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SUMMARY:
The purpose of this study was to explore how children who have been sexually abused experience the legal process and in particular what they experience when they are questioned by the police and in the courtroom, and when they come in contact with professionals from various agencies involved in the response to child abuse allegations.

The aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore the informants’ views of the world and to adopt as far as possible an “insider perspective” of their experience.

Subjects/Design:
The interviewees for this study were identified from three public prosecution offices in Sweden. Of the fifty children who were invited to participate in the study (had disclosed they were sexually abused and their cases were prosecuted), ten children (9 girls and 1 boy) agreed to participate. It is an indication of their experience that only 20% of those invited were willing to participate. In all of these cases the alleged perpetrator was someone living outside the family. The ten children were interviewed in a semi-structured method regarding the following topics:

1. Tell me about the disclosure of sexual abuse.
2. Tell me about your experiences in participating in the legal process.
3. Have you received support/treatment? Tell me about it.
4. Have you had the opportunity to express your thoughts and opinions?
5. What are your thoughts about the perpetrator?

Each of these questions was followed by more exploratory questions in response to the child’s statements. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed multiple times to identify major themes without any preconceived idea of what these may be.

Findings:
1. Five super ordinate themes emerged:
   a. Not being believed
      i. A good relationship with the police was important for them if they were to dare to tell their story
      ii. The children questioned the behavior of defense counsel when describing their experiences in court
b. Making the CSA visible
   i. Many of the children kept their experience to themselves for some time before telling
   ii. As soon as they came to the police and began to talk about the CSA they began to feel a sense of relief
   iii. They described a good contact with the police as a healing process

c. Need for support
   i. The children’s statements reflect they feel worse over time, at least until the trial is completed
   ii. These feelings are related to both the criminal act and also their anticipation and lack of information provided to them and their caregivers about the process
   iii. The children experienced a kind of support when the perpetrator had to leave the courtroom during the child’s testimony

d. Nature of the offenders and the sanctions if found guilty
   i. It was of great importance for the children that the perpetrator was found guilty and there were specific consequences
   ii. The opportunity for financial remuneration was much less of interest than the individual receiving a treatment or a prison sentence

e. Lack of respect for the child’s integrity
   i. One child mentioned feeling less willing to disclose her abuse after being shown all areas of the police department, including pistols and batons
   ii. Some children felt they were treated with disrespect by the defense counsel who suggested they provoked the abuse


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Research to Practice Summaries was supported by Grant No. 2012-CI-FX-K006 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of views or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.