

Child Sexual Abuse and Implications for the Ecology of Human Development

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ABSTRACT This is an investigation into child sexual abuse, with the view of pointing out the its implications for the ecology of human development. Four hundred and sixty five female undergraduate students attending psychology courses at the University of the North, South Africa (mean age = 23.8 years, SD = 5.28), filled in a re-trospective self-rating questionnaire in a classroom sett-ing. The questionnaire is part of the Child Maltreatment Interview Schedule (Briere, 1993). It asked questions about childhood sexual forms of abuse experienced by the participants, victim-perpetrator relationships, whe-ther participants perceive themselves as sexually abused during childhood or not, and their overall self-rating of childhood. Result shows a childhood sexual abuse preva-lence rate 23.7%. 19.1% were kissed sexually, 14.1% were touched sexually, 9.5% were victims of oral/anal/vaginal intercourse. The highest number of perpetrators is found either among family/extended family members of victims (sexual kiss: 40.9%, sexual touch: 27.2%, oral/anal/vaginal intercourse: 42.5%) or among people entrusted with care of the participant as a child (sexual kiss: 20.4%, sexual touch: 40.7%, oral/anal/vaginal intercourse: 45%). Most of the perpetrators are people known to the victims (sexual kiss: 73.4%, sexual touch: 61.1%, oral/anal/vaginal intercourse: 77.5%). Many victims (83% of the victims) perceived themselves (possibly in line with their societal or traditional perceptions and attitudes to-wards child abuse) as not sexually abused during childhood; and most rated their childhood as either as “average” (41.3% of the victims) or as “very happy” (41.3% of the victims). The author discusses the above results from the ecological approach to human development, bringing out how child’s environment (the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems) can contribute adversely to the development of the individual. It is recommended that programmes against child sexual abuse should involve also children and their parents as providers.

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