



## Gendered experiences of sexual abuse of teenagers and children in Mexico



Sonia M. Frías\*, Joaquina Erviti

National Autonomous University of Mexico, Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research, Mexico

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 13 June 2013  
Received in revised form  
20 November 2013  
Accepted 2 December 2013  
Available online 17 January 2014

#### Keywords:

Sexual abuse  
Children  
Mexico  
Adolescents  
Violence against children

### ABSTRACT

The prevalence of sexual abuse during childhood and adolescence in a national representative sample of Mexican youngsters is examined from a gender perspective using data from the 2007 National Survey on Exclusion, Intolerance and Violence in Public Institutions of High School Level Education. Of those surveyed, 1.76% were forced into their first experience of intercourse, and 6.43% had their genitalia touched or their first sexual interaction imposed against their will. In this sample, 6.82% had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18. Child sexual abuse was most commonly perpetrated by family members and neighbors. Only 20% reported being abused by an unknown person. Males and females had different victimization experiences. Forty percent disclosed information about the abuse to another person, and 7% reported their experiences to law enforcement agencies. Males and females stated different reasons for not disclosing. These findings are discussed within the context of the social construction of the male and female body and sexuality in the Mexican context.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Sexual abuse of children and adolescents remains an international problem. Comparative research has found serious difficulties in ascertaining its international prevalence. The heterogeneity in the definitions of sexual abuse, methodological strategies, and sample designs are behind these difficulties. A recent comparative review by Pereda, Guilera, Forns, and Gómez-Benito (2009a) highlighted that sexual abuse ranges from 0 to 53% in women and 0 to 60% in men. The most frequent prevalence for men is below 10%, and for women, the prevalence is between 10% and 20%. Most international studies confirm a higher prevalence of childhood or adolescent sexual abuse (CSA) among women than men (Pereda et al., 2009a; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009b; Stoltenborgh, 2011).

In Mexico, CSA as a social problem has not yet been fully incorporated into research and public policy agendas. As a result of a rooted Catholic tradition (Fontes, 2007), social problems related to sex and sexuality in Mexico tend to be silenced and stigmatized. In addition, sexual abuse is often not disclosed because in familistic and collectivist cultures, the cohesion and needs of the group and family unit are often considered more important than the individual (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Vanoss-Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987; Stoltenborgh, 2011). From time to time, Mexican newspaper headlines highlight the fact that the number of sexually abused children is increasing or specific cases reach public attention (Azaola Garrido, 2006). However, the prevalence and factors associated with CSA are still largely understudied.

Although Mexico has signed most international treaties and conventions regarding child abuse and the sexual exploitation of children and has enacted legislation aimed at protecting minors, children are still formally and materially unprotected.

\* Corresponding author address: Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Av. Universidad s/n, 2° Circuito, Col. Chamilpa, Cuernavaca, Morelos, México 62210, Mexico.

Children and adolescents are protected against pornography, exhibitionism, trafficking, and prostitution by Mexican laws. They are also protected from sexual violence in the case of rape (differentiating between forcible rape and nonviolent rape using seduction or lies, i.e., statutory rape) and incest (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Rape is considered an offense against an individual's physical and sexual integrity that brings shame to the family. This shame can vanish, for example, if the family's honor is restored by marriage with the abuser. Incest, in contrast, constitutes an offense against the family, and in some states has a lesser form of punishment than rape outside the family. The consensual age for sex in Mexico varies across states, starting from the age of 12. Still, in the criminal codes of some states, statutory rape is not a felony when the child or adolescent does not have an "honest" and "chaste" lifestyle or when she marries her abuser (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

In this context of uncertain protection against sexual abuse, some children and adolescents are at a higher risk because individual, contextual and relational factors might increase their vulnerability. As opposed to other countries with more reliable law enforcement systems and child protection services, Mexico does not have reliable and systematic administrative official records on the sexual abuse of children and adolescents.

The study of CSA, and especially that of females, is important because sexual abuse at an early age sets a spiral of abuse in motion (Arata & Lindman, 2002; Browning & Laumann, 1997; Daigneault, Hébert, & McDuff, 2009; Stermac, Reist, Addison, & Millar, 2002). In addition, the physical and psychological well-being of sexually abused children tends to be compromised in both the long and the short term contingent upon factors such as the age at which the abuse began or ended, number of incidents, relationship with the offender, or the severity of the abuse (Browning & Laumann, 1997; Maikovich-Fong & Jaffee, 2010; Maker, Kemmelmeier, & Peterson, 2001; Pereda, 2010). Children that experience sexual abuse tend to be polyvictimized, therefore, the consequences of the abuse need to be understood within the complex history of victimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

Unlike many other countries in Europe and Northern America, most of the research in Mexico on violence against children is principally focused on physical violence against children (Frías & Castro, 2011). In this paper, we contribute to the effort to fill this gap by studying a nationally representative sample of students attending high school level public education institutions in Mexico by using the 2007 *Encuesta Nacional sobre Exclusión, Intolerancia y Violencia en Escuelas de Educación Media Superior* (National Survey on Exclusion, Intolerance and Violence in Public High School Level Education; ENEIV; Secretaría de Educación Pública & INSP, 2007).

By using nationally representative data, this research has three main objectives: first, to analyze the prevalence and factors associated with experiences of sexual abuse among Mexican adolescents; second, to identify the perpetrators of said abuse; and third, to examine whether or not the abuse was disclosed, whether charges were pressed against the perpetrator, and to identify the sex of the adolescent involved. The underlying hypothesis is that the experiences of CSA are gendered, not only because females are at a higher risk, but also because in a patriarchal social structure, the sexual abuse of females may entail a learning process of subordination, while men may learn that they can have access to subordinates' bodies (Seymour, 1998). In the Mexican context, the female body is seen as being available to men, female virginity is taken and stolen, and through social control, women are held responsible for guarding their own bodies (Sosa-Sánchez, 2005). Therefore, as opposed to the rape of a male, patriarchal society blames sexually abused women and adolescents for their own abuse by claiming that "they made themselves available," were "in the wrong place at the wrong time," or "deserved it" (Koss, Heise, & Russo, 1994; Marciniak, 1998).

#### *Sexual abuse of children and adolescents: definitions and prevalence in Mexico*

CSA is defined as any sexual contact between an adult and a sexually immature child (sexual maturity is socially and physiologically defined) for purposes of the adult's sexual gratification; any sexual contact with a child by the use of force, threats, 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 relationship with the adult. These acts include prostitution and pornography, and relationships between the victim's parental or institutional caregivers (Finkelhor & Korbin, 1988). This conceptual definition was extended to include peer sexual abuse (i.e., sexual victimization in schools and dating violence). Nevertheless, the definition of CSA is complex because there are discrepancies regarding the upper age limit for sexual abuse and whether a given sexual experience is defined as abusive. Operational definitions of CSA found in current research are inconsistent and tend to capture just some dimensions of the phenomenon (Pereda et al., 2009a, 2009b; Stoltenborgh, 2011).

#### *Existing research on child sexual abuse in Mexico*

Most of what is known about CSA against Mexican children and adolescents is based on indirect data from a variety of disciplines. For example, childhood sexual violence has been examined as an intervenient factor (independent variable) in adult phenomena, such as suicide attempts, addictions, partner violence, or school dropouts (González-Fortaleza, Ramos-Lira, Vignau Brambila, & Ramírez Villarreal, 2001; Ramos-Lira, Saldívar Hernández, Medina-Mora, Rojas-Guiot, & Villatoro-Velázquez, 1998; Ramos-Lira, Saltijeral-Méndez, Romero-Mendoza, Caballero-Gutiérrez, & Martínez-Velez, 2001; Rivera, Allen, Chávez, & Ávila, 2006). There are few studies that examine the prevalence and correlates of sexual violence – sexual abuse and rape – during childhood or adolescence (exceptions include Benjet et al., 2009; Chavez Ayala et al., 2009;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/344907>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/344907>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)