

The relationships between childhood disclosure of child sexual abuse, 'betrayal trauma' and sexual revictimisation in adolescence and adulthood.

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Dr Nadia Wager



What do we know about children's disclosures?


- 18-32% of children disclose their experiences of CSA during childhood
- Delayed disclosure -mean latency period is 14 years after the end of the abuse (Roesler and Wind, 1994), but a significant proportion disclose within one year (Finkelhor et al., 1990) – positive skew thus problem of using mean as measure of central tendency (London et al. 2008)
- Father-daughter incest least likely to disclose (Priebe & Svedin, 2008)
- Children are most likely to disclose to their mothers, adolescents are most likely to disclose to their friends
- Teachers are the 3rd most popular confidants
- Young people aged 11-17 most likely to disclose to their mother when the perpetrator is a family member (Stein & Nofziger, 2008)

How do children tell?

- Review by London, Bruck, Wright & Ceci (2008)
- Evaluation of Summit's (1983) theory of *Child Abuse Accommodation Syndrome* which proposed that a child's disclosure would be characterised by:
 - a delay or failure to disclose in childhood
 - Denials when specifically asked
 - Recantations of abuse allegations
- Only the first proposition appears to be consistently supported by research
- *NB the theory was originally developed to account for disclosure in intra-familial cases of CSA*


What do we know about non-abusing parents responses to disclosures?

- Most research has focused on non-abusing mothers – hardly anything on fathers
- Ways of knowing
 - Case file extraction (known cases and based on professionals' judgements)
 - Retrospective self-reports of adults who were abused as children
 - Interviews and assessment of mothers of referred children
 - Interviews with young people

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- Heriot (1996) found that 14% did not believe their child
 - A further 12% were unsure of the veracity of their child's allegations.
 - The tendency toward disbelief was further exacerbated by:
 - ✖ the severity of the abuse
 - ✖ the strength of the mother's own emotional attachment to the perpetrator.

 - Everson, Hunter, Runyon, et al. (1989) found that mothers are more likely to offer emotional support than to take action.
 - Despite mothers' apparent reluctance to take evasive action, they are still the most likely recipients:
 - ✖ To intervene to end the abuse (Palmer et al., 1999),
 - ✖ To report the abuse officially
 - ✖ Whose actions lead to the arrest of the offender (Stein & Nofziger, 2008).

But they are less likely to respond positively ...

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- When the perpetrator is their current intimate partner
 - Particularly if they are NOT married to the perpetrator

 - Where the abuse involves their daughter rather than their son
 - Where the abuse involved penetration
 - When the child displays sexualised behaviour (even when this is as a consequence of the abuse)
 - Their child is over the age of 12 when they disclose
 - The mother is a survivor of CSA
 - They began motherhood in their teens

My study

Aim - To inform the development of more efficacious intervention strategies to prevent sexual revictimisation

Methodology: Retrospective web-based survey of 481 adults employing a mixed-methods approach.


- 183 survivors of CSA (under 14 years)

Theoretical Perspective – Finklehor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model (1985) and Freyd's Betrayal Trauma theory (1996)


Survey instrument – Brief betrayal trauma survey (Goldberg & Freyd, 2003) - modified

Key Findings to Date:

- Survivors of CSA who experience a period of psychogenic amnesia for memories of their abuse are a significantly higher risk of sexual revictimisation
 - 86% of once amnesic respondents reported a subsequent sexual assault, by a different perpetrator during adolescence, whilst most were still amnesic for the abuse
 - Once amnesic survivors were 8 times more likely to report a rape in adolescence and 4 times more likely in adulthood than their non-abused counterparts.

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- **66.1% of the survivors of CSA reported sexual revictimisation in either adolescence or adulthood**
 - **Over a 1/3 of CSA survivors reported sexual revictimisation in both adolescence and adulthood.**
 - **Men and women demonstrated equivalent risk for sexual revictimisation, although men without a history of CSA demonstrate a considerably lower risk for adolescent and adult sexual assault.**
 - **Women were 3 X more likely than men to report amnesia for CSA (partly accounted for by the fact that women were almost twice as likely to experience CSA in the context of high social betrayal and abuse tends to begin at a younger age).**

Predicting whether a child discloses

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- **Logistic regression: Factors entered into the model:**
 - Betrayal trauma
 - Age of onset of the abuse
 - Gender of the respondent
 - Approach/grooming behaviours of the perpetrator
 - Nature of the abuse
 - Experiencing a period of amnesia for memories of CSA
 - **Findings – the model could account for between 8 and 12% of the variance in disclosures**
 - **Only one statistically significant predictor**
 - perpetrator threatened that no one would believe the child if they tried to tell someone – almost 3X **more** likely to disclose
 - **Two marginal trends:**
 - if bribed with gifts and privileges almost 3X less likely to disclose
 - If abuse involved penetration more than 2X less likely to disclose

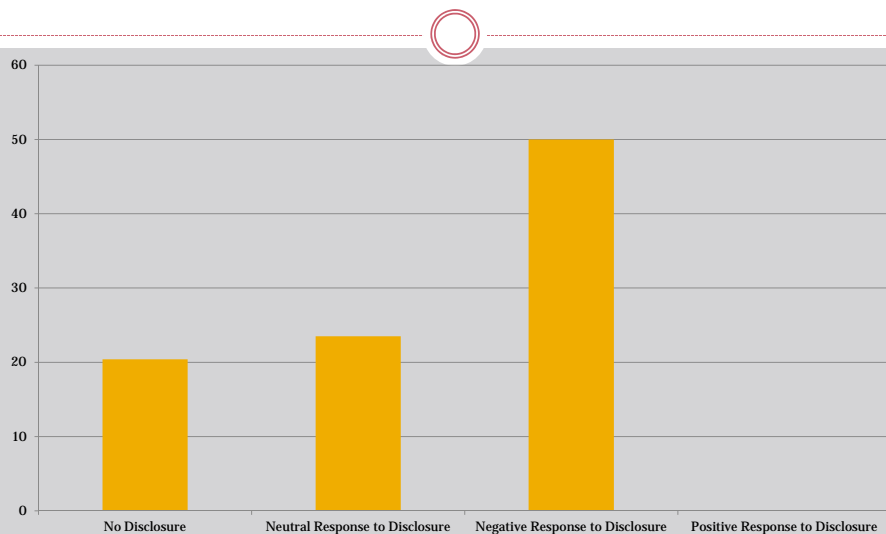
Response to the first disclosure of CSA

- 102 (55% of CSA cases) of the respondents' experiences of CSA were classified as exhibiting high betrayal trauma
- 25% survivors of CSA (n=57) indicated that they had told someone of the abuse whilst they were still a child.
- Of these 57% reported a negative response from the person to whom they disclosed.
- 17.5% received a neutral response
- 25.3% received a positive response – affirmative action and/or emotional support

Interactions between betrayal and response to disclosure

- The majority of negative responses from male recipients of the disclosure (n = 3) were characterised by sexually abusing the child themselves.
- The negative responses from women (predominately mothers) – accusation of lying (disbelief) or blamed the child
- The majority of disclosures (75%) to high betrayal CSA resulted in a negative response that would also constitute an additional betrayal of trust- 'the doubly-betrayed'
 - No men were doubly-betrayed – consistent with previous research findings
- Only 51% of disclosures to low betrayal CSA resulted in a negative response (although 69% of men in the low betrayal category received a negative response)

Relationship between Disclosure and Amnesia for CSA



Betrayal, Disclosure Experience and Revictimisation

- With regards to rape in ADOLESCENCE, a marginal difference was found between betrayal/disclosure groups ($\chi^2 = 9.711$, $df = 5$, $p = .084$).
 - 58.8% double betrayal
 - 40.0% who reported high betrayal and non-disclosure,
 - 28.6% who reported low in betrayal and a negative response to disclosure,
 - 23.5% for those whose CSA low in betrayal and who did not disclose,
 - 20% who reported high betrayal and a positive response to disclosure
 - 6.7% of those with histories free of CSA.
- Disclosure interacts with the betrayal dimension of abuse in that high betrayal CSA appears to pose a particularly high risk and this is moderated by the nature of the response to disclosure (e.g. a negative response increases risk and a positive response decreases risk).
- In this sample, women who have been doubly-betrayed demonstrate 8.8 times the risk of rape in adolescence in comparison to women with histories free from CSA.

Rape in Adulthood

- Slightly dissimilar trends were evident in relation to adult rape and in this instance the differences between the betrayal/disclosure groups attained statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 15.640$, $df = 5$, $p = .008$).
 - 58.8 % double betrayal
 - 57.1% low betrayal and negative response to disclosure
 - 40% for high betrayal and a positive response to disclosure**
 - 23.1% for those classified as high betrayal and no disclosure
 - 17.6% for those with low betrayal and no disclosure
 - 7.9% for those with histories free of CSA.
- Disclosure which evoked a negative response appears to be associated with the highest risk for sexual revictimisation regardless of the level betrayal evident in the original CSA.
- Double-betrayal in this group of women is associated with 7.4 times the risk of adult rape in comparison to the female respondents indicating a history free of CSA.

Conclusion

- Whilst double betrayal was associated with the highest reporting of adult rape, the group who were next most likely to demonstrate high rates of rape were **not** those who experienced high betrayal CSA, but rather those who received a negative response to low betrayal CSA.
- Suggests that the impact of a negative experience of disclosure may demonstrate a more pernicious and persistent effect on well-being than the nature of the relationship with the CSA perpetrator.
- In relation to adolescent rape, a positive response to disclosure was associated with half the risk demonstrated for high betrayal sexual assault in the context of non-disclosure and a third of that demonstrated by the doubly-betrayed group.

Implications

- Problem with attempts to create milieu which facilitates early disclosure
- Need to empower adults to recognise and act on implicit disclosures
- The need to increase adults' inclination and ability to offer a positive response to disclosure – needs to be done prenatally.

Thank you.

