Learning Objectives

• Identify 3 myths or misconceptions related to childhood sexual abuse

• Identify at least 2 dynamics that occur during sexual abuse which help dispel myths & improve our understanding

• Identify at least 2 short- or long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse
### Common Sexual Abuse Myths

- Sexual abuse is rare.
- Stranger danger
- Only men sexually abuse children.
- The victim is always a girl.
- I would know if someone was a sexual abuser.

### Common Sexual Abuse Myths

- Child molesters are pedophiles & target any & all children nearby.
- Abused children always tell.
- Child victims of sexual abuse will have physical signs of the abuse.
- If an abuser is found “not guilty” then the child must have made up the allegations.

### Common Sexual Abuse Myths

- Most allegations of sexual abuse in divorce/custody cases are false.
- If a child recants or changes their story, they were probably lying in the first place.
- Child sexual abuse is a cultural or socioeconomic problem.
- Sexual victimization as a child inevitably results in the child growing up to become a sex offender.
- It is impossible to heal from sexual abuse.
Dynamics of Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome

- Secrecy
- Helplessness
- Entrapment & accommodation
- Delayed disclosure
- Retraction

(Summit, 1983)

Traumagenic Dynamics Model

- Traumatic sexualization
- Betrayal
- Stigmatization
- Powerlessness

(Finkelhor & Browne, 1985)
Impact of Sexual Abuse

Sexually Victimized Children
- Highly diverse population with varying risks for mental health problems
- Victim characteristics & abuse characteristics influence risk factors
- Sexual abuse is usually not the only trauma sustained
- Psychiatric comorbidity is common

(Saunders, 2012)

A Current Meta-Analysis
- Childhood sexual abuse is a distinct type of trauma
- PTSD symptoms, internalizing problems, & externalizing problems, are the most common effects
- Treatment is effective at reducing many negative outcomes associated with childhood sexual abuse

(Trask, Walsh, & DiLillo, 2011)
Impact of Sexual Abuse

- Short- & long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse are well documented in the literature
- Sexual abuse has implications & impact beyond the abuse itself
- Childhood sexual abuse is a family system problem

Common Immediate Effects

- Posttraumatic stress
- Cognitive distortions
- Emotional distress
- Impaired sense of self
- Avoidance
- Interpersonal difficulties

(Briere & Elliot, n.d.)

Common Long-Term Effects

- Depression is the most common long-term symptom
- Guilt, shame, & self-blame
- Body issues & eating disorders
- Stress & anxiety

(Hall & Hall, 2011)
Common Long-Term Effects

- Dissociation, denial, &/or repression
- Difficulty establishing interpersonal relationships
- Sexual difficulties
- There is no single symptom that is common for all victims

(Hall & Hall, 2011)

Risks of Myth Acceptance

- Underestimates the scope of sexual abuse
- "Neutralizes" the impact of sexual abuse
- Limits our ability to protect & intervene
- Results in increased vulnerability for victims & potential victims
- Contributes to a culture of disbelief & silence
Questions & Answers

The Flight Attendant

~ Thank-You ~

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References


