Solís-Ortíz, Silvia; Espinobarros-Martínez, Eugenia
Child Sexual Abuse In A Provincial City Of México: A Review Of 110 Cases
Revista Mexicana de Psicología, vol. 22, núm. 1, junio, 2005, pp. 65-68
Sociedad Mexicana de Psicología A.C.
Distrito Federal, México

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243020643006
Child Sexual Abuse In A Provincial City Of Mexico: A Review Of 110 Cases

Abuso sexual infantil en una ciudad de provincia de México: una revisión de 110 casos

SILVIA SOLÍS-ORTIZ y EUGENIA ESTRINOBARROS-MARTÍNEZ
Instituto de Investigaciones Médicas, Universidad de Guanajuato

Resumen: Se estudiaron 110 casos de abuso sexual infantil reportados a un centro de apoyo para víctimas de abuso sexual en León, una ciudad de provincia de México, en un periodo de 18 meses. Se obtuvieron las características de las víctimas y de los perpetradores de una revisión retrospectiva de registros de 26 niños, 54 niñas y 30 niñas adolescentes. Se analizaron dos categorías: abuso sexual muy serio y abuso sexual serio. El abuso intrafamiliar involucró 53.3% de los casos y el abuso sexual extrafamiliar 43.6%; solamente 7.2% involucró a desconocidos. El abuso sexual muy serio fue más frecuente en las relaciones intrafamiliares. El abuso sexual serio ocurrió en 18.1% de los casos intrafamiliares y 20% entre las relaciones extrafamiliares. Este reporte indica que la naturaleza y extensión del abuso sexual infantil en una ciudad de provincia de México están de acuerdo con los hallazgos descritos en la literatura.

Palabras clave: abuso sexual, perpetradores, abuso infantil, violencia intrafamiliar, incesto

Abstract: One hundred and ten cases of child sexual abuse reported in a period of 18 months to a support centre for sexually abused victims in Leon, a provincial city of Mexico, were studied. The characteristics of victims and perpetrators were gathered from a retrospective review from clinical records of 26 boys, 54 girls and 30 adolescent girls. Theses cases were divided in two categories: very serious sexual abuse and serious sexual abuse. Intrafamilial sexual abuse involved 53.3 % cases and the extrafamilial sexual abuse 43.6 %, and only 7.2% cases involved unknown. Very serious sexual abuse was more frequent in the intrafamilial relationships. Serious sexual abuses occurred in 18.1 % intrafamilial cases and 20 % among extrafamilial relationships. This report indicates that the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in a provincial city of Mexico are in agreement with findings described in the literature.

Key words: sexual abuse, victimization, perpetration, child abuse, incest

Child sexual abuse is an international epidemiological problem (Finkelhor, 1994; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). Although some reports exist on child sexual abuse in developing countries (Barthauer & Leventhal, 1999), the nature of this kind of victimization of children in the Mexican population is not well known, most probably because studies of child sexual abuse in Mexico are not easily available in English-language journals or books.

Research on child sexual abuse in developing countries is essential to facilitate international awareness of the problem and to understand how social and cultural variables may affect this problem. Data on a Mexican population will also open the possibility to perform comparative studies with other countries.

The present study was conducted to describe the characteristics and magnitude of reported cases of child sexual abuse to a support centre for sexually abused victims in Leon, a provincial...
city of Mexico in a period of 18 months. Our main goal was to examine the distribution of child sexual abuse according to the characteristics of victims and perpetrators.

Method

A retrospective review of the records on all children seen at the Attention and Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Maltreatment Center in Leon, a city of Guanajuato, Mexico, between January 1995 and June 1996, for genital abuse, was conducted. The data contained in the records allowed us to collect enough information from each case to describe the abused population. Although the analysis of sexual abuse of adolescents has peculiar characteristics (Meyerson, Long, Miranda & Marx, 2002), we decided to include the cases of adolescent girls to have a better idea of the distribution of sexual abuse victims according to age.

Data related to the characteristics of the victims, perpetrators, category of sexual abuse, abusers’ relationship to the victim, marital status of parents, and reports of behavioral indicators of psychological disturbance were gathered in the retrospective review of the victims’ records. A total of 110 cases were reviewed.

Child sexual abuse was defined as “any sexual contact between an adult and a sexually immature (sexual maturity is socially as well as physiologically defined) child for purposes of the adult’s sexual gratification; or any sexual contact to a child made by the use of force, threat, or deceit to secure the child’s participation; or sexual contact to which a child is incapable of consenting by virtue of age or power differentials and the nature of the relationships with the adult”, according to Finkelhor & Korbin (1988).

Abusive events were clustered in two categories according to the classification used by Dube (1988): (1) very serious sexual abuse, including penile-vaginal or penile-anal penetration or attempted penetration, fellatio, cunnilingus and anilingus; and, (2) serious sexual abuse, including kissing or touching breast or genital area while unclothed, fondling and exposing of genitals. The relationship between these intensity categories with the type of abuse, intrafamilial and extrafamilial, was also obtained.

Results

Severity of sexual abuse according to the gender of the victims (boys, girls and adolescent girls), and the type of abuse (intrafamilial or extrafamilial) is shown in Table 1. Of the 110 cases of alleged sexual abuse, 26 (23.6%) involved boys (mean age = 8.3, SD = 2.6); 54 (49%) involved girls (mean age = 8.4, SD = 2.7); and 30 (27.2%) involved adolescent girls (mean age = 14.6, SD = 1.2). Only 5% of the victims were illiterate.

Most of the cases involved individuals known to the victim, and only 8 (7.2%) cases from the total of the sample implicated an unknown abuser. However, intrafamilial sexual abuse accounted for only 56.3% of the cases (62 cases); biological fathers were the most commonly identified perpetrators in these cases, representing 33.3% of the aggressors in intrafamilial abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intrafamilial</th>
<th>Extra familial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very serious</td>
<td>Serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Girls</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were significant differences between the type of sexual abuse and the severity of abuse ($X^2 = 12.67, p = 0.002$). The very serious sexual abuse was more frequent in intrafamilial relationships, than in the extrafamilial relationships (42 cases versus 26 cases). Girls with a mean age of 8 years were involved in this intrafamilial serious sexual abuse in 22.7 % of the cases, followed by the adolescent girls in 10 % of the cases.

Serious sexual abuse occurred in 18.1 % (20 cases) of intrafamilial cases, and in 20 % (22 cases) of the extrafamilial cases. Girls were also involved in the intrafamilial serious sexual abuse in 10 % of the cases, and in the extrafamilial serious sexual abuse in 10.9 % of the cases. The girls were more vulnerable to this kind of victimization than boys and adolescent girls.

In all the cases the sexual abusers were men. The sexual abusers of boys were young men between 15 and 25: brother, uncle, cousin, school mate, neighbors or strangers. The sexual abusers of girls and adolescent girls were also men between 15 and 78 years: biological father, brother, grandfather, uncle, cousin, godfather, school mate, teacher, friend, neighbor or stranger.

Marital status of parents showed that more than half of the victims lived in intact families (74%). The rest of the victims lived with single parents (3.4%), widowed (3.4%), separated (9%), and common law (10%).

Of the 110 records reviewed, only 37 (33.6 %) files contained report of some psychological disturbances similar to the symptoms of abused child syndrome (e.g., Kempe y cols., 1962). Females (N=23) reported more psychological disturbances than males (N=14), showing depression, hostility, aggressiveness, masturbation, feeling of isolation, irritability, disturbed eating patterns, guilt and embarrassment, nocturnal enuresis, fear, nervousness, suicide attempts, disobedience and distraction; males reacted with aggressiveness, anxiety, fearfulness, phobias, sexual games, behavioral problems, sexual abuse imitation, masturbation and lack of concentration.

Discussion

Retrospective studies based on records review have well-known limitations. The information obtained is usually based on reported cases and does not account for the large number of unreported cases of sexual abuse (Chandler, 1982). The present study involved a sample of victims in a Mexican population, who seeked help from public support centers and came mostly from low socioeconomic families with few resources; thus, the present findings must be interpreted with caution since they may not be generalized to the whole population of sexual abused victims.

In this study we found that the sexual abuse in Mexican children presents some very clear patterns, according to the gender of victims and the type and severity of the abuse. The great majority of aggressors were individuals known to the victims, and only a small percentage (7.2 %) of sexual abuse cases involved strangers. Also, intrafamilial sexual abuse occurred in more than half of the episodes of abuse (56.3 %); this type of abuse was more common in the case of the younger girls, with a mean of 8 years of age, than in adolescent girls or boys. Younger girls represented 22.7 % of intrafamilial very serious sexual abuse cases and 10 % of intrafamilial serious sexual abuse. In all cases the offenders were male with a wide age range. The patterns of sexual abuse found in the present study have also been reported in other studies of sexual abuse of children (Dube, 1988; Finkelhor, 1994; Tonmyr, 1998), and strongly suggest that sexual abuse in Mexican children is associated with known individuals and family members. Although reports of psychological disturbance were found in only 37 cases of the sample studied, this fact indicates the magnitude of sexual abuse and their consequences in mental health (Kendall-Tackett, 2002). Psychosocial dynamics present in families seems to be a critical factor for sexual abuse (Hornor, 2002), and should be considered in prevention programs directed towards children and adolescents.

Incest involving biological fathers and blood relatives was also found in the present review. It is possible that some prevailing social conditions in Mexican society are associated with this pattern of incest; provincial cities, mainly, can still be characterized by a predominant male domination (Ortega, Ortega-Gonzalez & Alvarez, 1999), a condition prevalent in many societies that has been associated with incest,
besides poverty and social isolation (Finkelhor, 1984). This condition is prevalent in the distribution of authority in Leon’s society and reinforces the idea of a very traditional society. However, it will be necessary to conduct comparative research that would allow to test specific hypotheses about social and cultural factors related to child sexual abuse.

In spite of the well-known limitations of retrospective chart reviews (see Chandler, 1982), this review provides some preliminary information on the characteristics of child sexual abuse in a provincial city of a developing country that may be useful for international comparisons, taking methodological differences into account. Specific characteristics seem to differentiate the victims according to their age, sex, type and severity of sexual abuse. However, it may be as important to understand how other characteristics of the abusers (e.g., pedophilic inclinations) as well as social and cultural factors are related to sexual abuse in children. Further investigation is required in order to take into account these variables.

References