

SEXUAL ABUSE COMMITTED ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Mariana PĂDUREANU, PhD Candidate

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Craiova

mariana86ro@yahoo.com

Abstract: *On addressing the basic motives of the sexual aggressions committed on adult and minor persons, despite numerous researches that have been done, there are still noticed a lot of unknown factors, explanatory theories being released along the me, either unifactorial, multifactorial or specific theories. The research that has been done in the field of negative distortions addresses both the cognitive structures (schemes) and the cognitive operations, these actually representing the strategies dedicated to the processing of information. A special attention is awarded to the cognitive products.*

Key words: *abuse, women, children, aggression, society.*

Following the numerous studies and researches done over the years, in the complex area of the sexual abuses, there have been identified the main causes from the basis of their committing, along with the factors afferent to the victims. Thus, besides the victims' gender and age, there can also be remarked the influence of certain factors that are generated by the structure of the family to which the victim belongs, the diverse parental characteristics, the cultural level of the family, and the health condition of the future victim.

Worth mentioned is the fact that all these factors, previously enumerated, manage to determine a complex of influences on the future victim of a sexual abuse, becoming more vulnerable in connection to a potential sexual aggression.

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The specialised literature award special attention to the sexual assault, describing:

- Micro-level theories – in which the main reasons for the committing of the sexual aggressions are attributed to the diverse characteristics that are specific to the sexual aggressors;
- Macro-level theories – in which the main reasons for the committing of the sexual abuses can be attributed to the discriminatory mentality that can be found in the patriarchal societies. In this case, the sexual aggressions are considered only acts of instrumental violence, used for

the attempt to keep the women in subordination, in their relation with the men – the feminist theory of the conflict.

In practice, there are constantly noticed, as regarding the sexual aggressions, the imposing of the two previously mentioned theories. Interesting approaches can be also found in:

- Biological theories regarding the evolutionist theory and the hypothesis of the biological determinism
- Sociological theories that try to identify the reasons behind the sexual abuses through:
 - ❖ Family life quality;
 - ❖ The level specific for the family life;
 - ❖ General different cultural influences;
 - ❖ Patriarchal society;
- The psychological theories that consider the authors of the sexual aggressions as being people with diverse disorders, manifested psychologically. Consequently, there ought to be mentioned the fact that these theories trigger different contradictions, being considered that these concepts do nothing more than exonerating the sexual abusers. Nonetheless, there has been proven that, more often than not, the sexual abuse is committed by people that suffer from different psychical problems, the most frequent being the personality disorders, or certain paraphilia.

In case of rape, there has been identified a complex of factors that can manifest direct influence in the sexual abuse, more obvious being:

- The static factors –they consider the evaluation of the diverse features that concern the criminal history of a person, along with their personality features, with the mention that the attention is focused on the personality features that have not suffered major fluctuations along the time;
- The dynamic factors –they consider the multiple daily variables, which can suffer special fluctuations, owing to certain intervention or treatments;
- The distal factors – they regard, both on addressing the sexual abuse victim, and the sexual aggressor, the diverse personality features, along with the adopted attitudes and, implicitly, the general life experience;
- Proximal factors – they aim at the multitude of actual elements through which there can be shaped the general context that has determined/favoured the committing of a sexual abuse;

Along the time, there has been tried the identification of a correspondence between the factors of risk, specific for the sexual abuses, and their recurrences, being observed a special influence within the category of the static risk factors:

- A chronic criminal life style;

- A personality disorder – especially psychopathy;
- Cognitive dysfunctions – especially those specific for learning;
- The age factor – respectively under 40;
- The manifestation of an anti-social behaviour;
- A certain level or aggressiveness and violence;
- The existence of a sexual compulsive behaviour, respectively a deviant one;
- Lack of safe attachment;
- Detached behaviour;
- Age of the criminal career beginning;
- Diversity in choosing the potential victims;

In the category of the dynamic factors that have the capacity to influence the eventual recurrences of the sexual abuses, there can be seen:

- The diverse stereotypical attitudes related to hostility, in the relation to the female sex;
- The life style that is permanently influenced by diverse anti-social attitudes;
- Accentuated level of impulsivity;
- Cognitive distortions on addressing the sexual aggression, especially rape;
- A diminished level of empathy for a sexual abuse victim;
- Certain deficiencies that are manifested within the intimate circle;
- Denial;
- An increased level of emotional solitude;
- The existence of constant preoccupation for the sexual aspect, or deviant sexual fantasies;
- Caution when manifesting emotional control;
- Existence of paraphilias, as long as obsessions;
- Certain partial social abilities;
- Manifestation of hostile behaviour;
- Diverse conflicts noticed within the intimate relations;
- A reduced level of self-control;
- Effects generated by the interruption or ceasing of medication prescribed by specialists;
- Consumption/Dependence of alcohol, or different other harmful substances;

In the area dedicated to negative distortion, constant characteristics of the sexual aggressions, the researchers have shown interest by their influence, as precursor of the sexual abuse, and through the strategies that are developed post-abuse, strategies that are dedicated to the maintaining of self-image of the sexual abuse author, as close as possible to their perception.

The research that has been done in the area of negative distortions took into consideration both the different cognitive structures (respectively the schemes), and the cognitive operations, which aim at the processing of information. A special attention was given to the cognitive product, including:

- The beliefs of the sexual aggressors;
- The attitudes adopted by the sexual assaulter;
- The diverse images that the aggressors confer to themselves;
- The complex of declarations of the aggressors on addressing themselves;

Within the discourses that are specific to the sexual aggressors, there was noticed the tendency of denying the accusations brought against them, and, implicitly, the attempt to lay the responsibility on other people, by combining their distorted self-evaluation with the minimising of the aggressive act, the erroneous explanation/description of it, along with a proper interpretation of the act.

In most of the cases of cognitive distortions, there are perceived as rationalisations that are developed both prior the committing of the sexual aggression and during it, and, respectively, after the committing of the sexual abuse. In the case of the therapeutic programmes, it is unanimously accepted the hypothesis that the cognitive distortions have the capacity to promote and, implicitly, to maintain the criminal behavioural attitude, a reason for which their approach is done directly, within any psycho-therapeutic intervention.

As regarding the hostility, a characteristic element for most of the sexual aggressors, that Spielberger defined as a complex set of attitudes that motivates the different aggressive types of behaviour, which converge towards the destruction or the harming of people, there has been noticed the fact that, in the case of the sexual aggressors, they base their behaviour of a rather inexistent socialisation, to which there is added the lack of the factors of control, and the ones that inhibit.

Any form of sexual aggressiveness not only is it perceived, but also facilitated by hostility, proving a particular predictor in most of the actions that are characterised by violence. In case of sexual aggressions, owing to the researches, there has been demonstrated a special level of hostility manifested by aggressor towards the women, in general.

Special attention is awarded to the personality disorders, in case of the sexual aggressions being identified several profiles, respectively:

- The profile of the anxious;
- The profile of the dramatic;
- The profile of the aloof;
- The profile of the aggressive anti-social;
- The profile of the passive-aggressive anti-social;
- The profile of the sub-clinical;

Special incidences are also noticed in case of the histrionic, the compulsive, the narcissist, the anxious, the avoidant, the passive-aggressive, as much as those from the borderline and schizoid category.

In the category of factors with the capacity to multiply the potential cases of sexual aggression, determining the increase of sexual abuse incidences committed on minors, there can be remarked (Miller-Perrin, Perrin, 2007: 114-167):

- The diverse physical disabilities;
- The mental disabilities;
- Certain psychical problems of the parents;
- Alcoholism and drug consumption within the family;
- The life style;
- The conflict with the parents, along with the conflict between the parents;
- The lack of friendships;
- The lack of communication with the parents;
- The existence of a sexual abuse precedent in the family (*Ibidem*).

A study realised on the sexual abuses against minors showed the fact that, in 78% of the cases, the assaulted victims were dealing with three risk factors among the ones mentioned previously, while 26% of the sexually abused minor girls had to deal with two risk factors, other 9 percent presenting one risk factor.

In the category of the factors that increase the risk of committing sexual abuse of minors, there are noticeable the disabilities, meaning that the people with certain physical disabilities are more exposed to the sexual aggressions (*Ibidem*). And the risk increases considerably, in case of mental retardation, as much as hearing and seeing impairment.

Moreover, in case of the sexual abuses committed on minors, there was noticed an over-representation concerning the male minors, with certain physical disabilities (Smith, 2002: 1-3).

The research (Smith, 2002) done in this area have managed to evidence the fact that, a special influence in the field dedicated to sexual abuses committed on minors, is represented by the age of the children (*Ibidem*), which constitutes an important variable that defines the correlation between the sexual aggression and the degree of vulnerability experienced by the victim.

There was noticed that the age of the sexually abused minors is directly proportional to the incidence of the sexual aggression, respectively:

- Children aged 0 to 3 represent 10% of the total number of the sexually abused minor victims
- Children aged 4 to 7 represent 28.4% from the total number of the sexually abused minor victims
- Children aged 8 to 11 represent 25% of the total number of sexually abused minor victims

- Children aged between 12 and 18 represent 39.5% (Gomez-Schwartz, Horowitz, Cardarelli, 2001) from the total number of the sexually abused minor victims (Smith, 2002).

The studies have managed to evidence the fact that the incidence of different sexual aggressions, with underage victims, is progressively higher, as the age of the children increases, the most vulnerable being those over 12 years old (Gomez-Schwartz, Horowitz, Cardarelli, 2001). Furthermore, other researches have concluded that the most vulnerable age of the minors, related to the sexual aggressions, is:

- Between 9-11 years old (Finkelhor, 2003: 66-71)
- Between 7-12 years old (The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 2004)

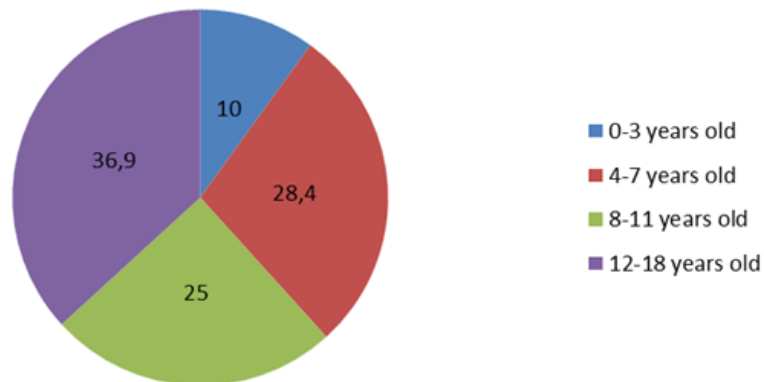
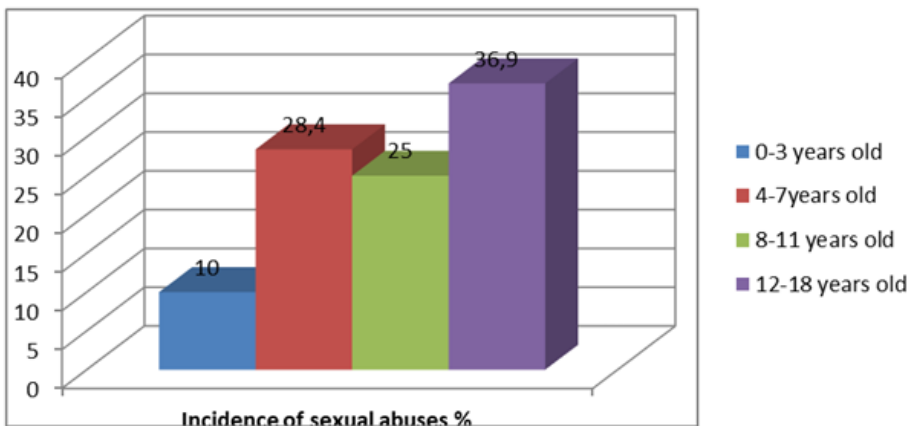


Figure 1. Incidence of sexual abuses committed on minors, related to their age.
Source: Smith, 2002.

On addressing the average age corresponding to the first acts of sexual aggression, it is 9.6 years old for girls, and 9.9 years old for boys (Boyer, Fine, 2002). Victimization also occurs at early ages, in more than 20% of the sexual abuse cases, the occurrence being up to the age of 8. Moreover, there has been established that in over 25% of the sexual abuse cases, committed on underage girls, they were younger than five (Hewitt, 2005).

Not all the data have been included in the official statistics, representing just the result of some studies and researches made in this area, along the years, some specialists (Ellerstein, Canavan, 1995) appreciating that the ages of the sexually abused minors are far lower, but these cases have not been reported to the authorities from different reasons, among which the most noticeable being:

- The lack of discernment of the sexually abused minor;
- The incapacity of the sexually abused minor to understand what happened to them;
- The incapacity of the child to tell the parents/close people the experience he/she had to face;

Even if it might seem difficult to believe, there were situations in which the sexually abused victims were children of merely few months old, quite often being abused children between one and two years old too (Boney, Finkelhor, 2005).

The sex of the victims also determines the incidence of the sexual abuses, the statistics demonstrating that, globally, one of three women is the victim of a sexual aggression, while in case of males; the percentage of victims reaches 25% (Smith, 2002). Related to the structure of the family that the sexually abused minor victim belongs to, there has been remarked that:

- The most frequent cases of sexual aggression occur in the single-parent families
- In the families with a step-father, the risk of sexual abuse against female minors is doubled;
- The different health problems of the family members can increase considerably the risk of committing a sexual aggression on minors (*Ibidem*).

Moreover, there ought to be mentioned that, within this sub-chapter, the fact that the sexual abuses are not influenced directly by the social-economic position of a family, nonetheless it has a special influence of the physical abuses, on the phenomenon of neglecting too, which has been frequently mentioned lately.

In the case of the sexually abused minors, there can be observed the fact that the highest share of victims is represented by girls, nevertheless, the specialists estimating that the risk of being abused is three times more increased, as compared to that of the boys (The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 2004). Specialists from USA have managed to conduct a study (Finkelhor,

2001) regarding the prevalence of sexual aggression committed on minors, identifying 27% in the case of the minor girls, and 16% in the situation of the boys.

There ought to be mentioned a sub-representation of the sexual aggression cases, whose victims are boys, and this is due to the fact that there is a tendency (of both adults and children) to not expose the traumatic episodes that they were forced to face (Romano, De Luca, 2006).

This sub-classification is preponderantly determined by both the special pressure exercised by the diverse social norms and the numerous social stereotypes, according to which:

- The male persons present different masculine dominant characteristics, have trust in themselves and manage to impose themselves;
- The different precocious sexual experiences of the boys are perceived as normal components in the existence of the future adult person.

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