

Growing Beyond: An Introduction to Adolescent Girls with Sexually Abusive Behavior

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Objectives



- Understand the literature specific to this population.
- Provide overview of assessment.
- Review clinical needs and treatment goals.

Culture of Denial

✦ “That she might seduce a helpless child into sexplay is unthinkable, and even if she did so, what harm can be done without a penis?”



Consider This:



✦ “Aggressiveness is gendered and... attention must be devoted to the particularities of male and female violence (Cavanaugh, 2002, p.i)

Statistics

In the USA:

For juvenile arrests, females under age 18 account for 2% of the arrests for forcible rape and 10% of arrests for other sexual offenses (excluding prostitution).

(OJJDP, 2014)



Research Limitations



- Few studies or comparison studies
- Small sample sizes
- Lack of statistical analysis
- Unrepresentative samples
- Poor generalizability
- Reliability/validity concerns with archival data
- Limitations of self-reported data

Sexual Victimization Histories of Sexually Abusive Girls

- Gender appears to be the area of greatest difference:

Girls	Boys	Study
96%	70%	Hickey et al., 2008
64%	50%	Kubik et al., 2002
72%	50%	Miccio-Fonseca, 2000
78%	43%	Mathews et al., 1997
100%	63%	Bumby & Bumby, 1997

Sexual Victimization Histories



Descriptive studies

- 72.7% - 100% had sexual abuse histories

(Weedon, 2011; Howley, 2001; Hunter et al., 1993; Johnson, 1989)

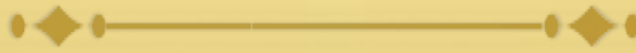


Sexual Victimization Histories



- ✧ Often abused at young ages
- ✧ Often victimized by multiple perpetrators
- ✧ Often sexually abused repeatedly and severely

Sexual Victimization Histories



- Many girls have been abused by female perpetrators.
- Girls more often abused by relatives and/or both relatives and acquaintances

(Hickey et al.)



Other Maltreatment Histories



Female adolescents “are more likely to have been maltreated in a variety of ways compared to their male counterparts”

- Physical abuse (63.6% vs. 40%)
- Neglect (70% vs. 36.4%)
- Exposure to family violence (62.5% vs. 22.2%)

Kubik et al.

Other Exposure



- Girls more likely than boys to witness domestic violence and sexual deviance within home



(Schwartz et al., 2006).

- Girls more likely to be exposed to inadequate sexual boundaries in the home (77.3% vs. 41.3%)

(Hickey et al., 2008).

Conclusions Regarding Victimization Histories



“[F]emales who committed sexual offenses tended to have more severe histories of maltreatment than their male counterparts”

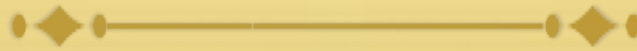
Kubik et al



“In comparison to their male counterparts, the developmental histories of the juvenile female perpetrators reflected even more extensive and severe maltreatment”

Mathews et al

Mental Health Issues Among Sexually Abusive Girls



- PTSD
- RAD
- Depression
- Prior Mental Health Treatment
- Suicidal Ideation
- Learning/Academic Difficulties



Behavioral Problems



- Running away
- Stealing
- Truancy
- Relational deficits

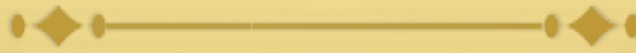


Motivations for Sexual Abuse

- More about anger ($\sim 60\%$), towards main caretakers
- Resistance to cultural scripts
- Protection by perpetration
- Trauma reenactment



Differences



Girls less likely to be adjudicated.

- 21% had been adjudicated (Howley)
- 2 girls vs. 93 boys charged with a sex offense (Ray & English)
- 27% girls vs. 15% boys cases handled informally and 73% girls vs. 85% boys processed formally (Vandiver).

Girls more likely to be viewed as victims.



Differences



- Boys more likely to abuse females; females more likely to abuse both genders.

Vandiver & Teske

- Girls tend to be younger when they sexually abuse others.

Kubik et al.; Vandiver & Teske

- Victims of females are younger.

Vandiver & Teske; Finkelhor et al.

- Girls more likely to be involved in incidents with multiple victims (23% vs. 12%).

Finkelhor et al.



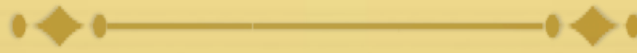
Differences



- Girls often sexually abuse in caretaking roles. Bumby & Bumby
- Sexually abusive girls are less likely to abuse strangers and less predatory. Finkehor et al.
- More dependency issues and revictimization in their current relationships.




Differences



- Girls reasons for offending may differ from boys – relational aggression.
- Girls cognitive distortions adopt more altruistic/caretaking justifications
- Less use of weapons
- Desire to be pregnant



Typologies: Predisposed Offending



- They sexually offend primarily due to their own sexual abuse histories or individual/family psychopathology.
- Severe abuse histories and evidence of complex trauma
- Co-morbid diagnoses
- Attachment and empathy deficits
- Criminal orientation or exclusive sexual offending

Typologies: Experimenting/ Exploiting

- Their primary motivation is sexual curiosity.
- Less likely to have abuse history
- Crime of opportunity
- Low levels of psychopathology
- Lack social skills and prior sexual experiences
- Naïve




Typologies: Peer-Influenced Offending

- Offending due to pressure from peers or group involvement.
- More common dynamic with sexually abusive females than for males.



Finkelhor, Omrod, & Chaffin (2009)



- Females more likely than males to offend with others (36% vs. 23%) as well as with adults (13% vs. 5%).
- They were more likely to be considered victims at the same time they were offending by investigators.

Vandiver (2010)



- ✦ Comparison study of 177 juvenile boys and 177 juvenile girls.
- ✦ 52% of the girls had at least one co-offender vs. 19% of boys.
- ✦ Boys were significantly older when they were arrested.
- ✦ Those who acted with someone were likely to have a male co-offender and have more than one victim – typically a girl.

Wijkman, Weeman, Biljeveld, & Hendriks (2015)

- ✧ Examined group sexual offending
 - ✧ 58% of the female offenders actively participated in the sexual abuse or battered or threatened the victim.
 - ✧ Aim of 10 groups was to harass the victim (just for fun).
 - ✧ Aim of 10 groups was sexual: 9 of these groups consisted of couples and 6 of these groups had female victims considerably younger than male co-offender.
 - ✧ Aim of 5 groups: revenge
 - ✧ Group dynamics played a dominant role.



Wijkman et al. (2015)



- ✦ The main aim of the sexual offending behavior seemed to be to harass the victim or to take revenge and humiliate the victim.

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revenge

Assessment



- Best practice is based on a thorough understanding of female development and the research on sexually abusive girls.
- Greater reliance on self-report
Hunter & Mathews, 1997
- Pay close attention to the more subtle and covert behaviors, and internalization responses, in addition to their more overt behavioral problems.

Assessment Continued



- Relational development, female identity, attachment styles
- Sexual functioning
- Mental health/internalization
- Offending behavior
- History of maltreatment
- History of conduct disordered behavior and/or relational aggression?

Clinical Needs/Treatment Goals

- Process and integrate complex trauma history, if applicable.
- Build an empathy bridge from her victimization to her perpetration.
- Work on identity formation and self concept.
- Develop healthy relational patterns.
- Balance personal needs with the needs of her relationships.

Clinical Needs/Treatment Goals

- Establish a voice of her own.
- Develop healthy sexual subjectivity.
- Develop self-esteem and self-care strategies.
- Address loss and abandonment.
- Address comorbid diagnoses.
- Eliminate self-destructive behaviors, e.g., cutting, bingeing.
- Improve her internal working model.

Clinical Needs/Treatment Goals

- Identify healthy female role models.
- Address family dynamics and parenting issues, if applicable.
- Address both risk and protective factors.

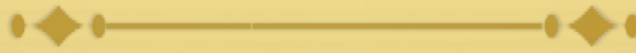


Therapeutic Process



- Therapeutic alliance built on respect, feeling heard, and supported
- Work on a relational level
- Clear consistent boundaries
- Strengths-based and holistic approaches
- Collaboration vs. confrontation
- Respecting survival strategies
- Dual specialization: trauma informed and offense specific

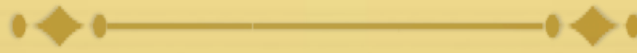
In sum....



- Don't give up on these girls..
- Listen. Don't assume the dynamics are the same with females.
- Don't apply a one size fits all model.
- Role model respect with every interaction.
- Respect their need for a relationship.



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A photograph of a beach with waves in the background. The words "THANK YOU" are written in the sand in the foreground.

THANK YOU