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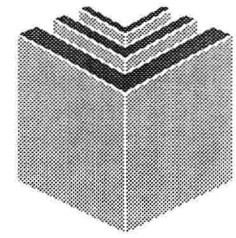
UNDERSTANDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Cynthia Crosson Tower

Child Sexual Molestation
PSYCH/CD 13



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Contents

Chapter 1

The Sexual Abuse of Children

Is there anything wrong with sex between children and adults? Some researchers argue that not only are children unharmed but that sexual relationships with adults can be educational. Perpetrators contend their sexual tutelage is actually beneficial to the victims' development. DeYoung (1982, p. 46) cites a 1937 article by Lauretta Bender and Abraham Blau, in which they comment that "the experience of the child in its sexual relationship with adults does not seem always to have a traumatic effect. . . . The experience seems to satisfy instinctual drives. . . . The experience offers an opportunity for the child to test in reality an infantile fantasy. . . . The emotional balance is thus in favor of contentment." Although some agree, many researchers argue against sexual activities between children and adults. First, some say a small girl's vagina is too small to accommodate an adult male's penis. Since sexual abuse often does not progress to the point of vaginal intercourse, this argument is not always valid. Second, many people are disgusted by the idea of child-adult sexual involvement, and prefer to see children as innocent and untouched by adult sexuality. And third, most societies have some type of taboo against such a sexual liaison. Researchers and therapists alike feel that early sexual involvement with adults exposes the child to premature sexualization and may have long-term negative effects. Indeed, studies of survivors attest to the scars left by sexual abuse.

Researcher David Finkelhor presents the most convincing argument against adult-child sexual involvement. He contends (1984a) that our society is based on consent and free will, and in order to consent one must have knowledge and authority. Children do not have knowledge of the meanings of sexuality, information to enable them to anticipate the direction of the sexual relationship, or any idea of how others will react to their sexual involvement. Further, children have no authority in either a legal or psychological sense. Their natural awe of adults, perpetuated by their elders, renders them subject to the whims of these adults. Legally, children are unable to marry, drive a car, or enter into contracts prior to their maturity. Therefore, children are in no position to consent to relationships that carry so many implications as sexual liaisons with adults.

Two Groups' Approaches to Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse of children is not new to our culture. (The historical aspects of exploitation were outlined in Chapter 1.) Today, child sexual abuse is a major problem. The concern is heightened when adult survivors report its impact on their lives. Two groups have been instrumental in bringing this issue to the attention of the public and in championing the efforts toward effective treatment and prevention: the child protection movement and the feminist movement. Although currently the two groups show evidence of combining their efforts in the interest of children and adult survivors, their fundamental difference must be understood (Finkelhor, 1984a).

Child Protection Movement

The child protection movement sees sexual abuse as the third form of child maltreatment in addition to physical abuse and neglect (Giovannoni and Becerra, 1979). Protective agencies deal primarily with in-family abuse or incest, which is perpetrated by family members, surrogate parents, or caregivers. The etiology of this problem is believed to be in the family pathology, a problem to which all family members contribute in some way (deYoung, 1982). Theorists describe family patterns that may repeat themselves if no intervention takes place. Although extrafamilial abuse is of concern, most protective agencies are legally bound to report this exploitation to law enforcement or judicial institutions. Protective agencies become involved in the treatment of parents of children abused outside the home. Alleviating parental guilt and strengthening the family unit provides protection for the child in the future. Thus child protection advocates place emphasis on the family as the seat of pathology as well as the medium responsible for the child's protection.

Feminist Movement

Feminists, on the other hand, espouse the sociological view that considers the assault of children as representative of societal values (see Table 7.1). Because of the patriarchial social structure, women and children have inferior status and are subjected to male dominance (Herman and Hirschman, 1981; Herman, 1992). Struve (1990) adds that patriarchy has not only set up boys to be sexually abused but has caused abused boys to keep silent, because they fear that disclosure or their victimization will prevent them from being seen as "man enough" to eventually assume the role of patriarch. Further, advertisements in the media and the prevalence of child pornography suggest that children are exploitable. Although Finkelhor's studies have shown that healthy strong mothers can apparently prevent incest, Russell (1984) states, "Mothers should not have to protect their children from their fathers!" (p. 264). Thus feminists see child sexual abuse as more of a societal than a familial issue.

By virtue of their particular perspectives, each group portends a different approach to treatment. The child protective philosophy sees protection of the child as paramount and

TABLE 7.1 How Society "Sets Up" Children as Victims

Girls	Boys
Taught by society to be "vulnerable"	Taught to believe they're "powerful"
Taught to feel guilt and shame	Taught not to be seen as victims
Taught to be clean and attractive	Taught molestation may lead to homosexuality or others to question manhood
Taught to be manipulative	Taught to think it "cool" to be initiated by a female
Taught to please others	Taught to fear no one will believe them
	Taught to be "free" and "freedom" repressed if molestation reported to parents

the family as the unit responsible for this protection. Toward this end, the whole family is seen in treatment, with emphasis on redefining generational boundaries and role definitions and enhancing communication. The ultimate goal is reuniting the family if the perpetrator is able to take responsibility for his actions and the mother is able to protect her child in the future. Some agencies use the threat of prosecution of the perpetrator to engage him in treatment. Only when his cooperation is not forthcoming or when required by state law do most agencies favor incarceration.

Feminists favor a rape crisis model with an emphasis on victim advocacy. Use of the criminal justice system to punish the perpetrator is seen as a deterrent to future abuse. The victim is helped through this process by a concerned advocate who also strives toward the establishment of protection for the child in the future. Family reconciliation is viewed with some reservation and favored only if protection of the child can be ensured (Finkelhor, 1984a).

It is not always easy to discern the orientation of a helper in the area of child sexual abuse. Although some workers concentrate on family dynamics, they may feel that separation and even incarceration of the perpetrator is better for all involved. Many also see the victim in need of a strong advocate. Whatever the position, both perspectives agree that protection of the child in the future is vital.

Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

Child abuse, for reporting purposes, was defined in the 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. In 1984, however, the U.S. Congress amended the previous definition to read:

> *The term sexual abuse includes: (i) the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in any sexually explicit conduct (or any simulation of such conduct) for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct, or (ii) the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children, under circumstances which indicate the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby.*

> *(Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act 42 as Amended by Public Law 98–457, 98th Congress, 9 October 1984)*

The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect defines *sexual abuse* as "any childhood sexual experience that interferes with or has the potential for interfering with a child's healthy development" (1985, p. 3). More simply, *sexual abuse* is the use of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult. Numerous other words are used synonymously with sexual abuse. *Sexual exploitation,* for example, can be not only the actual genital manipulation of a child and the request to touch an adult but also compelling the child to observe sexual acts or have pictures taken for pornographic purposes. Some authors use the terms *assault* (Burgess et al., 1978), *molestation* (Sanford, 1980), *victimization* (Finkelhor, 1979), and *child rape* (Rush, 1980). *Rape,* in the commonly understood sense, denotes sexual intercourse usually undertaken with violence to the victim. The laws of many states, however, define *child rape* as the intrusion of any part of the perpetrator's body (e.g., penis, fingers, tongue) into an orifice of the child's body.

The use of specific terms is debatable. For example, Finkelhor argues against the terms *sexual assault* and *sexual abuse* because they imply physical violence, which is usually not a part of the pattern. *Sexual harassment,* he contends, is too weak, while *sexual misuse* implies the child is an object instead of a person. Finkelhor suggests the term *victimization* to stress that by virtue of age, naivete, and relationship, the child becomes victim to the sexual behavior (Finkelhor, 1979).

Geiser, on the other hand, favors the term *sexual misuse. Sexual abuse,* he feels, is a legal term, while *sexual misuse* emphasizes the mental health perspective, suggesting that normal process has gone astray. In this view, the focus should be on treatment rather than punishment. Geiser writes,

> *Abuse implies an exclusive relationship between abuser and victim, which is often not the full picture. Sexual abuse is often a symptom of family dysfunction. The term misuse is a reminder of the need to study the entire system of human interrelationships. The consequences of sexual misuse will show up somewhere in this system as physical and/or behavioral symptoms in the child or as psychic distress in other family members. (1979, pp. 7–8)*

Types of Sexual Abuse

Whether termed *child sexual abuse* or *misuse,* this type of maltreatment is usually divided into categories based on the identity of the perpetrator.

Familial Abuse

Incest is sexual abuse by a blood relative who is assumed to be part of the child's nuclear family. An individual assuming the role of a surrogate parent, such as a stepfather or live-in boyfriend, may be included in a functional definition of *incest.* Older siblings,

who differ significantly in age or by virtue of their power and resources, may also be considered abusive.

Mayer (1983) cites categories of incestuous activity in families and to each attaches an assessment of harm to the child. The first and least damaging to the child is *sexual molestation.* This includes noncoitus sexual contact, petting, fondling, exhibitionism, and voyeurism, all of which result in the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. The second category, *sexual assault,* consists of manual, oral, or genital contact with the genitals of the victim, masturbatory activities, fellatio (oral stimulation of the penis), and cunnilingus (oral stimulation of the clitoris). The last and most damaging category is called *forcible rape* and includes forced sexual contact resulting in assault with the penis. Fear, violence, and threats are used to ensure compliance from the victim. Mayer states that the latter two categories produce the most trauma for the child, but past victims of abuse say this is not so. Despite Mayer's contention that the degree of trauma is dependent on the type of sexual abuse, victims and survivors experience things very differently. A survivor who has been a victim of molestation may be as severely impacted as one who has been forcibly raped. Many more variables (discussed in a later section of this chapter) affect the degree of trauma to the child (Tower, 1988).

Extrafamilial Abuse

Extrafamilial abuse, perpetrated by someone outside the child's family, represents only about 40 percent of reported abuse. The abusing adult is often called a *pedophile,* that is, an adult whose primary sexual orientation is toward children. *Pedophilia* literally means "love of children" (deYoung, 1982). *Pederasty* is sexual relations between an adult male and a male child (Rush, 1980; Struve, 1990).

Child pornography uses children to produce sexually explicit material such as graphics, photographs, films, slides, magazines, and books (O'Brien, 1983; Trivelpiece, 1990; Pecora et al., 1992). Using the child for pornography may be part of the engagement process—a form of initiation of the child by the perpetrator—or the pornography may be an end in and of itself. New evidence gives credence to the possibility that child pornography actually stimulates perpetrators to commit a sexually abusive act (Finkelhor, 1984b; Trivelpiece, 1990).

The Progression of Sexual Abuse

There is usually a progression in the sexual abuse of a child. The perpetrator may "try out" behaviors to measure the child's comfort. If the child allows the abuser to continue, the abuse is intensified. Such a progression may be

1. Nudity (on the part of the adult)
2. Disrobing (of the adult in front of the child)
3. Genital exposure (by the adult)
4. Observation of the child (bathing, undressing, or excreting)
5. Kissing the child in a lingering, inappropriate manner

6. Fondling (of the child's breast, genital area, thighs, or buttocks)
7. Masturbation (mutual or solitary)
8. Fellatio—oral stimulation of the penis (to the perpetrator or the child)
9. Cunnilingus—oral stimulation of the vulva or vaginal area (to the child or the perpetrator)
10. Digital penetration (of anus or rectum)
11. Penile penetration (of the vagina)
12. Digital penetration (of the vagina)
13. Penile penetration (of anus or rectum)
14. "Dry intercourse" (the rubbing of the perpetrator's penis on the genital or rectal area, inner thighs, or buttocks of the child) (Sgroi, 1982, p. 71)

Not every case of sexual abuse progresses in the same manner, but generally there are five separate phases of child sexual abuse. Certainly, a longer-term relationship between the child and the perpetrator allows for a more leisurely progression over a period of time.

Engagement Phase

During the engagement phase, the perpetrator gains access to the child, engages him or her, and conveys to the child that the behavior is acceptable. (The pronouns *he* and *his* are used here for *perpetrator* because more than 95 percent of those reported are men.) Often this is accomplished by his misrepresentation of moral standards. For example, he may say to a child, "This is what every father does with his daughter," or "This is the way adults teach kids about sex." Perpetrators use a variety of methods to elicit cooperation. Basically, perpetrators play on children's need for human contact and affection, their need for adult approval, their enjoyment of games, and their interest in material rewards. Children's awe of adults and recognition of their own powerlessness provide the perfect opportunity for the perpetrator. Groth (1979) classifies the method in which the perpetrator approaches the child according to that individual's motivational intent or the psychological aims underlying his behavior. Groth places these aims in two categories: pressured sex contacts and forced sex contacts.

Pressured Sex

In a pressured sex contact a perpetrator uses enticement, trying to persuade or cajole the child. "Come see the game I have for us to play" might be a lead line. Entrapment suggests that the perpetrator attempts to make the child feel indebted or obligated. He might say, "After I gave you that nice toy, the least you can do is make me feel good." This type of offender encourages the child to cooperate with the sexual activity by means of bribing or rewarding the child with attention, affection, or material goods. If the child refuses, he will not use force; he is attracted by the child as a loving, innocent, undemanding love object, and frequently knows the child prior to the assault (Burgess et al., 1978).

Forced Sex

Forced sex contacts, on the other hand, involve the threat of harm or the use of force to complete the abuse. A perpetrator may attempt to intimidate the child, using his position

as an adult for this purpose. Although he does not intend to injure the child, his use of force to complete the sexual act sometimes harms the child. To him, the child is an object—a tool to carry out his sexual gratification or his need for control. As a result, he makes no attempt to engage his victim. A very small number of child molesters gain pleasure from hurting their victims. This sadistic child abuser sees the child as a target for his anger and cruelty. His crime is premeditated, and his intent is to degrade, hurt, or even destroy the child (Burgess et al., 1978).

Sexual Interaction and Secrecy Phases

The second phase is sexual interaction, or the actual sexual contact. The abuse may range anywhere from watching or fondling a child to sexual intercourse. Often the longer the abuse has gone on, the more advanced and complex it becomes. The third, or secrecy phase, ensures that the abuse can continue as the perpetrator uses his power to dominate, bribe, emotionally blackmail, or threaten the child into keeping the secret.

Disclosure Phase

Disclosure may or may not occur during childhood. Many adult victims of child sexual abuse attest that this phase may not be realized until adulthood. During disclosure, the abuse is uncovered either purposefully (the child tells an adult or the perpetrator seeks help) or accidentally (the participants are observed or the child demonstrates physical or emotional trauma resulting from the abuse). Children with genital or vaginal tears, venereal disease, or age-inappropriate sexual behavior or knowledge often give clues that are interpreted as indicators of abuse.

Suppression Phase

The final phase, or suppression stage, occurs when those close to the child, as a result of their own abhorrence of the issue or fear of scandal, stigma, or consequences, encourage and often compel the child to recant or forget the abuse. The pressure the child feels often elicits a recantation, and treatment or prosecution becomes difficult or impossible.

> Georgia's abuse followed the classic progression. Soon after her divorce, Georgia's mother's boyfriend, Chip, moved in with the family. Alone with Georgia and her infant brother while the mother worked evenings, Chip appeared to be the ideal babysitter. He engaged 7-year-old Georgia in games and encouraged her trust. After several months of tickling, fondling, and bathing—interspersed with a variety of innocent games—Chip suggested they play a new game. He demonstrated to Georgia the "inflatable quality" of his penis and encouraged her to "play with it." Such play was followed by Chip's statement that this was "their little game" and she mustn't tell anyone. If she did, he told her, he'd have to leave, and her mother would never forgive her.
>
> When her mother observed Georgia rubbing her baby brother's penis sometime later, she questioned her. Georgia's response was that she "wanted to see if it got big

like Chip's." Not wanting to admit to herself that her boyfriend could be guilty of any wrongdoing, the mother passed off the remark by telling her daughter that she "shouldn't talk like that." Several years later, when Georgia developed extreme tenderness in her vaginal area, the mother took her to a doctor who, in conference alone with Georgia, managed to uncover the story. The mother reacted in disbelief and sobbingly ordered Georgia to "take back your awful lies." Fortunately, the mother was eventually able to support her daughter, but once social services closed the case, she told Georgia "to put it all out of your mind."

For such abused children there are interviewing techniques that include preparing children for the possibility they will be asked to recant. With this preparation and support from the helping system, fewer children are placed in the position of feeling they must deny what has happened to them.

Whatever the semantics or the categories citing its damage and progress, *sexual abuse* is the use of sex by an adult to gain power, dominance, and control over a child. The child is manipulated through force, coercion, cajoling, enticement, and threat to comply with the adult's desires. It is natural for children to "participate" because of their awe, trust, respect, or love for the adult.

Incidence of Sexual Abuse

Studies of Abuse

Studies to determine the scope of child sexual abuse have been undertaken in numerous countries and some date to 1914. One of the earliest studies was done in 1919 by deFrancis (Finkelhor, 1979) in association with the American Humane Association (Children's Division). From 263 cases studied in the New York City area, deFrancis discovered a much higher incidence of sexual abuse than had been previously assumed. Kinsey and his associates, in their random survey of 14,000 women in the 1950s, discovered that at least 25 percent had had some sexual encounter prior to the age of 13 (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 21).

Pursuing adults' experience of abuse in their childhoods, Finkelhor (1979), of the University of New Hampshire Family Violence Program, studied 796 college students in the 1970s and disclosed that of the 530 females, 19.2 percent reported having been victimized in childhood, as did 8.6 percent of the 266 males. In her survey of 930 San Francisco women, Russell (1984) found 647 cases of child sexual abuse but only 30 had ever been reported to the police.

In Finkelhor's 1981 study of 700 households in Boston, researchers conducted interviews with 521 parents to discover whether they or their children had ever been victimized. Of the 63 people 21 percent (15 percent female and 6 percent male) reported that they, themselves, had been sexually abused. Parents reported that 4.5 percent of their children had been abused and another 4.5 percent of their children had been victims of attempted abuse. Overall, 47 percent of the subjects studied had some knowledge or experience of sexual abuse[1] (Finkelhor, 1984a). From the various studies of adults reporting their own past experiences, it was found that between 9 and 52 percent of the females and between

3 and 9 percent of the males had some sexual abuse exposure as children (Finkelhor, 1984a).

With the recognition that males are abused almost as frequently as females have come recent studies on male victimization. In 1988, Urquiza found that, of the 2,016 male students studied at the University of Washington, 17.3 percent reported some type of sexual abuse prior to the age of eighteen. Murphy, in 1989, conducted 777 telephone interviews in Minnesota and came up with an 11-percent abuse rate among males. Many theorists and clinicians would argue that these statistics are extremely low compared to the actual suspected incidence of abuse (Urquiza and Keating, 1990).

The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) and the National Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research, a program of the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPCA), have provided important data on the current incidence of child sexual abuse. NCCAN (1994) reports that in 1992, 14 percent of the 918,263 reported maltreatment cases nationally were sexual abuse (p.6). In 1993, according to NCPAC (1994), 15 percent of *substantial* cases of 1,016,000 were sexual abuse (p.8). (The differences in total numbers of these reports is related to data collection sources and methods.) Of these numbers the majority of *reported* sexual abuse victims are female. Males are still sexually exploited at younger ages with the highest incidence of boys abused at age 4–6 years and the highest number of girls between ages 11–14 (NCCAN, 1994, p.26).

There are a few statistics to indicate the prevalence of children involved in pornography and prostitution. Campagna, in the "Meat Rack Investigation" conducted with Poffenberger, considered a variety of forms of exploitation of children. Based on a nationwide survey of 596 police departments, Campagna (1985, p. 6) estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 children (average age of 15 years) are involved in full-time prostitution. Considering runaways, Campagna suggests that at least 10 percent of the nation's runaways are victims of violence or abduction by strangers, much of which may be sexual (p. 135). Campagna offered no statistics on child pornography, but O'Brien (1983) states that of the $5 billion grossed in the sale of pornographic materials in the United States in 1980, perhaps 5 to 10 percent was from child pornography.

Sgt. Lloyd Martin of the Los Angeles Police Department estimates that in the three states of California, Texas, and New York, 40,000 to 120,000 children are involved in pornography or prostitution each year (O'Brien, 1983). The difficulty in obtaining more accurate statistics is based on several factors: (1) the public is naive to the existence of such a problem; (2) there is no national standardization in data-gathering or reporting; (3) few, if any, agencies have units specifically designed to study and uncover this type of sexual exploitation; and (4) there has been little funding for research and little, if any, legislative attention to the problem (O'Brien, 1983; Campagna, 1985).

Reporting of Abuse

Although the incidence of sexual abuse of children seems significant, the reported cases represent a very small portion of the children actually abused. There are several reasons for this:

1. Sexual abuse is difficult to identify and prove and easy to deny.
2. Children are given few legal rights and are often not believed.

3. Efforts to treat focus on punishing the offender. In family situations, the other family members are less likely to report because prosecution upsets the family balance both economically and physically.

4. Those investigating cases feel discomfort in talking about sexual issues and do not screen cases properly or do not recognize signals that sexual abuse is occurring.

5. Treatment methods are not coordinated or sufficiently effective to elicit a desire for treatment on the part of families or victims. Investigators, too, feel treatment is not effective enough to warrant the trauma children are exposed to when the case is reported.

6. Society's taboo on sexual deviations places a stigma on both victim and perpetrator, and, therefore, not to report is not to suffer disgrace (Urquiza and Keating, 1990; Pecora et al., 1992).

Family members and other private citizens describe personal reasons for not wanting to report sexual abuse. Some people do not want to inform on or interfere in the affairs of others, especially when the perpetrator may be a respected member of the community or even a family member. Parents may feel they can handle the situation of their child's abuse on their own. Even if the fact of the abuse is accepted and help seems warranted, many adults do not know where to report. Perhaps the most universal reason why more reports are not substantiated is adults' reluctance to believe children and their hesitancy to attribute such behavior to other adults (Sanford, 1980; Sgroi, 1982; Finkelhor, 1984a; Urquiza and Keating, 1990).

False Allegations Movement

Currently there is a movement which may also hamper the reporting of abuse now and in the future. This movement charges that the incidence of sexual abuse has been greatly exaggerated or even fabricated. While this sentiment has existed among some of the public and a few professionals for some time, it became formalized into what is known as the *False Memory Syndrome Foundation,* when one particularly controversial case sparked supporters of an accused couple to protest their innocence.

Gardner (1991), a forensic psychiatrist, is one believer in the idea that our society has become preoccupied with sexual abuse to the point of obsession or hysteria. He contends that ". . . [T]he ubiquity of environmental sexual stimuli is playing a role in the epidemic of false sex abuse allegations that we have witnessed in the last decade." (Gardner, 1991, p. 19). Further, he suggests that several common mechanisms lead parents (often within the context of custody disputes) to influence their children to make false accusations. These, Gardner explains, are: *vicarious gratification* (where the parent forms a visual image of a sexual encounter and attributes that encounter to the child); *projection* (where unacceptable thoughts or feelings are attributed to others); *reaction formation* (when an individual consciously takes on feelings which are the opposite of what he or she really feels); *voyeurism* (which is a compulsive need to observe sexual happenings or people); *a release of anger or displacement of blame* (which enables the parent to get back at the perpetrator by the accusation); and *substitution* (which allows the child to be substituted for the sexual object) (Gardner, 1991, pp. 25–37). Through these mental processes, the parent either suggests to the child that he or she has been abused or assumes that he or she has been.

Gardner goes on to characterize the evaluators of sexual abuse allegations as being untrained, with no certification and often little knowledge or experience. He also questions the use of anatomically correct dolls, the assumption that children never lie, and whether indicators of sexual abuse are in fact reliable. (See Gardner, 1991, p. 46–68.) It is his contention that not only do children lie, but that they may seek notoriety and want to ingratiate themselves to adult authority figures. Some may also make reports because others of their peers have reported or embellish these reports for the same reasons (pp. 92–97).

Although some authors believe that these ideas require additional debate, other clinicians and authors express concern that voicing such arguments only serves to prevent those who might otherwise have sought help for their abuse from doing so.

Profile of the Abused Child

Is there, in fact, a typical kind of child who is sexually abused? Research shows that girls are more likely to report as the victim of abuse than boys (NCCAN, 1994). This fact appears to be not so much indicative of who is abused but of our culture that tells males to be strong and run from danger (see Table 7.1). In the role of victim, boys may feel like sissies. Boys are less likely to have to account for their whereabouts and, therefore, not as likely to be confronted by parents about unusual behavior (Groth, 1979; Nasjleti, 1980; Sanford, 1980; Finkelhor, 1984a; Urquiza and Keating, 1990). Based on reports and stereotypes, the assumption has been that girls are the most frequent victims. It is now shown that boys are almost equally as vulnerable.

Recent studies (see Table 7.2) show the incidence of abuse among male children is significantly higher than reported. Porter (1986) reports that Henry Giarretto, executive director of the Institute for the Community as Extended Family (ICEF) in San Jose, California, points out that only 5 percent of child sexual abuse victims, treated between 1970 and 1975, were males. In 1986 the percentage of males being treated by ICEF rose to over 22 percent. Porter estimates that the true ratio of sexually abused boys to sexually abused girls would be 1:1, even though significantly fewer boys than girls report the abuse. Urquiza and Keating (1990) suggest that until more research has been done on male victimization we cannot gather accurate statistics.

The average age of those abused is between 4–6 years for boys and 11–14 years for girls (NCCAN, 1994). There may be more abused adolescents, but statistics are difficult to formulate for several reasons. First, adolescents are especially reluctant to report because they fear their parents will curb their freedom to punish or protect them in the future. Further, because of age, the offense, if reported, may very likely be categorized as adult rape. Our dating culture (i.e., early, unchaperoned dating as well as the popularity of singles bars) makes teens especially vulnerable to strangers, acquaintances, and the so-called date rape.

Children at Risk

It is difficult to determine why some children are abused while others are not. Several factors put children at risk for sexual victimization. Social isolation is one reason. Children

TABLE 7.2 Prevalence of Male Child Sexual Abuse

Author(s)	Population and Definition of Abuse	Prevalence Rate
Bell and Weinberg (1978, 1981)	284 men in a heterosexual control group of a study of homosexuality in San Francisco; prepubertal sexual experience with a male adult involving physical contact	2.5%
Finkelhor (1979)	266 college students in New Hampshire; experience under age thirteen with a partner five or more years older or an experience between ages thirteen and sixteen with a partner at least ten years older	8.7%
Finkelhor (1984)	185 fathers of children ages six to fourteen in the Boston area; (1) experience involving physical contact with a person five or more years older prior to age seventeen that the victim termed *abuse;* (2) experience before the age of thirteen with a partner at least five years older involving physical contact that the victim termed *abuse*	6.0% 3.2%
Fritz, Stoll, and Wagner (1981)	412 psychology students at the University of Washington; a sexual encounter involving physical contact with a postadolescent individual before the subject reached puberty	4.8%
Urquiza (1988)	2,016 male students at the University of Washington; direct sexual contact (i.e., physical contact that included the victim's and/or the offender's genitals) with an adult or older child (minimum five-year age difference) prior to eighteen years of age (direct abuse group)	17.3%
Murphy (1987)	789 telephone interviews in Minnesota, adult using physical or psychological force on a person under the age of eighteen to engage in any unwanted sexual contact, such as sexual touching of the person's body or unwanted intercourse	3.0%
Murphy (1989)	777 telephone interviews in Minnesota; one or more of the following factors occurring while the child was under the age of eighteen: (1) an adult exposed himself or herself to the child; (2) an adult touched or fondled the child's breast or sexual parts of the child's body when he or she was not willing; (3) the child had to touch an adult's body in a sexual way when the child did not want to; (4) an adult sexually attacked the child or forced him or her to have sexual intercourse; (5) an adult took nude photos of the child performing sexual acts in the adult's presence; (6) the child experienced oral or anal sex with an adult	11.0%

From Urquiza and Keating. "The Prevalence of Sexual Victimization of Males." In Hunter, *The Sexually Abused Male, Vol. 1,* p. 97. Copyright 1990 by Lexington Books. Reprinted with permission.

who are left alone, are unsupervised, and who do not have the physical presence of numerous friends and neighbors are more likely to be abused (Sgroi, 1982; Finkelhor, 1984a). The mother has an influence on the child's vulnerability. Studies show that the mother who is absent, who is not close to her child emotionally, who is sexually punitive or religiously fanatic, who never finished high school, or who keeps herself isolated is more likely to have a child who will be abused (Sgroi, 1982; James and Nasjleti, 1983; Finkelhor, 1984a). Finkelhor suggested that the presence of a stepfather in the home made a child more vulnerable, not only for abuse by the stepfather himself but for abuse by others. He theorized that statistically a girl, especially one whose mother had remarried, was probably exposed to a variety of men (i.e., the mother's previous boyfriends) who may have had an opportunity to abuse her. Further, friends of a stepfather may not perceive as strong a taboo against molesting the adopted daughter of a friend as against a blood relative. This perception may result from the belief that the stepfather does not have as great an emotional investment in the child (Finkelhor, 1984a).

Faller (1988) found that the stepfather was the abuser in only 17.3 percent of her sample, compared to 28.1 percent of biological fathers married to the mother at the time of the abuse (p. 30). Faller also considered other factors related to the victim's family. She found that 29 percent of the mothers of victims reported having themselves been abused as children (p. 32). In 52.7 percent of the families studied, there was some substance abuse or addiction (p. 33). Families of victims reported significant marital problems with 35.8 percent of the perpetrators as the dominant figure in the household (p. 34). Children came from families who tended to be isolated and have few supports.

Vander May (1988) outlined the risk factors associated primarily with male children. This author concluded that boys are at higher risk for sexual abuse in either father-son or mother-son incest if the parents abused alcohol. Mothers were likely to abuse their sons if they were single parents or the dominant parent, if the household was low income, and if these mothers exhibited other emotional or mental problems. Fathers were more likely to abuse their boys sexually if they were the dominant parent, if there was marital discord, if they had physically abused the wife or other children, if the household was low income, if the mother was emotionally distant and hostile toward males and if the father feared homosexuality.

Female Victims

Why a child is chosen to be abused has long been a subject of debate. In incestuous situations, deYoung (1982) found that of her sample of 60 victims of paternal incest, 83 percent were oldest daughters and 5 percent were only children. Others theorize that a father may approach his eldest daughter and if she refuses, he may go on to abuse other daughters (Justice and Justice, 1979; Sgroi, 1982). Children with disabilities (physical limitations or emotional disturbances) are particularly vulnerable to victimization (deYoung, 1982).

Although actual physical attractiveness of the daughter in incest situations seems to have little influence on whether or not she is abused, there is some debate as to the seductiveness or promiscuity of the female incest victim prior to victimization. Although offenders often describe their victims as seductive, this allegation is usually viewed as part of the perpetrator's rationalization. Recent studies that question the promiscuity of the