SYMPOSIUM I: SIBLING SEXUAL ABUSE

Dafna Tener - Sibling Sexual Abuse, Child Advocacy Center and the research context.

Roni Liberman and Ronit Essing Kedar- Understanding and coping with cases of sibling sexual abuse: Child Advocacy Center perspective.

Noam Tarshish- “Victim Perpetrator or Just My Brother”- sibling perceptions on SSA: A Child Advocacy Center study.

Efrat Luski- Parental attitudes following disclosure of sibling sexual abuse: A child Advocacy Center study.

Merav Saban- Dilemmas during therapy in Sibling Sexual Abuse cases
Siblings sexual abuse: how many of you...
Siblings sexual abuse: The pill
Sibling sexual abuse (SSA) is defined as a continuum of childhood sexual behaviors that do not fit the category of age-appropriate curiosity, and take place between two siblings or more (Thompson, 2009). Sexual behaviors vary along on a continuum from non-contact behaviors such as exposure to pornography to physical contact, and from fondling to forcible penetration (Haskins, 2003).
Sibling sexual abuse: Differentiating criteria

Several criteria are helpful in differentiating between age-appropriate sexual behaviors and SSA: (1) The age difference between siblings; (2) The severity of the abuse in terms of whether the relationship was mutual, the presence of coercion and physical penetration, and the duration and frequency of the abuse; and (3) The motivation for the sexual behavior and whether it was dominated by normative curiosity or precocious gratification (Ballantine, 2012; Carlson, Maciol & Schneider, 2006; Rudd & Herzberger, 1999; Veigh & Jo, 2003).
Sibling sexual abuse: consequences

Myths concerning SSA, such as assumptions of mutuality, harmlessness and normality (Ballantine, 2012; Tapara, 2012), are contradicted by multiple studies and clinical reports. These indicate that the negative physical and mental repercussions of SSA may be as severe as other types of intrafamilial sexual abuse, if not more.
Sibling sexual abuse study: Coming from the field..
Sibling sexual abuse study: The phases of our study

Qualitative document analysis

Multi-stage focus group

Focus group turning into partnership: giving back to the field
Siblings sexual abuse: Our speakers
Siblings sexual abuse: English and us
Siblings sexual abuse: You and us
Intervention in cases of Sibling Sexual Abuse—what can professionals learn from perceptions of siblings involved

Dr. Dafna Tener
Noam Tarshish
Shosh Turjeman and the CAC professional team
SSA continuum

Age appropriate mutual Sexual curiosity

Significant age difference (+2) Coercion + violence Sexual gratification Perpetrator – victim
Child Advocacy Center:

The CAC aims to minimize secondary victimization caused by the judicial process (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007).

The CAC employs a multidisciplinary team of experts to provide one-stop sensitive initial treatment to sexually, physically, or emotionally abused minors (under 18) and their families.
Setting

CAC in Jerusalem- specific context

• Large families
• Religious community – Ultra orthodox and Orthodox
Research questions

• Research Question 1: How do siblings attending the CAC interpret the dynamics of SSA?
• Part of a larger project which also includes the perceptions of professionals and parents.
Method

Setting, Data source & study population

- 100 cases of families referred to the CAC
- Transcribed conversations between CPO and children involved
- Demographic data, memos from welfare authorities, professional assessments, school reports.

Data analysis

- Qualitative document analysis (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008).
- Thematic analysis approach (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006)
Sample characteristics
• 163 incidents of sibling sexual abuse within 100 families (cases)

• Mean number of children per family: 6, Min=3, Max=15.

• Family religious affiliation:
  60% Orthodox (Religious) (Dati-Leumi)
  37.1% Ultra Orthodox (Haredi)

• In 90% of cases there was more than one occurrence of SSA
Gender: 67% female, 33% male
Mean age: 9.3 Y/O (STD= 3.59).
Min= 3 Y/O, Max=17 Y/O

Gender: 96% male, 4% female.
Mean age: 14.6 Y/O (STD= 3.6).
Min= 5 Y/O, Max=25 Y/O.

Type of abuse
Exposure of private parts: 8.4%
Sexual touching over clothes: 34.9%
Sexual touching under clothes: 45.3%
Penetration: 11.3%

* The terminology “Perpetrator” and “Victim” is used for convenience and does not capture the complexity of SSA.
Results
Siblings’ perceptions of SSA dynamics

The IP

Routine
The Identified Perpetrator (IP) type

• clear-cut distinction between perpetrator and victim
• The perpetrator is clearly identified as using force, threats and physical strength.
• Perpetrator is the initiator and acts - against the victim’s will.
• Using situations where the victim is unprotected, such as when she or he is asleep, or when parents are not around.
• Victims describe themselves as helpless or trapped
Example* *(Trigger warning...)*

- The ultra-Orthodox Cohen family, for example, arrived at the CAC after it was revealed that their 9.5 year-old son was sexually offending Rachel, his 8 year-old sister, together with a peer, while parents were sleeping.

- Her brother and his friend told her to go to the bathroom and strip naked. She described how her brother held her hands and his friend took off all her clothes. She tried to resist but could not because they were bigger and stronger. They both grabbed her and dragged her along the apartment. Next, they locked her in the bathroom took turns holding...

* Family names are fictitious
the *routine type*

- The sibling subsystem creates a shared world separated from the outside world - with rules and norms of its own.
- A sibling (usually the older) construct the sexual acts as part of daily life, while others tend to accept them.
- Whether experienced as pleasurable or uncomfortable and painful, the sexual acts are seen as normative and acceptable.
- In many cases they become “*viral*”, with one sibling acting as "leader" and others imitating him by initiating further sexual acts.
- it is difficult and sometimes impossible to clearly identify a perpetrator and a victim in this scenario, as siblings may play both roles.
Example* (Trigger warning...)

• In the case of the Shechter family, the younger sisters described how their older brother used to rub his penis against them in order to release tension after coming home from the Yeshiva (religious high school). In their sibling subsystem, this was considered an acceptable act, one that helped the brother relax and function better as the brother in charge of the sibling unit.

• The Levy family arrived to the CAC after the father saw the brother and sister touching each other’s private parts. It was subsequently revealed that four siblings were involved.

* Family names are fictitious
SSA continuum

Age appropriate
Sexual curiosity

Routine

Significant age difference (+2)
Coercion + violence
Sexual gratification
Perpetrator – victim

IP
Parental attitudes following disclosure of sibling sexual abuse:
A Child Advocacy Center intervention study

Dafna Tener
Noam Tarshish
Shosh Turjeman
Efrat Lusky
Background

• Children tend to disclose to their parents about CSA

• SSA as a **family crisis**

• **Divide loyalties** which cause radical changes in family relationships.

• **Parents responses to SSA:** intensely negative physical, emotional and behavioral reactions such as:
  - Not being able to continue working  - Feeling depressed
  - Incapacitated by self-blame and guilt  - Overwhelming
  - Angry  - Health problems
The study analyzes parents' attitudes regarding the disclosure of SSA in the course of the intervention at the CAC. It addresses the following questions:

(1) What are the parents’ initial attitudes after disclosure of SSA?
(2) Are those attitudes transformed during the intervention at the CAC, and how?
• **Research Setting:** The CAC

• **Participants:**
  * 60 families were treated at the CAC for SSA from 2013-2014.
  * All families were Jewish
  * 96.3% were religious spectrum.

• **Data Analysis:** Qualitative document analysis, Thematic analysis approach
Findings

The main theme:
Parental attitudes to the disclosure of sexual acts between their children.

Two subthemes:
(1) Types of attitudes upon initial disclosure
(2) The CAC intervention as a turning point that reconstructed parental attitudes regarding the sexual acts
Findings

Subtheme 1: Types of attitudes upon initial disclosure

The sexual acts never happened (11 cases)

The sexual acts did happen (45 cases)

A rupture in the family's image (8 cases)

Another unsurprising event in the family’s tragic life story (15 cases)

Something happened, but not abuse (22 cases)
Findings

Subtheme 2: The reconstruction of parental attitudes during and following the intervention

- Never happened (11)
- “Something happened, but not abuse” (22)
- A rupture in the family’s image (8)
- Another unsurprising event in the family's tragic life story“ (15)
Discussion/Conclusion

• The importance of focusing on **the family as a whole** during formal SSA interventions.
• The **religious context**
• **The major role of CAC** in the reconstruction of parental attitudes
The second phase of the research

A multi-stage focus group with the Child Advocacy Center staff members
Participants of the focus groups

A total of 9 staff members of a Child Advocacy Center in Jerusalem

• The head of the CAC (social worker)
• 2 Child Protection Officers (must be a social worker by profession)
• 1 Police Officer
• 2 Child Investigators (must be a social worker by profession)
• 1 Housemother
• 1 Physician
Focus group turning into partnership
Giving back to the field
Siblings sexual abuse: Hopes and dreams
Future directions

- Participation of children: should we see them as experts?
- The adequacy of Interventions and services in cases of routine SSA: Are we artificially labeling children?
- "epidemiology" of SSA: How it develops and spreads in and out of the family?
- Specific context: Is the routine variation just a reflection of the ultra-orthodox society?
- Call for longitudinal studies: Are these perceptions remain stable over time?
- CAC study which will include all the centers in Israel: are there similarities, are there differences?
Your turn...
Thank you

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