



The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse: A continuation of Finkelhor (1994)[☆]

Noemí Pereda^{a,*}, Georgina Guilera^b, Maria Forns^a, Juana Gómez-Benito^b

^a Departament de Personalitat, Avaluació i Tractament Psicològics, Facultat de Psicologia, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

^b Departament de Metodologia de les Ciències del Comportament, Facultat de Psicologia, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 June 2007

Received in revised form 10 July 2008

Accepted 17 July 2008

Available online 23 May 2009

Keywords:

Child sexual abuse

Prevalence

Epidemiology

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this paper was to compare the prevalence rates of child sexual abuse reported by [Finkelhor, D. (1994). The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 18 (5), 409–417] with those found in recent publications in order to confirm the widespread prevalence of child sexual abuse.

Methods: Relevant articles about prevalence of child sexual abuse were identified through searches of computerized databases and a handsearch of *Child Abuse & Neglect* and the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*.

Results: Thirty-eight independent articles were identified, corresponding to 39 prevalence studies; these articles report the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse in 21 different countries, ranging from 0 to 53% for women and 0 to 60% for men.

Conclusions: Comparison of the present study with that of [Finkelhor, D. (1994). The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 18 (5), 409–417] shows a similarity between prevalence distributions; there appears to be a general pattern that remains more or less constant over the years, especially in women.

Practice implications: Twelve years after the first revision study about the international prevalence of child sexual abuse, there is still a need for new data about this topic. The present study shows child sexual abuse is still a widespread problem in the society. In this research, carried out on 38 independent studies, there is new data for 21 countries over the world, being especially relevant the results obtained from other countries different from those pertaining to North America or Europe. It is important to point out the high prevalence found in most of the countries, so this information could be a new warning to make society and governments aware of this problem and undertake actions to prevent sexual abuse in childhood.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The widespread prevalence of child sexual abuse has been reported in several countries, thus highlighting the social importance of understanding the nature and scope of this problem. In this regard, epidemiological studies conducted over the last two decades have made important contributions to understanding this problem (Leventhal, 1998). The prevalence of child sexual abuse has been defined as the proportion of a population who have suffered sexual abuse during childhood

[☆] This study was supported in part by grants SEJ 2005-09144-C02-01-01 and SEJ 2005-09144-C02-01-02 from the Spanish “Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia” under European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and 2007FIC00736 and 2005SGR00365 from the “Departament d’Universitats, Recerca i Societat de la Informació de la Generalitat de Catalunya”.

* Corresponding author address: Departament de Personalitat, Avaluació i Tractament Psicològics, Facultat de Psicologia, Universitat de Barcelona, Passeig Vall d’Hebron, 171, 08035 Barcelona, Spain.

(generally before the age of 18) and it is based on retrospective accounts. In contrast, incidence studies estimate the number of new child sexual abuse cases occurring during a specified period of time, typically a year (Runyan, 1998). Although results vary considerably, and cannot be compared directly due to substantive methodological differences, they all suggest that child sexual abuse is clearly an international problem. Finkelhor (1994) reviewed the prevalence studies on child sexual abuse from the 1970s to the 1990s. Although the literature included in his review is extremely variable in its scope and quality, he concluded that sexual abuse was reported in all of the studies; specifically, he confirmed a history of sexual abuse in at least 7% of females and at least 3% of males, with a range of up to 36% of women in Austria and 29% of men in South Africa. As stated by Finkelhor (1994) and by Wynkoop, Capps, and Priest (1995) differences in research methodology (e.g., child abuse definitions, data gathering techniques, populations sampled, the use of broad or more behaviorally specific questions) are thought to account for most of the variance in prevalence rates between studies.

Definition of abuse

Sexual abuse researchers have used different definitions of what constitutes childhood sexual abuse (e.g., the age difference between the perpetrator and the victim, the age used to define childhood or the type of sexual abuse). Whereas some researchers have set the age of the victim at 18 (e.g., Bendixen, Muus, & Schei, 1994; Briere & Elliott, 2003; Collings, 1997), others have used a cut-off both below and above this age (Arreola, Neilands, Pollack, Paul, & Catania, 2005; Chen, Dunne, & Han, 2004; Jumaian, 2001). Obviously, such variability influences the estimates of child sexual abuse prevalence in any given sample (Wynkoop et al., 1995).

Measurement issues

Much of the variability in child sexual abuse prevalence is presumed to be due to methodological differences between studies, especially as regards the methods of data collection (Leventhal, 1998; Wyatt & Peters, 1986). Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor (1986) concluded that face-to-face interviews result in higher reporting rates for prevalence. Other authors, however, have established that self-administered questionnaires probably cause less embarrassment among respondents and produce better response rates than do face-to-face interviews in some societies (Tang, 2002). However, the use of self-administered questionnaires to identify personal experiences such as sexual abuse increases the risk of false negatives and affects the estimation of prevalence (Berliner & Conte, 1995; Oates et al., 2000; Wolfe & Birt, 1997). The number of false negatives is always higher than the number of victims who report false allegations of sexual abuse (Brown, Frederico, Hewitt, & Sheehan, 2001; Fergusson, Horwood, & Woodward, 2000).

Reviews have also found that the use of broad questions is associated with lower prevalence rates of sexual abuse than are more behaviorally specific questions (Fricker, Smith, Davis, & Hanson, 2003). Furthermore, both the context in which sexual victimization questions are asked (Koss, 1993) and the number of questions asked (Finkelhor, 1979) affect endorsement rates.

Sample characteristics

The gender of participants also seems to affect prevalence rates. Some authors have argued that the study of male sexual victimization was relatively neglected until fairly recently (Dhaliwal, Gauzas, Antonowicz, & Ross, 1996; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Romano & De Luca, 2001), although there are important publications that do address this potential bias (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Several problems have been considered when examining the rates of sexual abuse of males (Violato & Genuis, 1993), for example, substantially varying prevalence rates (Dhaliwal et al., 1996), the small numbers of sexually abused males who seek professional help for abuse-related difficulties (Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997), and lower rates than those obtained among female victims (e.g., Bouvier et al., 1999; Briere & Elliott, 2003; Robin, Chester, Rasmussen, Jaranson, & Goldman, 1997). These confounding variables have resulted in insufficient reporting, recognition and treatment of these samples (for a review of the absence of males in maltreatment research, see Haskett, Marziano, & Dover, 1996).

Many studies on the prevalence of sexual abuse of minors have been published since 1994, with the strong North American and European contribution being complemented by reports from many other countries (e.g., China, Malaysia, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, and El Salvador). Nevertheless, the situation in most non-English speaking countries remains relatively unexplored (Tang, 2002). The present paper includes studies published subsequent to Finkelhor's review (1994), the aim being to compare his prevalence rates of child sexual abuse with those found in recent publications. We sought to test the hypothesis, as stated by Finkelhor (1994), that child sexual abuse continues to be one of the most important public health problems in all societies in which it has been measured (MacMillan, 1998). In this regard, it was hypothesized that the rates found would be very similar to those obtained over a decade ago and would confirm the widespread prevalence of child sexual abuse.

Methods

Selection of studies

Relevant articles about prevalence of child sexual abuse were identified through searches of computerized databases including *Medline*, *Psycinfo*, and *Science Citation Index* and *Social Sciences Citation Index* of the Web of Science. These databases

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/345200>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/345200>

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