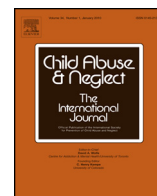




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Child Abuse & Neglect



Research article

Delay in disclosure of non-parental child sexual abuse in the context of emotional and physical maltreatment: A pilot study[☆]



Sarah M. Tashjian^a, Deborah Goldfarb^a, Gail S. Goodman^{a,*}, Jodi A. Quas^b,
Robin Edelstein^c

^a University of California, Davis, United States

^b University of California, Irvine, United States

^c University of Michigan, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2015

Received in revised form 13 June 2016

Accepted 15 June 2016

Available online 2 July 2016

Keywords:

Child sexual abuse

Disclosure

Victimization

Parent–child relationships

ABSTRACT

The present pilot study sought to identify predictors of delays in child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure, specifically whether emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure contributes to predicting delays over and above other important victim factors. Alleged CSA victims ($N = 79$), whose parental figures were not the purported sexual abuse perpetrators, were interviewed and their case files reviewed, across two waves of a longitudinal study. Regression analyses indicated that experiencing both emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure was uniquely predictive of longer delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure. Victim–CSA perpetrator relationship type and sexual abuse duration also significantly predicted CSA disclosure delay, whereas victim age at the time of the police report, victim gender, and victims' feelings of complicity were not significant unique predictors. Child abuse victims' expectations of lack of parental support may underlie these findings. Parent–child relationships are likely crucial to timely disclosure of CSA, even when a parent is not the CSA perpetrator.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The burden of disclosing child sexual abuse (CSA) often falls upon the young victims due to the frequent absence of physical evidence and the clandestine nature of the sexual acts. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to disclosure for CSA victims, including their fear of negative consequences (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Rates of disclosure in childhood are troublingly low (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2014; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2007), and when disclosure does occur it is frequently delayed (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990; Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; McElvaney, 2015). Delay in disclosing CSA to authorities can diminish successful prosecution, postpone needed therapeutic intervention, and expose other children to harm. For these reasons,

[☆] This research was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Grant 0004369 and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) under Grant 85-IJ-CX-0020 to Dr. Gail S. Goodman. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NSF or NIJ.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of California, 1 Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616, United States.
E-mail address: ggoodman@ucdavis.edu (G. S. Goodman).

and because early disclosure may reduce long-term negative sequelae associated with CSA (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Kogan, 2004), it is important to identify factors related to delays in CSA disclosure.

The present pilot study explored victim demographic, abuse-related, and psychological factors as predictors of CSA disclosure delays. Critically, this study also investigated emotional and physical abuse by a person in a parental role (a parental figure) as a unique predictor of delay in disclosure of CSA, specifically for victims *not* sexually abused by a parental figure (that is, not sexually abused by a biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, grandparent, or stepparent). Traditionally, “intrafamilial” CSA includes when biological parents are the offenders, for example, when fathers are the CSA perpetrators (Reitsema & Grietens, 2015). In the present study, we consider cases in which a parental figure, as defined above, was not the CSA perpetrator, but rather another family member (i.e., intrafamilial perpetrator, such as a cousin, sibling, or a parent’s partner) or non-family member (i.e., extrafamilial perpetrator, such as a babysitter, family friend, teacher, neighbor, or stranger) was the CSA offender.

Parents, most frequently mothers, play an important role in the disclosure process both as frequent recipients of child victims’ initial disclosures and as intermediaries regulating access to intervention from authorities (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1995; Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Mossige, Reichelt, & Tjersland, 2005; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015). To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure when child victims report having experienced emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure.

1.1. Disclosure rates and disclosure delays

Obtaining a firm estimate of disclosure rates is obfuscated by differences across studies in research designs (e.g., retrospective vs. contemporaneous), disclosure characteristics (e.g., initial vs. repeated, spontaneous vs. prompted), and disclosure recipients (e.g., initial disclosure to anyone vs. later disclosure to authorities; Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Lyon & Ahern, 2010). However, past research and national surveys indicate that CSA disclosure rates in childhood may be as low as 16–25% (Lyon & Ahern, 2010; National Children’s Advocacy Center, 2014). According to reviews by Paine and Hansen (2002) and McElvaney (2015), fewer than a quarter of child victims disclosed CSA immediately following the assaults.

Early disclosure is associated with significant emotional benefits into adulthood (e.g., less depression, reduced anxiety, and fewer self-destructive behaviors; Pipe et al., 2007). Disclosure can have psychological value for victims, although beneficial effects may depend upon the disclosure recipient’s reaction. Although disclosure in general can be beneficial, disclosure to authorities is often needed to avail child victims of formal intervention (e.g., to prevent further abuse) and access to mental health resources (e.g., to treat emotional sequelae).

1.2. Factors influencing disclosure

To understand the disclosure process and to intervene effectively, it is imperative to determine factors that influence children’s disclosure. One important consistency across different models of CSA disclosure is that children’s expectations of disclosure recipients’ potential reactions are central (Bussey & Grimbeek, 1995; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005). For example, McElvaney, Greene, and Hogan (2012) conceptualized children’s decision making about whether to disclose as a dynamic process with three key components: active containing of the secret, conflict between a desire to tell and a desire to keep the secret, and expectations for the disclosure itself, including whether a trusted confidant is available to receive the disclosure. Whether or not the decision process includes these components, child victims may grapple with the costs and benefits of disclosure, including anticipation of their parents’ responses. Even children who do not disclose to their parents may be concerned that their parents will find out, and the children may thus still fear negative ramifications (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011).

It is well established that low levels of familial support are associated with lower disclosure rates, delayed disclosure, and wavering after disclosure (Elliott & Briere, 1994; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). Supportiveness in relevant research is often defined as accepting that CSA occurred, showing positive actions/protectiveness, and not punishing victims following disclosure (e.g., Paine & Hansen, 2002). When considering parental support, however, these studies do not explicitly address children’s delays in disclosure of CSA committed by someone other than a parental figure in the context of emotional or physical maltreatment by parental figures. Relatively little is known about whether non-CSA maltreatment by a parental figure predicts children’s delays in CSA disclosure, leaving a potential concern of many victims unaddressed, specifically, whether disclosing to emotionally or physically abusive parental figures will result in positive intervention.

1.2.1. Parent–child relationship and multiple victimization factors. Non-offending parents, especially mothers, are most often the recipients of CSA disclosure (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1995; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015; Schaeffer, Leventhal, & Asnes, 2011). However, children maltreated by parents, compared to non-maltreated children, form more negative expectations of their caretakers (Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001; Stronach, Toth, Oshri, Manly, & Cicchetti, 2011). Thus, children experiencing non-CSA maltreatment by parental figures may be likely to form negative expectations for parental reactions to CSA disclosure. In fact, Elliott and Briere (1994) found that children with a history of substantiated neglect or physical abuse by caretakers experienced less maternal support after CSA disclosure. We theorized that if children perceive their parental figures as hostile (e.g., emotionally or physically abusive), those children will have developed negative

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832275>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832275>

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