

Sexual Victimization of Children: Implications for Families and Society

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Family Impact Seminar on Effects of Trauma on Youth

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Agenda

- Nature and Extent of Sexual Victimization
- Risk Factors
- Potential Remedies

Nature and Extent—Prevalence

- Sexual victimization=a broad variety of experiences
- Sexual assault (touching offenses), abuse (“lewd and lascivious”), rape (sexual battery, penetrative crimes), “other” (child pornography offenses)
 - Differing legal statutes
- The harm and extent of these crimes cannot be overstated!

Nature and Extent—Prevalence

- Lifetime prevalence estimates=surveys
 - Official estimates vastly underreport.
- Among 17 year-olds: 26% of females and 5% of males report sexual abuse/assault (Finkelhor et al., 2014, NatSCEV)
 - For “rape” (penetrative crimes): 6.1%=females, <1%=males
 - Items: “touch your private parts” and “force you to have sex”

Nature and Extent—Patterns

- Victim-Offender Relationship
 - Most sexual abuse committed by known perpetrator
 - As high as 90% of cases (Greenfeld, 1995)
 - Calls into question “stranger danger” myth

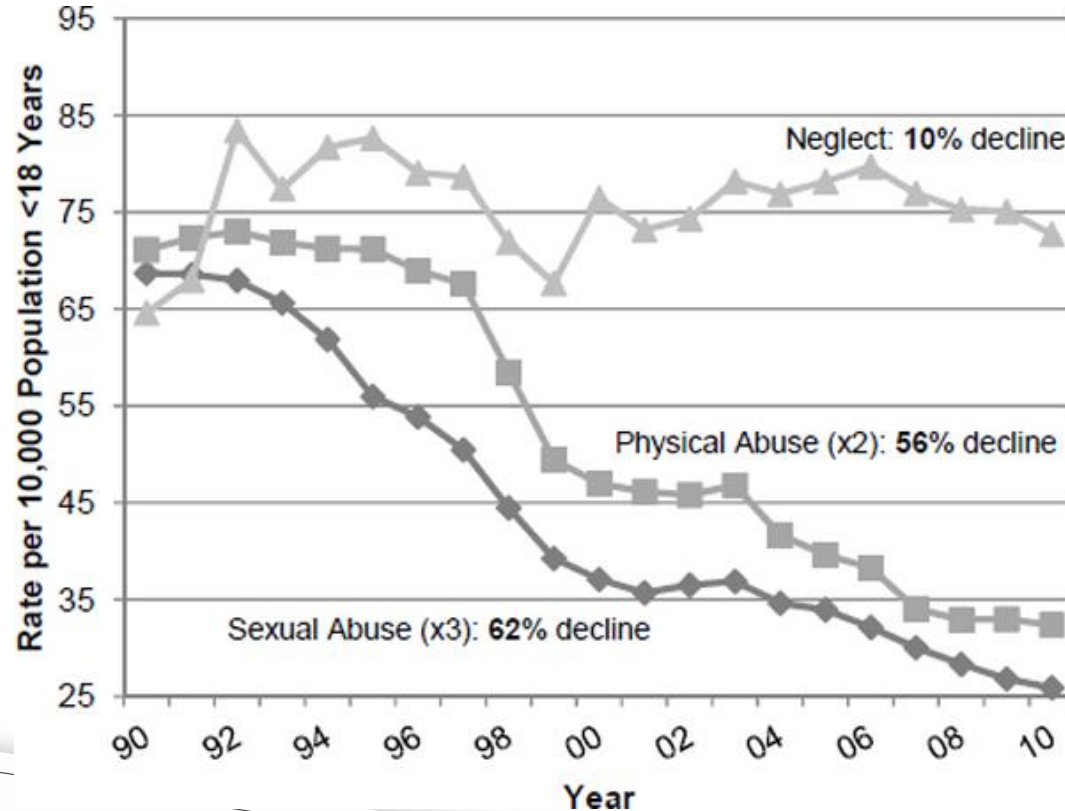
Nature and Extent—Patterns

- Victim-Offender Relationship
 - NatSCEV: ~17% of females report a peer sexually assaulted them, compared to 11% reporting victimization by adult (Finkelhor et al., 2014)
 - Similar pattern for males
 - 3.1% vs. 1.9%, respectively

Nature and Extent—Trends

- “The Good”: reports of child sex abuse have been in decline.
 - National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS): Primary data source for sexual victimization trends
 - “quasi-official”
 - Caveats: underreporting, substantiated vs. unsubstantiated; policy changes
 - Rely on this source because surveys have not been regularly conducted to assess trends

Nature and Extent—Trends



**Substantiated Abuse,
NCANDS, 1990-2010**
(Jones, 2012)

Nature and Extent—Trends

- Explanations: A genuine decline
 - Mandated reporting
 - Sex offender policies
 - Greater education and awareness
 - Economic changes
 - steepest decline, 1990s, during period of prosperity

Nature and Extent—Trends

- Explanations: Artificial?
 - Policy changes?
 - More narrow scope of abuse?
 - More difficult to find “substantiated” cases?
 - Lack of consistent definitions and standards across jurisdictions
 - Investigation resources?

Nature and Extent—Trends

- The overall consensus concerning the decline in sexual victimization, including offenses involving minors is “about as well established as crime trends can be in contemporary social science”
 - (Finkelhor & Jones, 2012 in a meta-analysis, p. 3; Mancini, 2014, in a review).

Risk Factors—Family-Level

- Living without one of the biological parents
 - having a step-parent, particularly step-father (20x>likely)
- Family distress, conflict
- Low SES/unemployment in family
 - (Sadleck et al., 2010)

Risk Factors—Child-Level

- Being female
- Reporting “extremely punitive discipline” or abuse
- Perceived as “quiet,” “passive,” or “lonely” (from perpetrator surveys)
- Witnessing other forms of abuse in the household or across social networks

Potential Remedies?

- Mandatory reporting
 - Special populations (e.g., doctors, teachers) must report suspicions of sexual abuse to the state
 - Reforms to encompass a wider set of reporters
 - 18 states designate any adult as a “mandated reporter” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012)
 - Not reporting could result in civil liability or criminal punishment.

Potential Remedies?

- Dispel myths and misperceptions
 - “Stranger-danger” (Craun & Theriot, 2012)
 - Others: false reporting, rape myths (Mancini, 2014)

Potential Remedies?

- Greater awareness and education
 - Associated with increased knowledge about sexual assault and prevention among participants (Zwi et al., 2009 in a meta-analysis)
 - Reduced incidence of sexual victimization later in life (see Collin-Vezina, 2013 for a meta-analysis)

Thank you and Wrap-Up!

- Thanks; questions?
- Students interested in our graduate program?
 - Contact me! Christina Mancini cnmancini@vcu.edu
- Also, check out my books!
 - Mancini, *Sex Crime, Offenders, and Society* (CAP, 2014)
 - Mancini, *Campus Crime and Safety* (KH, 2015)
- Last but not least . . .
 - My gratitude to the Virginia Commission on Youth, Dr. Robyn McDougale, and Ms. Jordan Stewart!