

# A Review of Child Sexual Abuse

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to define child sexual abuse and look for relationships between child sexual abuse and other diseases. We first analyzed the influence factors of family, gender, and age on child sexual abuse victims. We found that this kind of sexual behavior causes physical harm to the person involved and may threaten the mental health of the victim. Detailed information has been acquired by the present research about mental diseases associated with child abuse. This fruitful work explains the causal relationship between child sexual abuse and mental illness. In the following, three mental illnesses were chosen as examples and provide adequate explanations. They are PTSD, depression, and anxiety disorder. In conclusion, gender and age as factors might be more risk for child sexual abuse, and victims are easier to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Keywords:** *child sexual abuse, risk factors, mental illness*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is different from ordinary abuse. Child sexual abuse refers to having sex with a child, and such sexual behavior may threaten the health of the person concerned [1]. Laura et al. proposed many different types of child sexual abuse, such as sexual assault, rape, incest, and commercial sexual exploitation [2].

Children cannot resist, and they do not have certain cognitive abilities about their body and sex [3]. Studies have shown that younger victims are more harmed than older victims [3].

Nowadays, CSA is a serious problem with an extensive proportion of victims in the population. The previous review of 55 studies from 24 nations found that the estimation about CSA prevalence ranged from 3 to 17% for males and 8 to 31% for females [4]. And a study with random samples (9,717 adolescents, average ages 16 years) found 33.9% of girls and 36.8% of boys reported sexual abuse experience in South Africa [5]. In many countries, the risk of children being sexually abused is as high as 10%-20% [4]. Boden et al. state that many psychological problems will arise after children are sexually abused, such as anxiety disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, et al. [6]. In addition,

CSA experiences might lead victims to sexual dysfunction such as delayed ejaculation, female orgasmic disorder et al. [7], and impact victims' social function. The objectivities of this literature review are those find theories and evidence of the association between CSA and other disorders.

## 2. RISKING FACTORS

### 2.1. Family

One of the risk factors of child sexual abuse is family, including family function, parental drug problems, parental alcohol problems, mother's sexual abuse history, mother's depression, family members et al. [8,9]. Some studies suggest that children who lost one or both parents might lead to sexual abuse with greater risk. This risk could be produced by family members or outside the family, but it's worth mentioning that children living with both natural parents, could not avoid the risk of child sexual abuse totally [9]. In a recent study, the researchers filled a questionnaire which is desired by 40 questions about the socio-demographic characteristics, family type and structure, identity of the sexual abuse perpetrators, and frequency of sexual abuse to obtain data from 39 CSA victims (1-18 years of age) [10]. In this study, 15.4% of victims live in a fragmented family, and 82.1%

live in a nuclear family [10]. Besides, 5.1% of victims' parents used alcohol and cigarettes, and 41% of offenders are lovers [10]. 2.6% of victims were abused by stepfathers [10]. The results of this study demonstrated that divorced parents, losing one or both natural parents and parents with a bad addiction, and some family factors are at risk for child sexual abuse [10]. But the limitations include that the samples are small, and some cases were gathered from other individuals originally. Hence, the researchers need to pay attention to the external validity of this study.

And in some child sexual abuse events, the victims cannot report their events to police, women organization, or other family members [11]. One previous study collected data by interview and questionnaires and gathered a totally of 355 participants (10- 30 years of age) from tribal (175 girls/women) and non-tribal (180 girls/women) in western Madhya Pradesh (India) between January 2002 and March 2005 [11]. In an interview for one participant of this study, researchers found that this victim's father did not take any action against the abuser. Even more, he asked the girl to not report this issue to police or other elder family members and women organization after the victim talked the sexual abuse experience. The reason is that her father thought reporting is useless [11]. Moreover, other girls remembered that her 18 years old brother abused her when she was only 8 years old, but her mother asked her not to disclose this incest issue to others because the parents did not want their son to be arrested [11]. This study also suggests that the family members are risk factors for CSA, and even they affect the victims indirectly [11]. But the limitation is that the sample was collected from Indian girls/women, so the culture is a threaten, and the samples are small.

In conclusion, these previous studies demonstrate that the family as a risk factor of CSA could cause both direct (e.g., stepfather and parents with bad addiction) and indirect effect (e.g., preventing victims from reporting publicly) to victims.

## **2.2. Gender**

In child sexual abuse, victims of different genders suffer differently. Firstly, among the victims of child sexual abuse, men and women account for different proportions. Girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than boys. According to data from Dhaliwal et al., the proportion of male victims is 7.6%, and the proportion of female victims is 19.0% [12]. On the other hand, in many countries, the status of men and women is not equal. LeSure argued that in a society where men and women are unequal, more girls are victims of child sexual abuse [13]. Gender inequality increases the probability of girls' child sexual abuse [13]. In addition, even though the proportion of male sexual victims is lower than that of female victims, it takes longer for male victims to report

that they have been sexually abused [14]. As boys get older, boys who have suffered child sexual abuse are more reluctant to tell others [15]. Because many boys suffer from sexual abuse by people of the same sex, they are very repulsive, which leads to their reluctance to speak out [15]. Otherwise, males take longer than women to discuss their experiences with others, and they usually choose to be silent after being sexually abused [16]. In addition, child sexual abuse is related to risky sexual behaviors [17]. A lot of child sexual abuse is accompanied by risky sexual behaviours [18]. Compared with males, females are more susceptible to risky sexual behavior while being subjected to child sexual abuse [18]. Women can cause many sexual diseases due to risky sexual behaviours [18]. Gender is important in the relationship between child sexual abuse and sexually transmitted infections [18].

To sum up, although girls are more likely to suffer child sexual abuse than boys, a large proportion of men do not tell others about their experiences. Also, improper sexual behavior can cause a series of physical and psychological problems for the victim.

## **2.3. Age**

Firstly, there is a direct link between childhood sexual abuse and adult trauma and depression [19]. About 30 percent of children who experience some form of sexual abuse grow up to be dysfunctional adults, especially when it comes to relationships and how they interact with others [19]. In the previous study, it was also documented that survivors of sexual abuse often felt responsible for what had happened to them, which led to self-blame. The shame of being a victim often makes them realize that they could have done a better job with the situation, making it difficult for them to externalize what happened to them and see themselves as victims [19]. For children, statistical evidence suggests that the perpetrators are usually adults with whom they are close or elders they particularly respect and are unlikely to see them in a negative light, leading them to internalize it as their fault. This further leads to stress, as reporting may lead to the severance of family relationships that some people are unwilling to deal with. This further leads to depression [19].

Pre-schoolers are more vulnerable to sexual abuse. This age to resist injury ability is small, guard against consciousness is weak. One Ohene study given girls red paper, let them stick to the toy bear's body cannot be touched. The result of the children before the age of seven mostly stick to the shoes and eyes, that means they don't know where the private places are; even in so-called "safe areas," such as schools, students are often the target of sexual harassment and rumors [20]. A national survey in the United States found that 56 percent of teenage girls and 40 percent of teenage boys had been sexually harassed. And the harassment starts when they're very

young, up to the sixth grade (usually around age 11 or 12). So, in general, the younger the sexual abuse occurs to people, the more sexually risky behaviors they are associated with and are risk factors for sexually transmitted diseases.

### **3. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER DISEASES**

#### **3.1. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and CSA**

In psychology, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that could occur when individuals have been exposed to a traumatic event. In accordance with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5), the symptoms of people with PTSD consist of avoidance (e.g., avoidance of talking about events related trauma and thoughts), intrusion (e.g., flashbacks and nightmares), negative alterations in cognitions and moods (e.g., overly negative assumptions and thoughts about the world or oneself), and hyperarousal symptoms (e.g., sleeping difficultly and problems with concentration). Sexually abused children might suffer from physical injury and mental trauma. Researchers have demonstrated that the prevalence of sexual dysfunctions among CSA survivors is higher than it is among individuals who are not suffering from abuse. These survivors also have a high risk for PTSD than normal [7,21]. Moreover, research demonstrated that nearly 45% of CSA survivors develop PTSD [22]. A recent study investigates the association between sexual abuse and sleep disturbance (nightmare). The researchers used self-report questionnaires about the nightmare and other PTSD symptoms to collect 44 adults from French who experienced sexual abuse [23]. They found that sexual abuse by more perpetrators could lead to more frequent nightmares, and the age at the time of sexual abuse as an influencing factor for the serious extent of a nightmare [23]. In this study, researchers used a comparative group study to suggest that participants who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 reported that they had more distress with nightmares [23].

To sum up, for nightmares, one kind of symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, the perpetrators and age at the time of sexual abuse could impact its serious extent.

#### **3.2. Depression and CSA**

Sexual abuse is an umbrella term and can be defined as a wide range of victimizations, including but not limited to rape and attempted rape, which one may experience [24]. These include unwanted sexual contact like groping and also even unsolicited verbal threats from the offender to the victim. Depression, on the other hand, can be defined as a mental illness that can be characterized by a mood disorder that is persistent and

constant [24]. It is different from the normal mood fluctuations we experience from time to time as this is never ending, and unless treated, it can have dire effects on the person who suffers from it [24]. Sexual abuse often is not about sex as is known. It is an act of impunity and bullying, and often for the offender, it is about power. It is the disregard of the victim's will and imposition of the offender's power. With that said, the victim often feels sad and traumatized due to the tragedy that they have gone through, resulting in them being in a state of depression.

This way of thinking is often detrimental and ill-advised as most victims usually end up being depressed since there is a loss of sense of self-worth. The truth is that they often feel unprotected and powerless, and this, combined with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and anxiety that may come with the experience, leads them to go into a state of sadness. This is characterized by the inability to sleep at night due to the constant nightmares that come.

Another factor that leads to depression from sexual abuse is not just the sexual abuse itself, but rather the stigma from the community that comes from being known as a victim of rape or any form of assault. The society around often segregates victims of sexual abuse. Often is the case where you hear men say that they are unwilling to get into a relationship with someone who has been a victim of said crime. On the flip side, since it is a statistical unlikelihood for men to experience sexual abuse, it is often the case where men who come forward are seen as the weaker kind, undeserving of being a man. This only leads to the victim isolating themselves from the rest of society since the people who are supposed to help them are only making the situation worse by taunting them and adding to the feeling that they are less of a human [25].

Depression from sexual assault also results from the fact that such a heinous crime happening towards a person affects one aspect of that side of life but life generally. One is unable to form a proper relationship. One is unable to relate normally with people who are close to them. There is also the issue of feeling closeted from the world because there is no adequate support system that allows for you to air the grievances. It is without a doubt that the issue of victim-blaming is endemic in the society. Often, it is the case where instead of helping the affected, they are usually asked questions like "what were you doing there?" or "what were you wearing at the time when it happened?". Without a doubt, together with some of the factors mentioned above, this leads the victim to shut themselves out. At that point, one develops a sort of cynicism since they feel like the community has pitted them against the world while the perpetrator walks free [26]. This develops bitterness within the victim and causes them to develop apathy against their community and even towards themselves.

This may lead to them being depressed due to the lack of a support system.

In conclusion, one cannot deny that sexual abuse is a heinous crime and is an act of injustice that has serious implications on the victim's life. This is because an absence of such a platform or lack of normalization of this leads to deep depression, and sometimes it may even lead the victims to commit suicide as the burden can sometimes be too great to bear [27].

### **3.3. Anxiety Disorder and CSA**

Anxiety disorder is one of the important mental illnesses. The symptoms of anxiety disorders are special worries about some things or special fears about some things [28]. Anxiety is also very harmful to people. Anxiety disorders often make it difficult for the patient to breathe, fall asleep, fail to stay focused, and remain still [28]. The consequences of child sexual abuse are serious. Many studies have shown that child sexual abuse is a cause of anxiety because of the psychological shadow of children after being sexually abused. They will develop anxiety disorders after that. Maniglio compares the relationship between child sexual abuse and four kinds of an anxiety disorder (Generic anxiety, posttraumatic stress, Obsessive-compulsive, phobic) in detail [29]. The conclusion is whether it is an adult or a child, victims of sexual abuse will show symptoms of general anxiety after being sexually abused [29]. The author analyzed two data on the relationship between child sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress symptoms. The data show a significant association between child sexual abuse and PTSD after growing up [29]. Another result is child sexual abuse is related to obsessive-compulsive [29]. After being sexually assaulted, children may panic about a certain person or place [29].

In summary, the risk of sexually assaulted children getting anxiety disorders is much greater than other children.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In summary, the present study found that the risk factors of child sexual abuse and the association between child sexual abuse and other mental diseases. The risk factors include that family, gender, and age, and all of these factors could produce direct and indirect impacts on child sexual abuse. And for the other mental diseases, child sexual abuse experience could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. In conclusion, gender and age as factors might be more risk for child sexual abuse, and victims are easier to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. These findings could be good references for those who want to study this topic or some organizations that want to protect children from sexual abuse.

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