

OUTLINE

Sexual Abuse of Children

The response and responsibility of the
churches

Can we believe what children tell us?

Child Sexual Abuse

What is it?

What forms does it take?

Who does it?

Is it new?

How common is it?

Who are the victims?

What are the consequences?

How can we prevent it?

How can we protect our children?



What is it?

- The sexual exploitation of a child for the gratification of an adult

Is it new?



Sexual Abuse, Another Hidden Pediatric Problem: The 1977 C. Anderson Aldrich Lecture

C. Henry Kempe, M.D.

Three themes of the soapies

- Sex
- Family relationships
- Law and justice

Who does it?

- Family 35%
- Trusted acquaintances 35%
- Strangers 30%

Who are the victims?

How old are they?



What forms does it take?



How common is it?



What are the
consequences?



Some of the Immediate Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Pain

Fear

Confusion

Pleasure

Guilt

Humiliation

Loss of Value



SOME CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

SHORT TERM:

A proportion show -

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Aggression
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Withdrawal
- Low self-esteem

LONG TERM:

A proportion of adult women show -

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- A tendency to revictimization
- Self-destructive behaviour

How can we prevent it?
How can we protect our
children?



The response of the churches

- Some key messages
- Understanding the victim
- Forgiveness
- How churches have fared in the past
- What to do if there is an allegation
- Making churches safer for children

The response of the churches

Key message:

1. Working with children is a privilege
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The response of the churches

Key message:

2. Christians sin.....and in a variety of ways




The victim of child sexual abuse

- Understanding the anger
- Giving support



FORGIVENESS

- Forgiveness and repentance
 - Forgiveness and trust
 - “Forgive and forget”
 - Forgiveness and reconciliation
 - Forgiveness and punishment
 - Forgiveness and the church
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How the churches have fared in the past



What to do if there is an allegation



Making churches safer for children



Can we believe what
children tell us?



SINCE YOU WOKE THIS MORNING

- What was the most important thing you said to your partner?
- Recall two news items you heard
- What was the colour and make of each car stopped next to you at each set of red lights?

ONE WEEK AGO: THURSDAY 5th OCTOBER

- What did you have for dinner?
- What shirt or dress did you wear that day?
- What was the most important thing you said to your partner that morning?

SIX WEEKS AGO: THURSDAY 7
SEPTEMBER

This is becoming ridiculous



PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL VIEWS

How would an 8 year old respond to questions by police or in court?

Less than 50% in any group (legal professionals, psychologists and potential jurors) felt the child could give an accurate account

Yarmey and Jones, 1983

MEMORY IN CHILDREN

One of the most robust findings in research on children's memory is that children from six years of age and up are as accurate as adults and no more suggestible than adults

Goodman, G. and Reed, R. (1986)

Law.Hum.Behav. 10:317-332

Oates, K. (1990)

Aust.Law. J. 64:129-134

IT'S NOT AS CLEAR IN YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Younger children give less information spontaneously
- What they do report is accurate
- They are more susceptible to highly leading and suggestive questions

Shrimpton, S. and Oates, K. (1998)
App.Cog.Psychol. 12:133-143

“Children are prone to live in a make-believe world so that they magnify incidents which happen to them or invent them completely they are very suggestible and can easily be influenced by adults and other children They may consent to sexual offences against themselves and then deny consent. They may completely invent sexual offences.”

Evidence: Cases and Materials
Butterworths, London (1984)

ENCODING



CONSISTENT WITH PRIOR
EXPERIENCE



ENCODING



LINKED TO EVENT ALREADY IN
MEMORY

ENCODING



SHORT-TERM MEMORY



LONG-TERM MEMORY



LONG-TERM MEMORY



INTERVENING EXPERIENCES

- . COMPETE
- . SOLIDIFY
- . INFLUENCE TO FIT WITH
ATTITUDES AND
EXPERIENCES

FALSE MEMORIES

- 24 adults
- Given information about four events from their childhood
- Three of these events actually happened
- One event (becoming lost while shopping) was false

FALSE MEMORIES

- Seven adults (28%) recalled the false event

Loftus, E. and Pickrell, J. (1995)
Psych. Ann. 25:720-725

FALSE MEMORIES

- 39 children told about four events from their childhood
- Two were true and two were false
- One false event was plausible (lost at the shops)
- One was implausible (having a rectal enema)
- The children were asked to recall details of each event

FALSE MEMORIES

- Over half the children could not recall either false event
- Three younger children (5 – 7 years) “recalled” both false events
- 15 children recalled one false event. In 14 cases this was the plausible event

Pezdek, K. et al (1997)
Psychol. Sc. 8: 437-444

FALSE ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Review of 551 CSA notifications

Substantiated	236 (42.8%)
Inconclusive	116 (21.1%)
Not abuse	185 (33.6%)
Erroneous accounts by child	14 (2.5%)

Oates, K. et al (2000)
Child Abuse and Neglect 24:149-157

FALSE ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Analysis of the 14 erroneous accounts by children

Made in collusion with parent	3
Child confused/misinterpreted innocent event	3
Definite false allegation (1.5% of sample)	8
- to get even (1)	
- to impress classmates (1)	
- reason unclear (6)	

Oates, K. et al (2000)
Child Abuse and Neglect 24:149-157

SEXUAL ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS IN CANADA

Number of investigations	798
- substantiated	306 (38%)
- suspected	162 (20%)
- unsubstantiated	287 (36%)
- intentionally false	43 (6%)

No false reports by children

Trocme, N. and Bala, N. (2005)
Child Abuse and Neglect 29:1333-1345

Someone complimented me on my parking recently. They left a little note on my windscreen. It said “parking fine”.

That was nice wasn't it?





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LEGAL INNOVATIONS

- Preparation for court programs
- Screen between child and defendant
- Videolink/closed circuit tv
- Expert witnesses reading each other's reports, discussing them together and appearing as a group during the hearing (NSW Children's Court 2005)

SUMMARY

- Children have reliable memories, despite popular opinion
- Children are as truthful as adults
- Memory is not a videorecorder – it can be influenced
- False allegations of sexual abuse by children are uncommon
- We often over-estimate the linguistic abilities of children
- Our job is to help the child to reveal the truth