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**Multivariate Relationship between Situational Victim Characteristics and Disclosing  
Sexual Abuse in Children: Children as Victims**

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The detrimental ramifications of childhood sexual assault and abuse can propose a variety of long-term and short-term psychological defects, however, what are the implications regarding the victim's characteristics that predispose them to maladaptive psychological behavior post-trauma? As research has shown, victim's characteristics such as age, abuse prevalence, the relationship to the perpetrator, and cultural roadblocks are all factors that differentiate the severity of psychological defects within the child during disclosure (Bottoms et. Al, 2016; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Ullman, 2007). This academic article will argue that the multivariate relationship between childhood sexual assault disclosures and situational attributes ultimately results in varying levels of psychological trauma to the victim. Being able to understand the various trends regarding victim behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics surrounding disclosure is exceptionally crucial to implementing change within society that aims to diminish the occurrence of childhood sexual abuse. Consequently, through this analysis of the multivariate relationship, programs and policies throughout Canada can adapt to these findings when dealing with victims of childhood sexual assault in order to best articulate and assist in understanding each unique or similar circumstance and how these characteristics will evidently affect the psychological psyche of the child.

### **Age in Relation to Sexual Abuse**

In relation to age regarding disclosure of childhood sexual abuse, studies have shown an inverted effect where the older the child gets, the more likely they are to disclose information regarding sexual assault (Smith et Al., 2000). In contrast, other studies highlighted that younger children are less likely to disclose but attributed this phenomenon due to younger generations not being able to understand the consequences or fathom the idea of sexual assault due to the coercive behavior of the perpetrator (Ullman, 2007). Dependent on the circumstances, abuse may

be seen as the normal behavior within the household, as many eastern countries still heavily enforce aspects of corporal punishment (Bottoms et Al., 2016). In correlation to age, the disclosure of sexual assault may onset a variety of psychological defense mechanisms, such as repression that can alter the child's psyche, which is attributed to why the majority of adults who carry maladaptive psychological behaviors attribute these disruptions when these realizations occur (Smith et. Al., 2000). Although a substantial minority of almost 30% of childhood sexual assault victims subside into repressing these ailments, disclosing sexual assault as an adult result in positive and prosocial reactions to the situation as opposed to younger children who are often dismissed and receive antisocial reinforcement (Epstein & Bottoms, 1998; Roseler & Wind, 1994; Smith et. Al., 2000). This directly correlates to the findings discovered and discussed within Ullman's findings where victims of sexual assault are developing maladaptive coping mechanisms, antisocial behavior, and mental health diseases when encountering dismissive or antipathetic reactions to disclosing sexual assault (2003).

These aspects in relation to sexual assault victimization regarding children is crucial to implementing and understanding the psychological reasoning and behavior of children when met with the pressure and circumstances of dealing with sexual assault. Knowing that majority of children lack the cognitive understanding of the detrimental reality of sexual assault urges protective guardians and school systems to openly discuss these unfortunate events and create socialization outlets and opportunities for children to openly discuss and disclose information regarding sexual abuse. From the findings stated above in retaliation with age, the implementation of appropriate sexual health education is necessary for children to come forward to other agents of socialization within their lives, as studies have shown that children are more likely to disclose to other family members or trusted individuals, such as teachers (Hanson et Al.,

1999). Creating open lines of communication and education regarding these specialized topics is necessary to combat some of the research findings and creates an intellectual basis for the child to understand sexual assault. Due to all of the repercussions listed through maladaptive behavior and antisocial tendencies that children develop when not being able to disclose these instances, policies and procedures in educational institutions can adjust their literature as necessary to compensate and educate the vulnerable population.

### **Abuse Prevalence & Victim-Perpetrator Relationship**

Another attribute that showcases the multivariate nature of childhood sexual assault disclosures and situational attributes is abuse prevalence and victim-perpetrator relationship. In regards to this term, this analyzes how frequent this abuse happens to the victim and aims to discover trends in relation to disclosing. As research suggests, victims of severe abuse, usually outlined by frequency of the action, were less likely to disclose to other trusted individuals and the perpetrator holds some type of authority over the child (Ullman, 2007). Consequently, this could be attributed to the idea that the majority of these instances are defined by individuals who are related to the victim which emphasizes the importance of a pre-existing relationship (Bottoms et. Al, 2016; Paine & Hansen, 2002). This essentially pushes the victim into an undesirable state due to key socialization agents being absent in the ability and option to disclose. In the circumstance that this does arise, relatives are somewhat cognizant of the circumstance but more than likely will not bring it to the attention of an authority figure due to the behavior being deemed as “normal” by the perpetrator (Bottoms et Al., 2016; Jonzon & Lindblad, 2004). Consequently, instances where the perpetrator plays an active role within the livelihood of the child’s life cause a disruption when determining when to disclose sexual abuse which directly contributes and correlates to the power dynamic with coercive behaviour (Ullman,

2007). Disclosure is less likely to happen when the perpetrator is directly involved with the victim and has physical and emotionally coercive behavior that would deter the child from suggesting instances of sexual assault (Smith et Al., 2000). The importance of the relationship of the victim to the offender is crucial to understanding revictimization rates and sexual abuse disclosures. Studies have shown that sexual assault by strangers is only accounted for about 19.5% of the total reported cases (Berliner & Conte, 1995). Therefore, the majority of the cases revolving around childhood trauma is an individual in a parental relationship to the victim (Paine & Hasen, 2002). Under these confined manipulation tactics, children are forced to develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, increased predisposition to abnormalities and diseases, and are more likely to suppress emotions and struggle to confide in individuals as adults (Ullman, 2003; Pennebaker, 1985). Therefore, the overarching relationship between disclosure, abuse frequency, and victim-perpetrator relationship showcases that depending on the severity of the abuse, the role in which the perpetrator has and the prevalence of this instance, derives a relationship that corners victims of childhood sexual assault from being able to disclose. Although one question remains, what are the implications and procedures in places that can assist a child that are faced with all these various roadblocks that prevent disclosure?

The relevance of abuse prevalence is crucial when examining the multivariate relationships between disclosure and victim situational characteristics due to the fact there are a variety of factors that determine the likelihood of a disclosure. For instance, the severity of sexual abuse is highly dependent on the active role that the perpetrator has in the child's life, as shown through research. Through the analysis of these factors relating to one another, researchers are able to factor in and account for severe cases of sexual assault and give reasoning as to why some victims may withhold information in victimization surveys. Ultimately, when

weighing the differences between an individual who has experienced sexual assault once, as opposed to a consistently targeted victim, this places a large disposition of sociological and psychological factors that will evidently shape and cause turmoil in that child's life. As stated before, victims of rampant sexual abuse have very distinct withdrawals from society and maladaptive behavior that causes them to be predisposed to harboring negative emotions. This eventually leads to a variety of psychological abnormalities in the later stages of life in addition to not being able to successfully disclosing the instances of sexual assault.

### **Culture & Ethnicity Roadblocks to Disclosure of Sexual Abuse**

As discussed briefly within the analysis of the victim-perpetrator relationships and age differences, the attitudes and behavior of the victim's culture influence the child's decision on the ability to disclose sexual assault. Research has shown that the culture's values and behaviors create barriers and roadblocks for the child in being able to disclose, with issues such as family-depiction within media, lack of resources, tainting family reputation, to even shaming future generations with the repercussions of sexual abuse (Kazarian & Kazarian, 1998). These idealistics could be attributed to an "old-school" mentality that surrounds a variety of eastern cultures that prevents emotions or disclosure from happening due to cultural differences and backlash faced for dealing with this issue (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Consequently, this places minorities at a disadvantage in reporting due to cultural differences and values. This is evidently shown and touched on previously when discussing the idea of "normalized" household behavior (Bottoms et Al., 2016; Paine & Hansen, 2002). This presents problems for children or adolescents who would like to disclose, but do not want to bring dishonor by mentioning pre-martial sex or even being subdued to victim-blaming (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Ultimately, this attribute highlights that cultural values are highly involved in determining the child's or

adolescents' ability to disclose sexual abuse. As discussed prior, agents of socialization are key in providing positive reactions that induce receiving legal aid and therapy, but when those socialization agents are no longer there or absent, this causes hesitancy within the child to be able to effectively communicate instances of sexual abuse. Therefore, contributing to the psychological trauma of not having a present and active socialization figure in addition to bringing shame to one's family or community can override a victim to higher rates of suicide and mental abnormalities (Kazarian & Kazarian, 1998). Cultural stigmatizations should consistently be analyzed when dealing with sexual abuse cases because of the severity and withdrawals that confine victims of sexual abuse to disclose. Extremely vulnerable populations such as immigrants or people of color need to understand and utilize the programs implemented within society to assist with disclosing sexual abuse. Thoroughly, by analyzing this cultural trend, our policies and programs can change to best fit the minority population who are underreported and misrepresented due to cultural differences and barriers (Kazarian & Kazarian, 1998).

In conclusion, the multivariate relationship between childhood sexual assault disclosures and situational attributes ultimately results in varying levels of psychological trauma to the victim as discussed within the realm of age, abuse prevalency, victim-perpetrator relationship and cultural values. Evidently, these factors intertwine and correlate with another, cohesively presenting a variety of roadblocks discussed within the phenomena of childhood sexual assault disclosure. Through the discussion, an analysis of these prevalent factors infiltrating disclosure, policies and programs throughout Canada can be altered to better suit the past and present children of sexual abuse in coming forward to disclose their experience for legal aid and justice.

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