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Recent Research Abstracts

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SEXUAL ABUSE

Palmer, M.; Lamb, R. & Katakouzinis, N. (2002) The evidence for sexual assault counselling with children. *What Works? Evidence Based Practice in Child and Family Services – ACWA Conference, September 2002, Sydney.*

This paper reflects on the research literature in relation to child sexual assault treatment outcomes and the practice experience of The Children's Hospital and Westmead Child Protection Unit. Sexual abuse outcome literature and treatment effectiveness literature demonstrates few consistent relationships between sexual abuse events and outcomes or effects for children. Clinical experience demonstrates a variety of meanings attributed to events by children and their care givers which need to be understood in the context of each family. To accommodate both of these issues, assessment and treatment programs for children who have experienced abuse need to be flexible and responsive to the needs and experiences of individual children and their families. Indications are that current concepts of evidence, particularly when drawn from models of evidence based medicine are inadequate to the complexities of counselling practice. The implications for service delivery and developing relevant clinical evidence to support accountable and effective practice as discussed.

Trute, B., Docking, B. & Hiebert-Murphy, D. (2001) Couples therapy for women survivors of child sexual abuse who are in addictions recovery: a comparative case study of treatment process and outcome. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 27 (1), 99-110*

Treatment for women who are survivors of child sexual abuse and who have a history of substance abuse has largely involved gender-specific interventions. This study examined the use of conjoint couple therapy with a cohort of 8 couples in which the women were survivors of child sexual abuse and were in addiction recovery. The couples were all heterosexual and of European descent. A comparative case study analysis incorporated standardized clinical measures with client and therapist interviews. Brief conjoint therapy was found to assist couples in the specific relationship skills areas of communication and mutual problem solving. Further, substantive gains were found in the realm of affective relations. The women reported an increase in the support from their male partners, and the men reported a decrease in negative emotional atmosphere in the relationship. Overall, the findings suggest that brief couples therapy can lead to important relationship gains in heterosexual couples.

Little, L. & Hamby, S.L. (2001) Memory of childhood sexual abuse among clinicians: characteristics, outcomes and current therapy attitudes. *Sexual Abuse, 13 (4), 233-248.*

Therapists who reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse (CSA, n=131) were compared with therapists who suspected sexual abuse but had no memories (n=24) on variables related to abuse characteristics, outcomes, and perceived difficulties working with clients with a CSA history. Therapists who suspected abuse, in contrast to those who made definite reports, were more likely to report that the perpetrator was a family member, that their CSA did not involve physical contact, that there was alcoholism in their families of origin, and that the CSA had negative effects on their relationships with their own children, ability to trust others, sexual satisfaction, and work life. Therapists who suspected abuse also reported more difficulty treating CSA clients because of interpersonal pulls during sessions, arousal without memories of abuse, and some countertransference behaviours. These findings indicate that issues related to personal trauma should be addressed during training and practice.