A Research-to-Practice Summary:
The relationship between children’s age and disclosures of sexual abuse during forensic interviews

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ARTICLE:


SUMMARY:

Purpose:
Examine the association between age and disclosure in conjunction with other variables likely to affect disclosure rates:
- Child-suspect relationship
- Suspect’s history of violence and sexual assault
- Suspect having prior charges for violent offenses

Design:
Data was gathered from a police case management database for sexual abuse cases involving a child between 3-16 during 2011. Suspect had to be at least 10 years old.

527 cases were included in the study. Forensic interviews were done by police or child protection officers who were trained in a modified version of the NICHD protocol.

Mean age was 10.93 years
- Ages 3-5 - 12.3%
- Ages 6-12 – 43.1%
- Ages 13-16 – 44.6%
Gender:
- Female – 81.2%
- Male – 18.8%

Findings:
1. 66.0% of cases had at least one form of corroborating evidence (medical evidence, corroborating witness(es), forensic evidence (DNA, suspect phone calls)
2. 81% of the children disclosed at least one incident of child sexual abuse during forensic interview
3. The proportion of cases in which children disclosed increased from age 3 to age 11, and then decreased to age 16
4. As age increased, the proportion of cases with extrafamilial suspects and penetration increased, and the cases with male victims and juvenile suspects decreased
5. Two case characteristics were significantly associated with a disclosure in forensic interview:
   a. Delay to police report – if the abuse occurred more than 12 months prior to the interview 89.9% of the children disclosed. If it was less than 12 months since the abuse occurred, only 79.5% of the children disclosed.
   b. Prior disclosure – 82.8% of the children who had made a prior disclosure disclosed during the forensic interview while on 65.3% of those who had not previously disclosed made a disclosure in the forensic interview
6. Younger children were more likely to disclose when suspects had histories of violence, but older children were less likely to disclose when suspects had histories of violence
7. QUOTE – “the results of the current study indicate that disclosures during forensic interviews are not only related to children’s ages but also to other case characteristics, such as the relationship between the child and the suspect, the severity of the abuse, the length of delay between the offense and the report to police, whether the child had previously disclosed, and whether the suspect had a previous charge for a violent crime.”

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