

Chapter 2

Abuse Disclosure

What Adults Can Tell

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Whether abused children are reluctant to disclose abuse is currently the subject of some controversy (Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2007). The resolution of the controversy has implications for assessing the truthfulness of children's reports. If children are not reluctant to disclose abuse, then a child who denies abuse has not been abused. If children are reluctant to disclose abuse, then denial is evidence against abuse, but it is not conclusive evidence. Reluctance is thus an important factor in assessing the truth of abuse allegations when the alleged victim has been inconsistent in alleging abuse.

Studies examining disclosure rates among children believed to have been abused provide some guidance in understanding children's reluctance to disclose, but they are necessarily hampered by the fact that corroborative evidence for sexual abuse is often lacking. This leads to two problems. First, some claims of sexual abuse may be false. Second, sexually abused children who never disclose their abuse are unlikely to be suspected of being abused ("suspicion bias") and unlikely to be substantiated as having been abused ("substantiation bias"). In earlier work (Lyon, 2007), I examined children known to have been abused without reliance on disclosure to derive realistic assessments of how likely abused children are to disclose abuse. Disclosure rates routinely ran less than 50% among children whose abuse was first suspected because of external evidence of abuse (e.g., gonorrhea). These children can confidently be said to have been abused, thus solving the false allegation problem, and were neither suspected of being abused nor sub-

stantiated as having been abused based on disclosure, thus solving the suspicion and substantiation bias problem.

The fact that substantiated samples of child sexual abuse are made up of children uncommonly willing to disclose abuse has two implications for interviewers. First, if a child who has not previously disclosed abuse denies abuse when first questioned, one cannot say with confidence that suspicions of abuse are unfounded. A subsequent disclosure must be taken seriously and not simply dismissed as the product of suggestion or coercion. On the other hand, it is neither necessary nor wise to ask highly leading questions to elicit reports of abuse from the children seen for evaluation, because most children have previously disclosed and are likely to disclose again (Ceci, Kulkofsky, Klemfuss, Sweeney, & Bruck, 2007). Indeed, it is doubtful whether highly leading questions are ever justified, because they risk both creating false allegations and tainting true allegations.

Responding to my argument, advocates of the view that reluctance is uncommon among abused children have challenged research that finds high rates of nondisclosure and recantation as nonrepresentative of abuse victims (London, Bruck, Wright, & Ceci, 2008). They assert, for example, that poor African American children are uncommonly reluctant to disclose abuse and that this could explain the high rates of denial among children with gonorrhea. Although their claims are subject to question, their call for representative samples of abused children is apt, because a primary concern with research on clinical samples of children believed to have been abused is precisely that they are unrepresentative of abused children in general.

In this chapter, I review population surveys that ask respondents about childhood abuse. These surveys provide support for the proposition that most sexual abuse is not disclosed during childhood, and that, indeed, disclosure is difficult even for older respondents, and particularly so in cases of intrafamilial abuse.

Surveys enjoy a number of advantages. First, their goal is to question a representative cross-section of the population about their abuse experiences and ask whether and when they previously disclosed their abuse. Second, they are unlikely to elicit false disclosures of abuse. Respondents who acknowledge abuse in population surveys indicate that only about 10% of the abuse they disclosed was ever reported to authorities (Martin, Anderson, Romans, Mullen, & O'Shea, 1993; Russell, 1983; Smith et al., 2000). Therefore, their reports are unlikely to have been the product of having been suggestively questioned as children by biased adults (either officials or perhaps parents hoping for official intervention). Moreover, only a very small percentage (2%) of women in population surveys who acknowledge abuse report having remembered abuse with the help of a therapist (Wilsnack,

Wonderlich, Kristjanson, Vogelanz-Holm, & Wilsnack, 2002). Hence, their reports are also unlikely to be the product of suggestion through recovered memory therapy (Geraerts et al., 2009). Third, unlike clinical samples, which enlist participants who already self-identified as former victims, population surveys are potentially able to identify former victims who have never previously disclosed their abuse.

However, to the extent that former abuse victims never disclose their victimization or are inconsistent in their willingness or ability to disclose, population surveys may fall short. Nonreporting of abuse, or “survey reluctance,” will have several ill effects. First, estimates of the prevalence of sexual abuse will be biased downward by survey reluctance (Ceci et al., 2007). Second, to the extent that survey reluctance is caused by the same factors that inhibit disclosure more generally, survey reluctance will bias upward estimates of the proportion of abuse victims who previously disclosed their abuse.

This second point has not been generally recognized and, therefore, deserves some explanation. It merely requires the assumption that adults who have previously disclosed abuse are more likely to disclose abuse to a surveyor than adults who have never previously disclosed abuse. If this assumption is true, then adults who acknowledge abuse to surveyors will be disproportionately likely to be those who have previously disclosed. As a result, survey reluctance will lead to inflated estimates of prior disclosure.

As we shall see, survey reluctance offers an alternative explanation for the common finding that younger adults report lower rates of abuse than older adults. Although this is sometimes interpreted as evidence that abuse is declining, it can also reflect differences in survey reluctance between younger and older adults. Moreover, survey reluctance will provide an explanation for the fact that younger respondents often report very high rates of prior disclosure, as high or even higher than older adults. Such a finding flies in the face of logic: Prior disclosure should be higher among older adults because they have had more time to disclose. However, if younger respondents exhibit greater survey reluctance, then younger respondents who acknowledge abuse will be disproportionately likely to have disclosed abuse before the survey.

Hence, this review of population surveys will alleviate some representativeness problems and some false allegation problems, but the false denial problem will remain. Nevertheless, a careful analysis will provide some insights into questions regarding the willingness of abuse victims to disclose their victimization. Most important, despite survey reluctance, the survey research will reveal the difficulties abuse victims face in disclosing. Moreover, survey reluctance is itself evidence of these difficulties.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

I identified seven studies in which representative samples of adults were questioned about whether they had been sexually abused in childhood and when and whether they had disclosed their abuse (see Table 2.1). As can be seen, delayed disclosures are common, and a large percentage of adults across studies report never having told anyone about their abuse before the survey. The one exception is Fergusson, Lynskey, and Horwood's (1996) sample of 18-year-olds. I return to this study later.

I also identified five large-scale surveys of college students (see Table 2.1). College students are quite young. Because they have been given less time to disclose, their nondisclosure rate ought to be higher than that among surveyed older adults. Although there is clear evidence for delayed disclosure, the percentage who had never disclosed is no higher than in the adult population surveys.

College samples have some of the advantages of population surveys, because they include students for whom there are no preexisting suspicions of abuse. However, researchers arguing over the harmful effects of sexual abuse have noted that college students tend to be higher functioning than the general population (Duncan, 2000). How might this affect sexual abuse disclosure? If nondisclosure in general, and nondisclosure of intrafamilial abuse in particular, is associated with poor functioning, then college enrollment might screen out delayed disclosers and nondisclosers. Hence, one must be somewhat cautious in interpreting these numbers.

I found two representative samples of minors questioned about abuse (see Table 2.1). Surveys of children should find higher nondisclosure rates because they are being questioned about abuse that may still be occurring. However, the rates of nondisclosure are not appreciably higher than those of the adult population surveys.

Overall, there is clear support for the proposition that a large proportion of abuse victims never disclose their victimization until questioned by surveyors. However, the percentage of survey respondents who report having never disclosed their abuse does not clearly decrease with age. Indeed, the 10- to 16-year-olds questioned by Boney-McCoy and Finkelhor (1995) reported that 35% of the abuse they disclosed had been reported to authorities, several times the rate found in population surveys of older respondents (Martin et al., 1993; Russell, 1983; Smith et al., 2000). One possible explanation for this curious finding is that younger respondents exhibit higher rates of survey reluctance and this, in turn, generates inflated estimates of the likelihood that abuse was disclosed. I first review the evidence for survey reluctance among survey respondents generally and then consider the evidence that younger respondents are more reluctant to disclose abuse than older respondents.

TABLE 2.1. Surveys in which Respondents Were Asked about Prior Disclosure of Sexual Abuse

Source	Year	N	Population	No prior disclosure	Delayed disclosure
<u>Population surveys</u>					
<u>Adults</u>					
Finkelhor et al.	1990	2,626	U.S.	33% women, 42% men	59% women, 57% men did not disclose within 1 year
Anderson et al.	1993	3,000	Women, New Zealand	28%	*
Laumann et al.	1994	3,432	U.S.	*	74% women, 78% men did not disclose in childhood
Fergusson et al.	1996	1,019	18-year-old birth cohort, New Zealand	13%	*
Fleming	1997	6,000	Women, Australia	48%	83% did not disclose within 1 year
W Wyatt et al.	1999	338	Women, Los Angeles County	53% African American, 60% White	*
Smith et al.	2000	4,009	U.S.	28%	48% did not disclose within 5 years
<u>Minors</u>					
Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor	1995	2,000	10- to 16-year-olds, U.S.	36%	*
Kogan	2004	4,023	12- to 17-year-old women	26%	*
<u>Convenience samples: Students</u>					
Landis	1956	1,800	U.S.	*	56% women, 73% men never disclosed to parents
Finkelhor	1980	796	6 New England colleges and universities	*	63% women, 75% men did not disclose "at the time"
Arata	1998	800	Women, southeastern U.S. university	*	69% did not disclose "at the time"
Ullman & Filipas	2005	733	U.S. university	33%	64% did not disclose within 1 year
Bottoms et al.	2007	1,411	Women, 3 U.S. colleges and universities	22%	*

Note. Asterisks (*) indicate information not reported.

SURVEY RELUCTANCE

Three lines of research support the proposition that survey respondents are often reluctant to disclose abuse. First, substantiated abuse is often subsequently denied by survey respondents. Second, more persistent questioning elicits more reports of abuse. Third, respondents surveyed repeatedly are often inconsistent in acknowledging that abuse occurred.

A standard finding in victimization research is that large percentages of respondents known to have been victimized on the basis of official records, such as police reports, hospital records, and court records, will deny it when subsequently questioned (e.g., one-third of rape cases known to police are not reported to surveyors when questioned within 1 year; Turner, 1972). Reviewing the research on retrospective reports of childhood maltreatment, Hardt and Rutter (2004) concluded that “the universal finding [is] that, even with well-documented serious abuse or neglect, about a third of individuals do not report its occurrence when specifically asked about it in adult life” (p. 240).¹

These rates are likely conservative estimates of the likelihood that former abuse victims fail to disclose their victimization. To the extent that documented childhood abuse is dependent on children’s willingness to disclose abuse (Lyon, 2007), studies on documented abuse will enroll large percentages of disclosing children. If there is any consistency between one’s willingness to disclose as a child and one’s willingness to disclose as an adult, these studies will disproportionately enroll adults who are more willing to disclose.

A second source of evidence for survey reluctance comes from the fact that more respondents acknowledge abuse if more questions, including more direct questions, are asked about sexual abuse. This was first recognized by Russell (1983) in piloting her survey of San Franciscan women, and confirmed by Wilsnack and colleagues in their nationally representative survey of 711 American women (Wilsnack et al., 2002) in which they found that the percentage of respondents reporting abuse doubled (from 15 to 31%) when they asked a greater number of specific questions about sexually abusive experiences. Several reviewers have noted that the most important determinant of prevalence rates in retrospective surveys appear to be the number of questions asked (Finkelhor, 1994; Hardt & Rutter, 2004), an observation formally confirmed in a meta-analysis by Bolen and Scannapieco (1999). Two of the studies examining adult recall of confirmed child abuse cases also had similar findings: Williams, Siegel, and Pomeroy (2000) found that 14 questions were required to elicit all disclosures, with 13% of the abuse disclosures requiring more than five direct questions, and Goodman and colleagues (2003) found that among the nondisclosers, about half (12/26) reported abuse when questioned again.

Of course, to some extent, nonreporting and greater reporting with more persistent questioning reflect memory failure rather than reluctance (Williams et al., 2000). In many cases, however, respondents will subsequently explain that they deliberately withheld information (Femina et al., 1990). A third line of evidence answers the contention that subsequent nonreporting of substantiated abuse is due to forgetting and further supports survey reluctance: Even with shorter delays between initial disclosure of abuse and subsequent questioning, substantial percentages of respondents inconsistently report abuse. Fry and colleagues (1996) interviewed female gynecological clinic patients complaining of chronic pelvic pain at two time periods, 3 months apart. The authors found that 26% of the abuse mentioned at the first interview was not mentioned at the second interview (41/155) and that 16% of the abuse mentioned at the second interview was not mentioned at the first interview (22/136). Although one might suspect that women omitted abuse that was relatively trivial and, therefore, less memorable, the authors found that the “effect is even more striking when the reports of severe (contact) abuse are examined” (p. 727). McGee, Wolfe, Yuen, Wilson, and Carnochan (1995) questioned adolescents from the open caseload of a child protection agency who were substantiated as sexually abused and found that 19% (12/63) denied sexual abuse when individually questioned by two researchers.

Survey Reluctance among Younger Respondents

If victims surveyed as adults falsely deny abuse, then the rate of abuse will be understated. Evidence that younger respondents are more reluctant to acknowledge abuse can thus be found in the fact that surveys frequently find lower rates of reported abuse among younger respondents. Reviewing five community surveys conducted from 1983 to 1990, Finkelhor (1994) noted that, “all five show slightly lower rates for the youngest age group” (p. 44). Although lower rates of abuse among younger respondents in cross-sectional studies are sometimes interpreted as evidence that abuse is declining, Finkelhor noted that “the youngest women may not yet have enough distance from childhood events to feel comfortable talking about them” (p. 44). Wyatt, Loeb, Solis, Carmona, and Romero (1999) directly tested the possibility that there was a decline in sexual abuse from 1984 to 1994 by comparing the rates of their 1994 survey with those of a similar 1984 survey and found no such evidence. Hence, differences in apparent prevalence among age groups in the 1980s are likely to have more to do with differences in reluctance rather than differences in actual prevalence. (Some of the evidence that sexual abuse declined during the 1990s is not subject to this confound because it does not rely on cross-sectional analyses of survey data; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006.)

False denials are also likely to affect the probability that survey respondents who acknowledge abuse will be those who previously disclosed their abuse. It is reasonable to suppose that victims most reluctant to disclose abuse to others will subsequently be most reluctant to disclose abuse to surveyors. If victims who never disclosed their abuse are also less likely to disclose abuse to surveyors, then surveys will miss those victims. As a result, survey respondents who do acknowledge abuse will disproportionately be those abuse victims who previously disclosed their abuse. Hence, underreporting of abuse among younger respondents will mean that among younger respondents who do acknowledge abuse, there will be *higher* rates of reported disclosure. The between-study comparisons are consistent with this effect; one sees relatively high rates of reported disclosure among younger abuse victims. However, because other variables affect disclosure between studies (such as differences in the number of questions), within-study comparisons are more reliable. Here, too, there is some evidence of higher rates of reported disclosure among younger respondents in the surveys of adults: Fleming (1997) grouped the youngest respondents into the 18- to 24-year age category and found a higher percentage of lifetime reported disclosure (83%) compared with 59% for 25- to 35-year-olds, with further declines thereafter. Anderson, Martin, Mullen, Romans, and Herbison (1993) failed to find statistically significant differences in reported disclosure rates based on the age of respondent but grouped the younger respondents into 18- to 39-year-olds, a very large age range (even then, their lifetime disclosure rate was somewhat higher than that of older respondents: 75% vs. 66%). Again, recall that one would expect reported disclosure rates to increase with age because older respondents have had more time to disclose.²

The best evidence that high rates of reported prior disclosure among younger respondents is due to reluctance to disclose on surveys can be found in the longitudinal data collected by Fergusson and colleagues (1996). Recall (see Table 2.1) that only 13% of the 18-year-olds acknowledging abuse in that study stated that they had never previously disclosed abuse. At first glance, one might suppose that these young respondents were particularly forthcoming about abuse. On the other hand, perhaps many abuse victims who had never disclosed abuse did not disclose when surveyed. As discussed, one effect of false denial is that prevalence rates will be understated. Fergusson and colleagues (1996) found relatively low prevalence rates and recognized the danger that their young respondents were not ready to disclose. Three years later, Fergusson and colleagues questioned the same individuals when they were 21 (Fergusson, Horwood, & Woodward, 2000). Remarkably, among the respondents who reported sexual abuse at 21, 45% had failed to report abuse at 18 (37/83). Conversely, among the respondents who reported sexual abuse at 18 years of age, more than half (54%) failed to report abuse at age 21 (54/100). In other words, more than half of the respondents who reported abuse at some point did so in only one of the

two interviews. The inconsistencies across time suggest that young adults are indecisive with respect to their willingness to disclose abuse. Moreover, the inconsistencies cannot be attributable to uncertainties about whether the reported behaviors were, in fact, sexual abuse, as some have claimed (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005), because respondents were, if anything, less consistent in their reports of more serious abuse (Fergusson et al., 2000).

To summarize the argument thus far, there is general agreement among researchers that a large percentage of adults sexually victimized as children never disclose the abuse to anyone during their childhood. Prior disclosure is often reported by larger proportions of younger respondents, but this is probably attributable to the fact that a large proportion of younger respondents who experienced abuse are not ready to disclose it to the surveyors. Because those nonreporters are disproportionately abuse victims who have never disclosed their abuse to anyone, their exclusion inflates prior disclosure rates. Reluctance is understated because reluctance makes itself invisible.

It may occur to the reader that this methodological point is analogous to the problem one confronts in examining disclosure rates among children questioned about their abuse. Debates over the need for repeated interviews or direct questions in eliciting abuse reports from children reappear with respect to questioning adult survey respondents about childhood abuse. Disclosure of sexual abuse is never easy, even among adults guaranteed anonymity and questioned long after the abuse has ended.

Do Survey Respondents Forget Having Disclosed?

One can speculate that there are other possible explanations for differences in the extent to which respondents report having disclosed their abuse. One possibility is that many respondents have simply forgotten that they reported their abuse to others (London et al., 2005, 2008). There is anecdotal evidence that some claims of recovered memory of abuse turn out to have been disclosed to others at the time that the victim claims not to have remembered the abuse (Schooler, Ambadar, & Bendiksen, 1997).

There are a couple of problems with this possibility. Speculation makes it difficult to generate any kind of estimate regarding the likelihood that forgetting of prior disclosure occurs. Moreover, if one is allowed to speculate, then it is just as easy to imagine ways in which respondents' recall of reports would be exaggerated. If one worries about false memories of abuse, then one should also worry about false memories of disclosure. Perhaps more realistically, one should worry about the informativeness of the disclosure that an adult recalls. There is evidence that child disclosures are often less than explicit descriptions of sexual activity ("things were not right at home"; Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant, & Loughlin, 1999, p. 269). In Ullman and Fili-

pas's (2005) college sample, 75% of the respondents who had previously disclosed abuse characterized their disclosures as a "vague, brief or general reference" (p. 774). This problem replicates a problem one encounters in research on children's disclosure. As stated by Sas and Cunningham, "Sometimes the failure of an adult to catch on to the children's meaning stemmed from the vague terms used by children, words which do not match adult language of sexual abuse" (1995, p. 138). Often children's "disclosures" are, in fact, inconclusive, and counting them as disclosures exaggerates abused children's informativeness (Dubowitz, Black, & Harrington, 1992).

Victim-Perpetrator Relationship and Disclosure

The assertion that relationships influence the likelihood that victims report their victimization is not new. The same study that found high rates of non-disclosure of rape cases reported to the police found that subsequent non-disclosure to interviewers was three times as likely when the offender was known to the victim as when the offender was a stranger (Turner, 1972). Conversely, it is a standard finding that rape and other sexual offenses committed against adults and reported to surveyors were less likely to have been reported to the police when the victim was close to the offender (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003). Indeed, analysis of Kinsey's large (but possibly nonrepresentative) sample of adult women found the highest rate of reported prior disclosure in the "single-accidental cases," cases in which children were assaulted on one occasion by someone with whom they had no previous contact (Gagnon, 1965, p. 183).

The pattern of results with respect to the victim-perpetrator relationship has to be assessed with caution because the problems noted earlier with respect to survey reluctance, and its effects on both estimated prevalence and rates of reported disclosure, recur. Survey reluctance may be greatest when respondents are asked to discuss intrafamilial abuse. Discussing their sample of 10- to 16-year-olds, Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman (1994) commented that "it is probably difficult for children even under the best of circumstances to disclose especially intimate victimizations and family abuse to a stranger interviewer, especially if they are under any risk of retaliation by the perpetrator. This is suggested, for example, by the relatively low rate of intrafamily sexual abuse disclosed in this study compared with what is reported by adults retrospectively" (p. 418). Similarly, Martin and colleagues (1993) found, in their interviews with women surveyed via mail by Anderson and colleagues (1993), that "a small core of women had suffered experiences of at least genital touching by a close family member, but chose not to mention the episode to an interviewer. Fifteen percent of women who admitted an incident [child sexual abuse] involving a close family member, reported this only in writing" (p. 389). If respondents' greater reluctance to

disclose intrafamilial abuse extends to their survey responses, then this will both decrease the apparent prevalence of intrafamilial abuse and potentially inflate the extent to which acknowledged victims of intrafamilial abuse report having disclosed.

Despite this confound, there is nevertheless clear evidence that disclosure is less likely the closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Four of the five representative surveys that tested for the effects of relationships on disclosure found that the relationship mattered, with closer relationships leading to lower rates of reported disclosure (Anderson et al., 1993; Kogan, 2004; Smith et al., 2000; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990; but see Fleming, 1997). Moreover, a study examining the same sample as Smith et al. found that reporting to the police was more likely when the perpetrator was a stranger (Hanson, Resnick, Saunders, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1999). Three of these studies utilized a multivariate design (Kogan, 2004; Smith et al., 2000; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990), which enabled the researchers to control for possible confounding by interactions between relationship and other characteristics of abuse that might affect reporting.

In contrast, only one of the studies questioning college students found an effect of victim–perpetrator relationship (Landis, 1956). However, although a statistical test comparing all four relationship groups (stranger, acquaintance, relative or stepparent, and parent) was not significant, Arata (1998) found a 10% reporting rate for relatives versus 34% for nonrelatives, a difference that would be statistically significant if it were tested directly, $\chi^2(1) = 13.16, p < .001$. It is probably for this reason that other researchers have cited Arata as supporting such a relation (Hanson et al., 1999).

It seems clear that the best adult evidence supports what is now well accepted in the literature examining children's disclosure rates (London et al., 2008; Lyon, 2007): Relationships matter. Although now conceding this point with respect to research on child samples, London and colleagues (2005, 2008) have argued that the adult evidence is mixed on this point (with five studies finding no effect and two or three studies finding an effect). To their credit, they acknowledged that one must exercise "caution in accepting these null findings because of the relatively small sample sizes" (London et al., 2008, p. 33). Beyond this caveat, however, they made little attempt to assess the quality of the research, cited predominantly clinical samples, and overlooked some of the research reviewed here.³

CONCLUSION

Studying the dynamics of abuse disclosure is a tricky business. Estimates of disclosure are almost inevitably biased by reluctance to disclose. In the case of child samples, this means that we exaggerate the likelihood that

abuse victims disclose abuse if we examine samples of children suspected of and substantiated as abuse victims based on interview disclosure. In the case of survey respondents, we similarly exaggerate the likelihood of prior disclosure if we examine samples of respondents known to have been abuse victims because they disclose to surveyors.

Nevertheless, the survey literature shows clear evidence of nondisclosure and supports the link between intrafamilial abuse and reluctance to disclose. The methodological difficulties, such as the evidence for greater reluctance to disclose among younger respondents, themselves support the claim that children find disclosure difficult. Although surveys regarding the disclosure of child abuse have emphasized sexual abuse, similar conclusions are warranted with respect to physical abuse (see, e.g., Bottoms, Rudnicki, & Epstein, 2007; Widom & Shepard, 1996). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the dynamics discussed in this chapter mirror the larger problem of questioning people about experiences that are intensely embarrassing and painful to disclose.

These difficulties are of obvious importance to practitioners who question children about abuse and researchers who study children's veracity. Practitioners should be cautious in assessing the reports of children who fail to disclose abuse or who inconsistently maintain that abuse occurred. It is obviously wrongheaded to assume that denial is an indicator that abuse occurred, but it is just as wrong to assume that denials conclusively rule out abuse. Unfortunately, practitioners have few tools to encourage disclosure among abused children that do not risk increasing the rate of false allegations. For their part, researchers should be cognizant of the need for questioning methods that increase the willingness of otherwise reluctant children to disclose. They may help create the tools for reassuring children without suggestion, whether those children are survey respondents, clinic patients, or the subject of social services and police investigation.

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NOTES

1. See Femina, Yeager, and Lewis (1990): 30% (18/61) of incarcerated delinquents disclosing physical abuse questioned 9 years later denied or minimized abuse; Johnson, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, and Bernstein (1999): 74% (23/31) of a social services sample of maltreated children questioned 17 years later denied maltreat-

- ment; Widom and Morris (1997): 37% (35/94) of a social services sample of sexually abused children questioned 20 years later denied all sexual abuse; but cf. Goodman et al. (2003): 10% (17/175) of a criminal court sample of sexually abused children questioned 13 years later denied all sexual abuse.
2. Because these data are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, one cannot conclude that the higher rates of prior disclosure among younger respondents is evidence that victims are becoming more willing to disclose over time; this is the same error as the assertion that lower reported prevalence rates among younger respondents is evidence that sexual abuse is declining. Just as their longitudinal data showed no decrease in sexual abuse prevalence, Wyatt and colleagues (1999) also found no evidence of higher rates of disclosure in 1994 than in 1984.
 3. In both articles, London and colleagues (2005, 2008) cite five negative findings (Arata, 1998; Kellogg & Hoffman, 1995; Kellogg & Huston, 1995; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Roesler, 1994). As noted, Arata's (1998) findings support a relation between relationship and disclosure. None of the other studies are either representative surveys or large-scale surveys of respondents who had not previously self-identified as abuse victims. Furthermore, Lamb and Edgar-Smith's (1994) sample of 60 women contained no stranger molesters whatsoever (p. 315) and the raw numbers are not presented. Interestingly, respondents had disclosed their abuse on average more than 16 times. Studies by Kellogg and Hoffman (1995) and Kellogg and Huston (1995) are, in fact, based on a single sample; the former tested the relation between disclosure and type of perpetrator, the latter the relation between disclosure to an adult and type of perpetrator. The raw numbers are not presented, and it is unclear what "type of perpetrator" entailed. Moreover, because 85% of the respondents had disclosed abuse, this reduced variability, making a statistical test of the relation between relationship and disclosure less powerful. Finally, Roesler (1994) did not, in fact, examine the relation between delay and disclosure, but rather examined the relation between age and disclosure and only compared incest with nonincest cases.

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