Apply child sexual assault theoretical perspectives to practice
NSWTCSA702A
Version 1

Learner Resource

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![Benchmark Logo](image-url)
TOPIC ONE: CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This topic relates to Element 2:

_Critically analyse the impact of theoretical perspectives on government responses and service development in the CSA field._

Performance Criteria:

2.1 Knowledge of the historical context of societal and government responses to CSA is demonstrated.

The sexual exploitation and abuse of children has occurred throughout history, and has long been sanctioned by religious, cultural, legal and political structures. Under traditional Talmudic law, for example, a female child over three years of age could be betrothed by sexual intercourse with her father's permission. 'Blaming the victim' also has a long history. In the Old Testament, Lot's daughters are depicted as seducing him in the absence of their mother.

Greek history includes the popularity of the sexual use of boys, and the castration of young slave boys who were then bought and sold for sexual use. Corby (1998) notes that while extra-familial paedophilia was an accepted practice in classical Greek society, and was not considered abusive, it was largely a prerogative of the upper classes. Children and young people from poor and oppressed classes were most likely to be at risk. Intra-familial sexual relationships, however, were seen as unacceptable (as in the story of Oedipus). Child prostitution and the use of slave children for the sexual gratification of their adult male owners were equally acceptable in Roman society.

The advent of Christianity, with its ideas of childhood innocence, particularly children's perceived lack of sexual thoughts, feelings and capacities contributed to societal denial of sexual exploitation of children. However, beginning in the 16th century in England, there was some legislative recognition of the need for the protection of children from sexual exploitation: boys were protected from sodomy, and girls under the age of ten from forcible rape. Children could be removed from unfit parents. In 17th century in America, a father was executed for incest (however, victim blaming continued: his daughter was whipped for her 'part' in the crime) (Tomison, 1995:1).

In 1857, Ambroise Tradieu, a professor of legal medicine in France, published a book describing sexual assaults on children, most of whom were girls under the age of 16. His opponents countered by claiming that such children were vindictive and seductive degenerates from the lower classes.

The Victorian age was one of contradictions. The romantic view of the child was growing in popularity, emphasizing the notion that 'children, born as innocents, were innately virtuous'. Finch, 2000 p.5) At the same time, there was a shift back to stronger moralistic views about sexuality, including 'a frenzied campaign against childhood masturbation' which involved controls such as sexual surgeries and constraints such as special gloves (Bagley and King, 1990:28). It has been suggested (Finch 1981) that the prevalence of incest was more widely recognized in Victorian Society than in the mid-twentieth century, but was commonly seen as a practice of the lower classes. By the late 19th century, concerns were expressed by welfare...
groups about children as victims of sexual crime; initially extra-familial assault such as child prostitution, but gradually also intra-familial assault. There was a growing concern for the conditions of children in the slums, where over-crowding was seen as an explanation for child sexual assault.

Jackson (2000 p.4) comments that ‘the ‘discovery of sexual abuse in England from the 1860’s on was the product of a coalition of interests between the social purity societies and the burgeoning child welfare movement’. Removal of children from their parents on the basis of cruelty or ‘endangering the morals’ of children was the basis of the 'humane movement of the mid-nineteenth century in the U.K., U.S.A. and Australia. At the same time, moralist groups were instrumental in pressing for legal reforms which raised the age of consent for sexual activity.

By the 1920’s, changes in ideology meant that the family was seen as the best environment for children. The acknowledgment of intra-familial child sexual assault was thus a threat to the structure of the family. Child sexual assault was therefore characterised as extra-familial, and victims viewed as provocative 'temptresses', rather than innocent children. Australian practice reflected the British and American view of the sanctity of the family. The Royal Commission on Human Relationships in 1977 viewed incest as primarily prevalent in deviant and socially marginal families. This was the dominant view in Western societies until the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought the issue of intra-familial sexual assault and the experiences of survivors into the public arena. Increasing awareness of child abuse generally as a problem was paralleled by children's increasing legal status, and an increasing recognition of children as individuals; e.g., the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), which Australia signed in 1981.

**Learning Activity**


Finch describes the role of the age-of-consent laws, which were passed in the 19th century in Australia as ‘regulating the sexual behaviour of the working-class, and in particular, about defining the boundaries of sexual behaviour within the family’ (p.22).

*How would you describe the role of age of consent laws today? In what way are the issues related to age of consent similar or different to those that Finch describes in the context of Victorian society?*
TOPIC TWO : THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT

This topic relates to Element 1:

*Evaluate the key theoretical perspectives underpinning CSA counselling practice in terms of practice implications.*

Performance Criteria:

1.1 Knowledge of how the various theoretical perspectives which have informed approaches to CSA practice have developed over time is demonstrated.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives in terms of the practice implications with diverse groups of children and young people and their families are critically analysed.

1.3 The approach of each of the key theoretical perspectives in relation to the issue of power and responsibility in CSA is critically evaluated.

*Psychoanalytical approaches to child sexual assault*

Freud’s understanding of child sexual assault is grounded in his theory of psycho-sexual development. He postulated that children have sexual drives which are expressed through various body modes, beginning with the oral region, and then moving to the anal and phallic. The latter stage is followed by a 'latency period', in which sexual drives subside while the child develops his/her social and cognitive skills. The final stage, the genital, begins at puberty. It is during the phallic stage that Freud claimed that children pass through a stage of being sexually attracted to their opposite sex parent, and wish to displace their same sex parent (the Oedipus/Electra complex). In boys, this desire is blocked by paternal authority and the fear of castration: the resolution is to repress the desire for the mother and identify with the father. Girls, on the other hand, only manage to partially repress their desire for their father and anger at their mother. Freud argued that it is the inability to successfully resolve this psychosexual stage of development that gives rise to psychic damage, not an actual experience of incest. Freud considered that the vast majority of allegations of child sexual assault were the result of a child's fantasy: actual incest was an extremely rare phenomenon. However, where sexual assault or incest does occur, the offender is viewed as pathologically disturbed due to castration anxiety as a result of the failure to resolve the Oedipus complex (due to failure in his mother's parenting, which makes it difficult or impossible to relate to adult women), while in incest, the daughter is the active 'seductress' of her passive, innocent father. The mother is cold and rejecting of the child because of poor resolution of her own Oedipus complex, through which she generates a situation in which her daughter acts out her own incestuous desires. Psychoanalytic theory holds that trauma arises for the child because she/he experiences stimulations for which he or she is developmentally unprepared, and which may flood the consciousness with feelings of sexual and emotional confusion, causing a profound neurosis. Incest is viewed as particularly damaging "because it makes the Oedipal fantasies of the girl concrete and interferes with the progression of her development towards autonomy, a controlled selfhood, and relationships outside the family".

Freud initially recognised that the cause of 'neurosis' or 'hysteria' in many of his female patients was that they had been sexually abused in childhood, often by their fathers (his
'seduction' theory). However, the overwhelmingly negative response by his professional colleagues led to Freud rescinding his original theory, instead positing that the memories of sexual assault were expressions of children’s fantasy or wish fulfillment rather than reality. Freud’s reversal had the effect of creating a perspective which came to dominate social casework and reduced the likelihood that allegations of child sexual assault would be believed by medical and other professional for over half a century. For example, a study by Bender and Blau in 1937, which attempted to document the effects on children who had been sexually abused by adults, began with the premise that such abuse was extremely rare and concluded that children often initiated sexual activities with adults, and were not harmed by them. Kaufman et. al. (1954) argued that incest was the acting out of the Oedipal wish by young girls whose super-ego formation was defective.

Implications for therapeutic practice

Bagley and King (1990) argue that while the traditional approach has been justly criticised for its blaming of both victims and their mothers, it has led to some important therapeutic developments. They argue that Freud’s work on the unconscious aspects of the mind aids in understanding why some victims of sexual assault are able to repress memories of the actual abuse, resulting in nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety and panic attacks, and unexplained bouts of depression. Adler (one of Freud’s followers) argued that the fundamental motivation of human beings is to achieve power and mastery in their social world, and to be esteemed in that world. Based on this analysis of human motivation, modern psycho-analytical therapy in relation to child sexual assault stresses the need to restore the victim’s self-esteem, power and control over his/her life. Generally speaking, you psychoanalytical approaches in relation to offenders are aimed at addressing the intra-psychic conflicts which are believed to underlie the deviant behaviour, while the goals of therapy with victims focuses on revealing, understanding and resolving pathological conflicts arising from child sexual assault.

Psychoanalytical psychiatry, while no longer a dominant theoretical explanation of child sexual assault, still continues to exert a powerful influence on discourses of child sexual assault, both among professionals and among the broader community. Breckenridge (1999) notes that the use of medical metaphors such as 'syndrome' and psychiatric diagnoses such as dissociative identify disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder now feature prominently in feminist literature: the risk is that the focus will again turn to 'individual pathology' rather than strategies to address issues of power and gender.

Learning Activity

Read:


How would you describe the current trends in relation to community and professional approaches to child sexual assault?