



Power in the Narratives of Finnish Women and Men with an Intra Familial Child Sexual Abuse Background

MERJA LAITINEN

Abstract

In the article the enticement process is analysed through power in the narratives of Finnish women and men who were sexually abused in their childhood nuclear families. The material of this sensitive interview study consists of in-depth interviews of twenty-one victims, seventeen women and four men, and secondary material of writings. Thematic analysis was carried out. The categorised aspects of power were named as arbitrary power, threatening power, coercive power, manipulative power, compensatory power, seductive power and caring power called love. These categorised aspects of power can be conceptualized as victimizing power which is a remarkable part of victimization in the victim's experiences. The victims need support in the breaking of the bond formed by power, violence, gender and sexuality in their personal histories, and in disentangling and interpreting its meanings. It is a question of how adult victims with their experiences are understood in the service system.

Key Words: Child sexual abuse, power, enticement, qualitative interview-study

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has become a profound child welfare problem across Europe (e.g. May-Chahal & Herczog, 2003). For example in Finland it was recognised as a social phenomenon at the 1980s when intense discussion broke out about its seriousness, the amount of human suffering it caused and its social consequences in the public, professional and political arena (see Parton, 1991, pp. 52; Wolfe, 1991). This marked the beginning of the development in the field of research and the professional practices.

Prevalence and incidence studies show estimated amounts of CSA. By international standards, the survey into the frequency of children's violent and sexual experiences that was conducted in Finland in the 1990s was very comprehensive. According to the survey, about 5-7 per cent of girls and 1-3 per cent of boys of 15 years or older have experienced sexual harassment. (Sariola & Uutela, 1994) A more recent study showed that among 778 suspected cases of child sexual abuse reported to the authorities, the suspicion fell on an abuser previously unknown to the child in only 52 cases. In Finland most cases of child sexual abuse take place in children's immediate surroundings, and most abusers are people the children know, people who are close

to them. The victim is likely to be female and the perpetrator male. (Kauppinen, Sariola & Taskinen, 2000.)

In the international research literature an important distinction is drawn between intrafamilial child sexual abuse (ICSA) and extrafamilial child sexual abuse (ECSA). These two phenomena differ from each other in many ways and require different professional interventions as well. (e.g. Grosz, Kempe, & Kelly, 2000; Holguin & Hansen, 2003.) This article will look at intrafamilial child sexual abuse. The events of child sexual abuse can be localised in specific interdependencies and states – close relationships, children's intimate surroundings, home.

In research literature, power is seen as the key factor in the structuring of child sexual abuse and the experience of the victimization. Power is also connected with grooming. The concept of grooming is used to describe those acts by the abuser that create the basis and setting for the later sexual abuse of a child (Alexy, 2005; McAlinden, 2006; Mitchell, 2005). The expression of power can be both positive and negative. Rossman (1985), for instance, states that very often abusers play an important role in the victims' lives regardless of whether they use positive or negative methods to involve the child in their activities. Child sexual abuse is a question of abusing a trust relationship in which the adult misuses the power brought on by adulthood. Because of power and authority the child is subjugated. Children do not realise this, however, and are loyal to their abusers. This is how power in its turn creates and maintains secrecy. Through power and abusers' deeds a child can be isolated, intimidated, bribed or forced. Feelings of helplessness, entrapment, or fear of disclosure force many children to keep the secret (e.g., Finkelhor, 1984; Krane, 2003; Levine, 1992; Marshall, Laws, & Barbaree, 1990; Moore, 1985; Pittman, 1993; Renvoize, 1993; Sgroi et al., 1982; Smith & Howard, 1994).

Sexual abuse is enabled by the unequal power relation between the child and the abuser, which is mainly invisible. The power relation is very special in the sexual abuse that takes place in intimate relationships. The power is also connected into the culture. For example in the Finnish culture the authorisation for the exercise of power in a caring relationship is based on the notion of parents' natural and irreplaceable love for their children. It is generally thought that the parents' lives go on in their children; thus making it almost impossible in terms of definition that the parents would exercise their power to dominate their children on purpose or that they would harm their children to satisfy their own needs. The exercise of power by the parents and older siblings is understood in the guiding, positively restricting way of taking care of children and protecting them from the outside factors that could harm them (cf. Harva, 1980).

Although power is conceptualised as a key factor structuring the child sexual abuse and the experience of the victimization little attention is paid to the victims' personal accounts and experiences concerning the power. In this article I examine child sexual abuse from the enticement process viewpoint. Especially I am interested in victims' experiences of power included in the enticement process. I am asking, what kind of descriptions do victims give to the power included in their enticement processes? The aim of this article is to write close to people who experienced sexual abuse inside their family as children, respecting their experiences, and disentangling key concepts that are linked to sexual abuse in the research literature, in particular power and grooming, and the individual meanings given to these concepts.

Analysis is inspired by feminist epistemology: Subjectivity offers an opportunity to find, hear and see people's experiences, but these experiences also pose challenges to professional practices (see Acker, & Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Granfelt, 1998.) The purpose of this study is to give a voice to ICSA survivors to conceptualize their childhood experiences and victimization processes, and further specify the meanings they give to both their sexual abuse experiences, and victimization. The point is to find out perceptions and understanding, how victims can be helped in adulthood after sexual abuse has occurred.

Methodology

Participants

Various channels were used in the selection and invitation of research participants. Some were active in Suomen Delfins Ry, named after dolphins, which is a national support organisation for sexual abuse victims and people close to them. Others read about the study in a newspaper advertisement or contacted the researcher directly when they had heard about the study. There were also some with whom the researcher came into contact through acquaintances or social authorities. Those who had already been interviewed told others about the study, and helped to obtain more participants. This is how twenty-one people, seventeen women and four men, were chosen for the study. The oldest participant is a man born in 1936 and the youngest is a woman born in 1978. They all have two things in common: they were sexually abused when they were children, and their abusers were people close to them, family members. In twenty cases the abuser was male (father, stepfather, brother or other male living in the family). In only one case the abuser was female (mother). This distribution describes well the gendered nature of child sexual abuse. Among CSA victims, girls outnumber boys by four to one on average (Finkelhor & Baron, 1987; Gomez-Schwartz, Horowitz, & Cardarelli, 1990; Wyatt & Powell, 1988).

In their childhood the research participants were subjected to exploitation in a relationship which is generally conceived of as safe and upon which great trust is placed in Finnish culture in terms of its incorruptibility and the protection it offers. The biological, social and psychological inner relationships within the nuclear family are seen as the mainstay of the safe, healthy development of children. Sexual abuse distorts the relationships so that they do not correspond to the general views. The Penal Code of Finland also classifies a case of child sexual abuse as a felony when the child puts special trust in the offender or has special dependence on him or her (Chapter 20 Sex offences 563/1998, Section 7 Aggravated sexual abuse of a child). All the participants come from different family backgrounds. There is substantial variation in terms of their relations inside the family and their relations to the outside world, family structure, living surroundings, financial and social status, cultural value base as well as religious beliefs.

The narratives of the research participants' ICSA experiences reveal a multidimensional picture. The sexual abuse they experienced took many forms, varying from sexual intercourse to sadistic sexual violence, touching the genitals, or forcing the child to satisfy the abuser's sexual needs in some other way. In most cases the abuse started before the children reached school age or when they were at school age, and lasted for several years, usually until puberty. Sexual abuse often started under cover of play, especially if the children were very young, between 2 and 4 years of age. Little by little as the children grew, sexual abuse took different forms. The abusers found it easier to cross the boundaries they had already crossed and to gradually change their method of operation. Their deeds had become normalised for them step by step, and the process had blurred the real nature of the deeds even from the child, even though the events and deeds had taken forms that were further and further away from those culturally acceptable in the social intercourse between children and adults. (see Mellberg, 1995). Twelve of the research participants experienced the progression of sexual abuse to vaginal or anal penetration. The sexual abuse experienced by them did not take only one form of realisation, but every incident and the chain of incidents was different. In addition to sexual abuse, the activities included physical or emotional violence, deeds and words that violated the borders of the body. What the cases have in common is the way in which violence, power and gender overlapped with each other, taking on different realisations (see Rathsmann, 2001).

Eventually the abuse ended in all cases, but the reasons for this varied: either the grown-up child did not arouse the abuser sexually any more, or they moved away from home, or the abuser got

them pregnant or the abuse was exposed. It is worth noticing that the process of victimization is localised in the incidents of sexual abuse. The number and frequency of these incidents are not the only traumatic factors involved here, but the initiation of sexual abuse in general. Even after the sexual abuse ends, it lives on in the close social relations either as a shameful memory that requires concealment or something concrete that reminds the people involved of the fact (e.g. pregnancy or childbirth).

Research material

Because it was our aim to give voice to the victims and conceptualise their childhood experiences, a qualitative interview study was chosen. Subjective knowledge and different experiences are seen as valuable. Starting point for this study is the victims' standpoint, and in the centre are victims' everyday lives, their meanings, thoughts, and values, looked through their own position. (Smith, 1988; Reinharz, 1992; Pohjola, 1994; Granfelt, 1998.)

One key feature of the study worth noticing is invasion into people's privacy, which also involves waking and digging up an individual's mental burden, the trauma of the past. This requires sensitivity both from the researcher and the research methods so that the research process does not upset the fragile mental balance the individual has achieved through hard work, or cause more pain or feelings of discomfort (Lee, 1993). All this pointed the researcher towards carrying out a sensitive interview study. The sensitive interview study is context based and a very intensive research method which analyses the many interactive factors related to the phenomenon. Individual differences are respected and different ways of discourse are allowed. Talking is not the only way, so it's important that research recognizes different ways how people can produce knowledge concerning their traumatic experiences. No matter what happens, the trauma on which victimization is based will live on in a person's individual life story, where it will be told somehow or other. People have the basic need to explain events that are unusual, unexpected, or unwanted. (Klein & Janoff-Bulman, 1996.)

The primary research material of the research is based on in-depth interviews (Chirban, 1996; Morgan, 1995). The in-depth character includes awareness of self and own position. It is important that the researcher considers her own feelings, values, motives, needs, and believes. Critical self reflection is needed. That is the way how subjectivity can be seen as a tool of research. Interviewees were able to tell about their life span including sexual abuse experiences and different kinds of feelings, emotions, and thoughts bond into it. The role of the researcher was a listener, a questioner and a tester of primary interpretations. The background of the interviews lies on the idea that people are experts in their own experiences.

The number of interviews per person varied from two to seven, and the average was three times per person. The transcribed interview material consists of 2,562 sheets in 1.5 line spacing. The transcripts of the interviews were posted to all the interviewees. This enabled the interviewees to familiarise themselves with the material and to read it carefully to decide if they wanted to be involved in the study as participants.

The interviewees were also asked whether they had any material which was relevant to their experiences of sexual abuse and which could be used for research purposes with their consent. Consequently, the secondary research material was compiled from personal letters, diaries, therapy memos, drawings and poems, and official records and documents. This is so-called pre-existing material, which means that it has come into existence regardless of the present study. The secondary material was created in processes where the victims of sexual abuse have tried to clear their thoughts about their childhood experiences and analyse them, they have also looked

for answers to the questions why and how. The secondary material consists of over 1,000 sheets. In this article only one man's and five women's writings were analyzed, because in them the victimization and power are considered.

Procedure and analysis

The focal point of analysis in the research was the victim's viewpoint, referring to the experiences, emotions, thoughts and meanings participants include in their experiences of sexual abuse. It was the object of study, in particular the experiences related to sexual abuse that mainly defined the methodological decisions. Aim of analysis is not about testing reality but, rather, to make statements about how participants interpret the reality.

The process of data analysis includes three stages (see Mason, 2002, pp. 147-150). First one was recognizing and reading through the data. All quotations in the transcripts and in the writings that referred even weakly to the victimization process, power and enticement were marked. Secondly, the quotations were divided into themes, each describing one dimension of power. The categorised aspects of power were named as arbitrary power, threatening power, coercive power, manipulative power, compensatory power, seductive power and caring power called love. These forms of power are presented in the following paragraph. The aim of the analysis was to preserve the diversity and uniqueness of the narratives. Each of the research participants told something about the categorised aspect of power and one person's experience could differ sharply from that of another, taking on entirely different meanings and contents. The third stage of analysis was an interpretively, reflexive reading of categorised aspects of power through research literary concerning enticement processes and possibilities for professional help. The research participants make their voices heard in the quotations throughout the results, and the quotations also illustrate the interpretations made by the researcher.

Results

Forms of power in the victims' accounts

The research participants tell how people close to them exercised their power to dominate and suppress them in their childhood with the purpose of satisfying their sexual needs regardless of the consequences that their actions had for the child's well-being. It is not a question of arbitrariness or momentary lack of consideration, but purposeful and target-oriented activities. The exercise of power experienced by the research participants in their intimate relationships varies dramatically. Even in the experience of one person, power does not appear as one clear-cut or rule-governed entity but its realisation and form change from one situation to another. Power becomes visible through the told state and space of the child in the intrafamilial relationships.

The categorised aspects of power from victim's narratives are arbitrary power, threatening power, coercive power, manipulative power, compensatory power, seductive power and caring power called love. The character of arbitrary, threatening and coercive power is negative. Others include a positive tone. The form of power varied between the interviewees, however, but in most cases the abuser did not have to use force to dominate the child. In most cases power appears in a positive light. The forms of power are combined so that within them the reality and justification of the abuser's actions are produced. They are processes providing a one-way nomination and significance. Power conceals the wrong of the act committed.

Sexual abuse can be characterised by arbitrary power, which combines unpredictable sexual desire with physical or mental violence in one man's and in two women's accounts. In the descriptions given by the research participants the aggression and sexual desire of the abuser are intertwined. The abusers may have got part of their sexual satisfaction from the humiliation and subjugation of the child (e.g. Marshall, et al., 1990). Coercive, physical execution of power or the fear of it subjugated the victims. They did not have the energy to change the situation into something else nor the power over their bodies or bodily integrity. Some of the described situations are characterised by negativity, unpredictability and irregularity. The victims felt that they were never understood, their hopes and needs were neglected completely – and submitted themselves to the impulsive desires of the abusers.

"The kicking and pulling hair and the wall ... and hitting my head into the wall and shaking and punching and all kinds of things. And if I cried, he hit me and if I didn't cry because I was so hard, he hit me some more. Totally despotic behaviour." (Female 15, interview)

"One day Dad started to grope me, and I tried to resist him, but I couldn't: my legs went all stiff and I totally lost control over them, and I fell on the floor paralysed. My father went completely mad about that and started to beat me up, kicked me into the sides and head. In addition to incest, my life went around sadistic humiliation, subjugation and venting his anger on me, kicking and violence, which resulted in physical injuries." (Male 3, writing)

One of the forms power took in almost all the narratives is threatening power. The abuser subjugated the child by threatening them with various negative consequences which could be physical or emotional, but so painful that the victim gave up their own free will to avoid them. A threat of the family breaking up, sending the child away from home, the death or falling ill of a person the child was close to, or the immediate threat of violence made many of the victims submit themselves to abuse even after they had reached the size where they could have resisted the abuser physically.

- " • When you were ten years old and older, you were probably big enough to resist her, or how?
- Yeah, you are probably right, I might have been able to resist, but then she would have found other people to punish me... she had to ask one of the more robust farmers from the neighbourhood to beat me up thoroughly once so that I would know what I was doing or something." (Male 1, interview)

"He threatened me that he will kill me or he will take his own life if I tell anybody." (Female 5, interview)

The narratives reveal the picture of how the threatening power realised itself as a coercive power in the few cases where the victim tried to get help or when they resisted the abuser. In these cases the abuser felt strongly bonded with the child and could not accept the fact that the child tried to break loose from "the relationship" that the abuser had formed. In the experience of the victims, it was a humiliation for the abuser, something they did not let go without punishment.

"I started to fight back with all the strength I had, Dad hit my head against the table edge getting the upper hand and subjugating me." (Male 3, writing)

"I learned to fear that if I say something, something really horrible will happen." (Female 11, interview)

Almost all the research participants tell about manipulative power in their narratives. This form of power subjugates the victims and makes them feel guilty of what is going on by

changing their beliefs. Gradually the abuser managed to make the child believe that what had happened was the child's fault. Sexual abuse turned into a thing that was right towards the victims because they were like what they were. The victims submitted themselves to abuse without ever questioning it. Oral exercise of manipulative power was complemented by the abuser's whole being, facial expressions and deeds, which all affected the children and their self-image.

"I remember once how Dad made me apologise to himself and comfort him after sexual abuse. According to him, it was I who had caused the whole thing, the fact that he had to do it." (Male 3, writing)

"I couldn't tell to my Mum, because I thought it was my fault. I thought I was enticed him. I never say no to him." (Female 9, interview)

In the research participants' experience, the wielding of compensatory power is also quite common to cover up the wrongness of the deed. The cases show how the abuser or the other parent tried to compensate the victim for the abuse in many different ways. The children got something extra or positive for their subjugation, which somehow blurred what really happened. The victim may also have felt it was right to submit them to sexual abuse because they were rewarded for that.

"And then in other ways too I was somehow pampered. He always cared for me. He had little time for us, but he always paid more attention to me than to the other children in our family on average, even though there were many of us. So that's why one wanted to compensate for that." (Female 11, interview)

"That's true with the money and material things he tried to compensate for that, because there was money, and he had so many different opportunities to compensate or try to compensate ... " (Female 17, interview)

In some cases power appears in the form of seductive power, with the abuser persuading the victim to sexual abuse by giving them goods or money. If the children were young, the abuser may have let them believe it was a game or something nice or special for the child. The abuser cheated the child by offering them attention and acceptance. (e.g., Rossman, 1985; Sgroi, Blick, & Porter, 1982)

"It was like this, we used to play hide-and-seek and he always partnered me in these games. He would often play with us and he always partnered me and took me by the hand and we were running across lawns and then to the porch upstairs and there he would make me lie on top of him, and well, went into my knickers. He definitely didn't touch me violently, but it was like, everything happened in cooperation. He never used violence, never, he didn't blackmail me. To my mind he never even manipulated me, nothing." (Female 16, interview)

Since it is ICSA cases that were studied the caring power that is called love features strongly in the narratives. It involves a positive feeling that is directed towards the child. By being good and gentle with the child and by being close to them the abuser won the child over. Taking advantage of children's basic need for closeness, hugs and safety is a very simple method of subjugation. Children have a desire to be accepted and loved. One form of caring power appears in the process of raising children into good people, which sees sexual abuse as a punishment for the child not obeying the rules that the parent has drawn up "for the child's best".

When the abuser emphasized their feelings towards the child and their special relationship with the child, the concrete events to be kept secret became insignificant. By appealing to love the

abuser was able to cover up and explain away their guilt. It is as if love and devotion had made the deed less severe and purified the relationship between the child and the abuser. In sexual abuse love appears in a most puzzling form. It is patriarchal and conditional, setting sexual abuse as an essential prerequisite. Children are worth the "love" of a person close and important to them only when pleasing and obeying the person and submitting themselves to sexual abuse. The abuser has the power to control the situation. It is not based on respect for the child or the responsibility of the abuser but on the satisfaction of selfish needs. In these circumstances love does not offer safety but threat. It contains promises of compensation and assurances. It is the exact opposite of the silent invisible unselfish care and affection that are associated with love in a caring relationship. (see Fromm, 1985; Airaksinen, 2001.)

The victims' narratives reveal the fatefulness of the fact that the abuser ties up their perverse desire with love. At times the abuser loved the child as a unique personality, a child and at other times the abuser objectified the child as the target of their sexual desire. The victim felt trapped by the sticky bond. The fact that positive feelings, care and affection are tied to sexual abuse victimizes the child. Children cannot understand the perverse nature of the bond or its wrongness. The victim forms an idea of care, love and affection that is tied to fear and anxiety. This bond may follow the victim all the way into adulthood.

"My father used to say before sexual abuse: 'Dad has to do this because Dad loves you'." (Male 3, writing)

"He [the abuser, a male cousin] tried to be ... tried to be like a big brother to me, like, really like someone who protects you and if someone had come to threaten me, say my schoolmates, well, he would have come and rescued me. He was kind of protector. (Male 2, interview)

Victimizing power

What the seven forms of power discussed above have in common is the fact that they produce the abuser's truth about and justification for the deed. They are one-way processes of naming and signification. They conceptualise the social space of the victim, its relations and interaction, and define the status of the victim and their latitude and the boundaries of their existence. All forms of power become visible in the hierarchisation of social relations. Childhood space is subjugated to sexual abuse. Power victimizes children. The anatomy of victimizing power consist of seven forms of power, in particular despotic power, threatening power, coercive power, manipulative power, compensatory power, seductive power, and caring power that is called love.

On the other hand, some of the research participants were active actors in the narrow space that the abusers had defined for them in their homes. They acted as regulators of power and through their deeds took part in the way how sexual abuse alternated with ordinary life in the family. Many of the victims told about the heightened sensitivity they had developed, some sort of antennae with which they had to be able to perceive the atmosphere at home, and the thoughts and moods of the family members, mainly those of the abusers.

Some of the victims consciously, even provocatively, behaved in a way that incited sexual abuse. This was how they were able to control the situation in a way and how they were partly spared from living under the constant shadow of despotism, being on their guard and fear. Relieving the tension, agreeing to abuse, guaranteed them periods of freedom, without subjugation and sexual abuse. They sacrificed themselves, and sexual abuse left room for what was good in their opinion – momentary freedom.

"There was this threat all the time, terrible fear when you didn't know what would happen next. But then I developed some sort of... you had to be very good at it... I read facial expressions very carefully. Because nobody talked about anything, nothing was said, and that's why you had to read his thoughts. And if you read wrong, he never punished you, but he took revenge. You were forced to learn this skill so that you survived, yeah, that's because you simply had to." (Female 2, interview)

"In time we developed 'a balance of terror' where I bought domestic peace by submitting myself to those treatments." (Male 1, letter)

Despite of these acts regulating of power the subjugation of a child or young person takes place in a state of interdependency aimed, from the viewpoint of the abuser, to justify and neutralise the sexual acts that take place later. The abuser is unable to view the situation, relationship or acts through the eyes of the victim – as injurious, victimizing, and destructive. Moral codes, ethical principles and legal limits are insignificant; they are eliminated in the process of interaction. Right and wrong, love and perverse sexual desire are seen as a sticky tangle from the victim's point of view.

At issue is a process in which through acts, words and disposition the abuser dispels the dividing line between what is normal and abnormal, persuades and compels the child or young person into an abusive relationship. When the abuser is someone previously known to the child or young person, the abuser does not have to spend time gaining trust, only strengthening it. Gradually, the victim may start to believe that the relationship is meaningful and important to him or her.

The abuser moves often in small steps towards his objective, when the cultural propriety of relations between child and adult is obscured (see Mellberg, 1995). At the same time, this procedural advancement diminishes the substance and significance of respecting the other's body boundaries. The relationship slowly takes on a more intensive and intimate form whereby it becomes mutually shared by abuser and child. This involves the exclusion of others and the acts of sexual abuse.

"The ban on speaking was so strong that you weren't allowed to speak about it, and then I stopped talking altogether. It was so horribly strong. At the same time it meant that the thing didn't exist. In other words it was like ... I had to deny its existence so that I was able to live on at all. So it ceased to ... well the thing, it was not in my conscious mind." (Female 2, interview)

The narratives show how victimizing power creates a secret around the events. The keeping of the secret becomes one form of power. The secret remains a secret because both the abuser and the child remain silent. The abusers do this because they know that what they do is wrong, the children do it because they think they are somehow of the wrong kind – guilty for the fact that they are abused (Moore, 1985; Rathsmann, 2001; Renvoize, 1993). Not only does the secret mean that the events are locked up from the outside but also that the victims lock themselves up from the inside. They do not think about what they have experienced and they deny or reject their feelings. They can seal up their mouths, minds and feelings as well. Silence strengthens victimization.

Discussion

In this article I have analyzed what kind of descriptions victims give to the power included in their enticement processes. The enticement process of sexual abuse is based on unequal power

relations. The abuser as seen by the victim is in a superior position due to age or position. In ICSA cases the abuser is a person who the victim trusts, feels affection for or who the victim wants to attract. From the point of view of the victim what is central to the enticement process is whether the child or young person reveals course of events at an early stage, before the abuser achieves his goal of acts producing sexual satisfaction, and before the victim experiences feelings of shame and guilt at having taken part. So it is important to recognize different forms of power like arbitrary power, threatening power, coercive power, manipulative power, compensatory power, seductive power and caring power called love. Victimized power is more often positive rather than negative, coercive physical violence. The abuser gets the victim on his side using simple means, demonstrating positive attention in both words and acts. That's why sexual abuse hides so well.

Disclosure can be conceptualised as a process, where the child or young person is in interaction with adults and in which the narrative of their current decisions and their cancellation, denial and empowerment is shaped (Staller & Nelson-Gardell 2005). This is why it is by no means unimportant what sort of interactions children and young people have in their daily lives with key people at home, school, and hobbies and in the surrounding community. Trust is crucial. It concerns the way people want to be seen and the way people are seen. This is important because the victim chooses between talking and remaining silent. For instance, in a study carried out by Sperry and Gilbert (2005) under a quarter of children who had been abused by one of their peers – another child – told their parents about it. Young people's unwillingness to reveal sexual abuse when the perpetrator is another young person strengthens their efforts to independently and capably look after themselves and their lives. They fear that their parents will limit their freedom if they find out about what has happened (Crisma et. al, 2004).

What is central in weighing the possibilities of revealing the events is whether the victim trusts that what she or he says is believed and understood or whether the response will be dubious: could something so awful happen without anyone noticing anything, or, why didn't the victim say anything earlier? The doubt and dubiousness of the listeners result from the assertion of victimizing power, the abuser's creation of an illusory reality. For example, McAlinden (2006) notes that grooming takes place in relations with the child's family and even local community, as well as in the relationship with the child. Institutional grooming on the other hand takes place in the settings of society's institutions, whereby abuse suspects seek to reassure people that the children are not at risk. The principle used is the same at each level: the convincing behaviour, the building of trust and its exploitation.

The analysis showed how home, family, intrafamilial relationships and sexual abuse form a complex and sticky network of good and evil because of power. It often prevents others from seeing the family reality in the same light as the children see it. At the same time it affects the children's idea of themselves as sexual beings, as boys and girls. They can be socialised into the natural and commonplace existence of abuse in their life and family. The research data of the present study make visible and draw attention to the fact how relative concepts like normality and abnormality are in the end. Sexual abuse can be a normal thing in children's life, belonging to it; they may never have been allowed to live in different conditions. Children do not have the ability to assess the situation from the perspective of an outsider or that of an adult. (see also Smith & Howard, 1994; Westwood, 2002)

The process of victimization also involves the fact that the abuser has the role of an authority in the victim's life regardless of the form of power. Even when they are adults, the victims do not necessarily feel that they are able protect them. The victims need support in the breaking of the bond formed by power, violence, gender and sexuality in their personal histories, and in disentangling and interpreting its meanings. The processing of sexual abuse and the reconstruction of the self on the cognitive, emotional and bodily level requires that the person is met and

heard as an individual, as a woman or as a man. These challenges become visible within the professional arena.

Childhood sexual abuse can be seen as a traumatic, victimizing event. Literature indicates both short-term and long-term effects (e.g. Beitchman et. al., 1991; 1992). When looking at adult survivors' point of view it is important how child sexual abuse experience follows its victims all through the course of their lives from one situation to another, attaching itself to situations and actions, thus dominating the key areas of life: sexuality, social relations and parenthood. Because of power many victims reveal their experiences until adulthood. It is a question of how adult victims with their experiences are understood in the service system. Opening up one's own life story and putting it into words always comes with a certain uncertainty about the sort of person one is seen and met as (see Alaggia, 2004). It is a question whether the individual can produce a story that is believable from the other person's viewpoint. From the victims' point of view, it is important to keep in mind that sharing a traumatic experience or talking about it does not automatically produce an empowering experience in the professional arena either (cf. Ullman, 2003). Some of them do not feel to have been met, heard or helped as individuals, but as objects, interpreted according to established concepts or models. This results in experiences of unfairness or unreasonableness (cf. Metteri, 2006).

In its entirety talking is a way of breaking the boundary of the private and the public. In addition, it can break down victimizing power. Real attempts to find help and sharing the experiences are both ways to leave victimhood and to attach to new kinds of spaces and relationships. Talking can break isolation and enable the victim to experience connectedness. At the same time it can turn the incomprehensible into something that can be communicated. Thus it has a very important social and societal dimension in institutional and professional encounters. (Husso, 2003)

References

- AIRAKSINEN, T. (2001). *Rakkauden vangit. Filosofisia tunnustuksia*. Helsinki: Otava.
- ALEXY, E. M., BURGESS, A. W., & BAKER, T. (2005). Internet offenders. Traders, travelers, and combination trader-travelers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(7), 804-812.
- ACKER, J., BARRY, K., & ESSEVELD, J. (1983). Objectivity and truth: problems in doing feminist research. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6(4), 423-435.
- ALAGGIA, R. (2004). Many ways of telling: expanding conceptualizations of child sexual abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(11), 1213-1227.
- BEITCHMAN, J. H., ZUCKER, K. J., HOOD, J. E., DACOSTA, G. A., & AKMAN, D. (1991). A review of the short-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 15(4), 537-556.
- BEITCHMAN, J. H., ZUCKER, K. J., HOOD, J. E., DACOSTA, G. A., AKMAN, D., & CASSAVIA, E. (1992). A review of the long-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16 (1), 101-118.
- CHIRBAN, J. T. (1996). *Interviewing in depth: the interactive-relational approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- CONTE, J. R. (1984). Progress in treating the sexual abuse of children. *Social Work*, 29(3), 258-263.
- CRISMA, M., BASCELLI, E., PACI, D., & ROMITO, P. (2004). Adolescents who experienced sexual abuse: fears, needs and impediments to disclosure. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 28(10), 1035-1048.
- FINKELHOR, D. (1984). *Child sexual abuse: new theory and research*. New York: The Free Press.
- FINKELHOR, D., & BARON, L. (1987). High-risk children. In D. Finkelhor, (Ed.), *A sourcebook on child sexual abuse* (pp. 60-88). Beverly Hills: Sage.

- FROMM, E. (1985). *Rakkaus on elämä*. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- GOMES-SCHWARTZ, B., HOROWITZ, J. M., & CARDARELLI, A. P. (1990). *Child sexual abuse: the initial effects*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- GRANFELT, R. (1998). *Kertomuksia naisten kodittomuudesta*. Proceedings of the Finnish literature Society 702. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden seura.
- GROSZ, C. A., KEMPE, R. S., & KELLY, M. (2000). Extrafamilial sexual abuse: treatment for child victims and their families. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(1), 9-23.
- HARVA, U. (1980). Hyvä ja paha: praktisen etiikan ongelmia. Helsinki: Otava.
- HOLGUIN, G., & HANSEN, D. J. (2003). The "sexually abused child": potential mechanisms of adverse influences of such a label. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 8(6), 645-670.
- HUSSO, M. (2003). *Parisuhdeväkivalta: Lyötyjen aika ja tila*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- KAUPPINEN, S., SARIOLA, H., & TASKINEN, S. (2000). *Lasten seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö: Sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon viranomaisten tietoon tulleet hyväksikäyttöepäilyt 1.5.1998-30.4.1999*. Statistical publications 2000:5. Helsinki: Stakes.
- KLEIN, I., & JANOFF-BULMAN, R. (1996). Trauma history and personal narratives: some clues to coping among survivors of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 20(1), 45-54.
- KRANE, J. (2003). *What's mother got to do with it? Protecting children from sexual abuse*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.
- LEE, R. M. (1993). *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.
- LEVINE, S. B. (1992). *Sexual life: a clinician's guide*. New York: Plenum Press.
- MARSHALL, W. L., LAWS, D. R., & BARBAREE, H. E. (Eds.) (1990). *Handbook of sexual assault: issues, theories, and treatment of the offender*. New York: Plenum Press.
- MAY-CHAHAL, C., & HERCZOG M. (2003). Child sexual abuse in Europe. Strasbourg Cedex: Council of Europe.
- MASON, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.
- MCALINDEN, A-M. (2006). "Settin 'Em Up": Personal, Familial and Institutional Grooming in the Sexual Abuse of Children. *Social & Legal Studies*, 15(3), 339-362.
- MELLBERG, N. (1995). Sexuella övergrepp mot barn: i ett socialt och kulturellt sammanhang. *Nordisk Socialt Arbeite*, 1995(1), 3-17.
- METTERI, A. (2006). Knowledge and power: maltreated cases. Presentation at Forsa 2006 conference. Helsinki. Retrieved December 7, 2006 from <http://www.forsa2006.fi/metteri.pdf>.
- MITCHELL, K. J., FINKELHOR, D., & WOLAK, J. (2005). The Internet and Family and Acquaintance Sexual Abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, 10(1), 49-60.
- MOORE, J. (1985). *The ABC of child abuse work*. Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company.
- MORGAN, M. (1995). *How to interview sexual abuse victims*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- PARTON, N. (1991). *Governing the family: child care, child protection and the state*. Houndmills: MacMillan.
- PITTMAN, F. (1993). No hiding place. *The Family Therapy*, 1993(May/June), 31-37.
- POHJOLA, A. (1994). *Elämän valttikortit? Nuoren aikuisen elämänkulku toimeentulotukea vaativien tilanteiden varjossa*. Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis 5. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.
- RATHSMAN, K. (2001). *Incest: Att bo i en stolen kropp*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- REINHARZ, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RENVOIZE, J. (1993). *Innocence destroyed: a study of child sexual abuse*. London: Routledge.
- ROSSMAN, P. (1985). *Sexual experiences between men and boys*. Worcester: Billing & Sons Ltd.
- SARIOLA, H., & UUTELA, A. (1994). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in Finland. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 18(10), 827-835.
- SGROI, S. M., BLICK, L. C., & PORTER, F. S. (1982). A conceptual framework for child sexual abuse. In S. SGROI, (Ed.), *Handbook of clinical intervention in child sexual abuse* (pp. 9-38). Toronto: Lexington Books.
- SMITH, D. (1988). *The Everyday World as a Problematic. A Feminist Sociology*. Oxford: Alden Press.
- SMITH S. L., & HOWARD J. A. (1994). The impact of previous sexual abuse on children adjustment in adoptive placement. *Social Work*, 39(5), 491-501.

- SPERRY, D. M., & GILBERT, B. O. (2005). Child Peer Sexual Abuse: Preliminary Data on Outcomes and Disclosure Experiences. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29(8), 889-904.
- STALLER, K. M., & NELSON-GARDELL, D. (2005). "A Burden in your Heart": Lessons of Disclosure from Female Preadolescent and Adolescent Survivors of Sexual Abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29(12), 1415-1432.
- ULLMAN, S. B. (2003). Social reactions to child sexual abuse disclosures: a critical review. *Journal of Sexual Child Abuse*, 12(1), 89-121.
- WESTWOOD, S. (2002). *Power and the social*. London, New York: Routledge.
- WOLFE, D. (1991). *Preventing physical and emotional abuse of children*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- WYATT, G.E., & POWELL, G.J. (1988). Identifying the lasting effects of child sexual abuse. In G.E. WYATT & G.J. POWELL (Eds.), *Lasting effects of child sexual abuse* (pp. 11-17). Newbury Park: Sage.

Author's note

Merja Laitinen

D.Soc. Sciences, Adjunct professor
University of Lapland
Department of Social Work
Box 122
FI-96101 Rovaniemi, Finland
Tel +358-16-3412696
Fax +358-16-3412699
e-mail: Merja.Laitinen@ulapland.fi