as they have a huge influence on his development.

![Bar chart showing fathers' presence at birth, during the child's first 5 years, and currently.]

Figure 6: Fathers' Presence in the Child's Life

“My ma was always too cross because my pa had left home and never talked or asked about school or anything”, “We never sat together or even went out together”
RESULTS: THE CHILD AND HIS FAMILY

Relationship with Family

• **44% (or 22)** of children came from nuclear families.

• A third of the respondents (32%) **described conflict between their parents** and there was little evidence of substance abuse (alcohol or drugs) by the parents.

  “The children heard my husband scream and swear me all the time” and “every time my husband hit me, my children ran outside and stayed there”.

  “My father whenever he’s drunk he hits me and shouts us”,

  “We did not always have food because my father went to the shebeen most days, when he used to live with us”.

• **88%** of the respondents turned to their mothers for support (positive relationship).

• **74% of children** said they **hardly ever played together with siblings** and only half (54%) shared spiritual closeness by **engaging in prayer together**.

• **94% of the children did not learn about sex from their families** but 92% described their accrual of sexual information from the television.

  “I was told nothing about sex from my parents except that it would get me into trouble nothing more”,

  “In our family my parents never talked about sex and I was afraid I may get a hiding if I asked any questions about sex”.

TEDDY BEAR CLINIC
FOR ABUSED CHILDREN
RESULTS: THE CHILD AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

• Overcrowding
  This study found that 42% of the mothers had a minimum of one and a maximum of nine other family members living with them, apart from their children and partners. This may suggest some form of overcrowding as the respondents lived in a two-room house. The great majority (74%) lived in a township, in a two-room brick-built house. Other types of housing included: wooden house, flat, shack and traditional hut.

• Household Income
  Many families (72%) were in receipt of govt grants, subjected to means test. Hence, children came from poor socio-economic background.

• Influence of the media
  “We were playing cops and robbers and then I told Roxanne let’s play the rape game. I then forced Roxanne to play the rape game that I saw on TV”, “I saw pictures of sex at school and on e-TV, Emmanuelle, so we did it”

• Geographic location
  Families lived in townships that recorded high rates of crime - Hillbrow, Eldorado Park, Krugersdorp, Kagiso, Manziville, Soweto certain inner city areas of Johannesburg.
CONCLUSION

• **Micro-level factors**: Single headed households, having more than one child, history of victimization, conflict between parents and lack of consistent paternal presence. Not a high correlation with the victim-victimizer theory of sexual abuse.

• **The meso-level factors**: There seemed to be few problems in the school environment, although a number of children reported behaviour such as name-calling and bullying from peers. Recreational opportunities limited (townships and inner city).

• **The exo-level factors**: Exposure to sexually explicit media, highly sexualised environments and violent neighbourhoods.

• **Macro-level factors**: Unemployment, limited financial resources and poverty. Although these factors were not specifically discussed, they relate to the legacy of apartheid inequalities and geography in which poor families continue to live in communities where there is a lack of housing, infrastructure, safety and security.

Children have traditionally been treated as miniature adults. Thus, adult-based treatment models were applied to children as a “trickle down phenomenon”, with current intervention strategies proving to be inadequate and insufficient.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Further Research:
  – More research on single-parent families
  – Fathers should be included in future research
  – Comprehensive research on the influence of the media
  – Longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of the diversion programme
  – More research on the victim-victimizer theory in the local context

• Micro and meso-level interventions:
  – To provide training to parents and educators (identification and management).
  – Awareness raising around desexualizing the home environment. Use of technology and social websites.
  – All practitioners working with child sex offenders undergo specialized training.
  – Prevention programmes be rolled out at ECD centres.

• Macro-level interventions:
  – Resocialisation regarding gender issues.
  – Low cost housing be fast tracked.
  – Robust engagement with media – strict censorship
Having reviewed the characteristics of young sex offenders and the contributing factors the research responds to the national urgency for “something to be done” (Richter et al., 2004).

It is a response to activists who have called for the revision and improvement of policy and procedures to provide added support for the victim, the family, the perpetrator and the justice system.

“CHILDREN ARE BORN BUT PEOPLE ARE MADE”

Noordam, 1970
THANK YOU