

DYNAMICS OF SEXUAL **ABUSE OF CHILDREN**

Elayne Aber M.S.W.

May 23, 2008

Plan

- **Definition of sexual abuse**
- **Prevalence of the problem**
- **How do children get caught up in the sexual abuse “web”???**
- **What can you do?**
- **Question period**

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- An act by a person giving or seeking sexual stimulation inappropriate to the age and level of development of a child or adolescent, thereby adversely affecting his bodily or psychological integrity, in the case where the abuser is related to the victim or is in a position of responsibility, authority or domination in his regard (Manuel de reference).

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- **Contacts or interactions between a child and an adult in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.**

Sexual abuse may also be committed by a person under the age of 18 when that person is either significantly older than the victim or is in a position of power or control over another child (Rycus and Hughes).

Sexual abuse consists of:

- 1. Child Sexual Exploitation**
- 2. Intra-familial Sexual Abuse**
- 3. Extra-familial Sexual Abuse**
- 4. Sexual Abuse by Strangers**
- 5. Exposure to developmentally inappropriate sexually-stimulating activities and materials**

PREVALENCE

- **Statistics vary, but it is believed that 50% of Canadian women and 33% of Canadian men have been subjected to some form of sexual abuse as children.**
- **Based on studies, the majority of sexual abuse offenders are men. However, there is increasing evidence that women can be sexual abusers, as well.**
- **It is estimated that 80% of youth in care have been sexually abused.**

Sexual Abuse can be broken down into 5 distinct phases:

- **Engagement Phase**
- **Sexual Interaction Phase**
- **Secrecy Phase**
- **Disclosure Phase**
- **Suppression Phase**

Engagement Phase

Access and Opportunity:

- A. Sexual Abuse is not a spontaneous or accidental phenomenon.
- B. Perpetrator is almost always known to the child. In 80% of the cases, the perpetrator is someone in the child's home or family circle or someone who has been given access to the child by the parents or guardian.
- C. Opportunity to engage the child in sexual activity is essential. Perpetrator will watch for or create opportunities.

Engagement Phase

Access and Opportunity (cont'd):

- ❖ The dynamics of child sexual abuse almost always involve a known adult who is in a legitimate power position over a child and who exploits accepted societal patterns between children and adults (i.e. children do as they are told by the adults in charge) to engage the child in sexual activity.

Engagement Phase

Inducements:

1. Child is engaged in sexual behaviour through activities that are presented as “special” games.
2. The power and authority of adulthood conveys to the child that the “special” games are acceptable and permissible.
3. Rewards and bribes for engaging in the activities may be offered. Threats are rarely used as inducements.

Sexual Interaction Phase

- ❖ A perpetrator's behaviours with the child usually progress in scope and severity over time. That is, there is a gradual increase in intimate acts - e.g. from exhibitionism to intercourse - throughout the course of the abuse.

Secrecy Phase

For the Perpetrator:

- A. Secrecy eliminates accountability
- B. Secrecy allows for repetition of the behaviour

Secrecy Phase

Why Does the Child Keep the Secret?:

- A. Child enjoyed the activity and attention and wants it to continue.**
- B. Threats may have been used.**

Disclosure Phase

There are 2 types of disclosures:

- A. Accidental/Circumstantial - There is no deliberate decision to disclose the abuse.**
- B. Purposeful/Intentional – There is a deliberate and conscious decision to disclose the abuse.**

Suppression/Recanting Phase

- ❖ In the majority of cases, there tends to be a suppression/recanting of the disclosure of the abuse once the effects of the disclosure are experienced.

What Can you Do?

1. Believe that children can be sexually abused.
2. Be aware of what you are capable of hearing/listening to.
3. Believe what you are being told.
4. Be patient with the child and yourself.
5. Don't make promises that you can't keep.
6. Bring in the appropriate help/resources to deal with the disclosure, if you do not feel equipped to handle it or do not have the mandate to do so.