

Adolescents who have Sexually Offended Within the Family: Clinical Issues, Impact & Family Reunification

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Learning Objectives

- To explore trends in research
- To explore family dynamics
- To provide an overview of important components of practice specific to sibling sexual abuse cases.
- To highlight the importance of collateral partnerships.



Reunification

- Habitational Reunification
 - relationship repaired and live together
- Relational Reunification
 - relationship repaired but choose to live apart
- Static Reunification
 - relationship repaired and were never separated
- No Therapeutic Reunification





Sibling Relationships

- Can be one of life's longest intimate relationships
- Sibling relationships shape personality and are models for future relationships
- Older siblings serve as subsidiary attachment figures for younger siblings



Research and Prevalence

- Sibling sexual abuse is thought to be one of the most common forms of sexual abuse
Adler & Schutz (1995); Finkelhor (1980); Shaw, Lewis, Loeb, Rosado, & Rodriguez (2000)
- 15% of female & 10% of male students reported sibling sexual activity
Finkelhor (1979)
- Perception that sibling sexual abuse is harmless and a normal occurrence in children's sexual development
Rowntree (2007)

O'Brien, 1991

adolescents with sibling victims ($n = 75$)

vs.

adolescents with extrafamilial victims ($n = 95$)

On average, adolescents with sibling victims:

- Offended for longer time periods
- Were more likely to engage in sexual penetration
- Were more likely to have multiple victims
- Were more likely to experience physical abuse

Worling, 1995

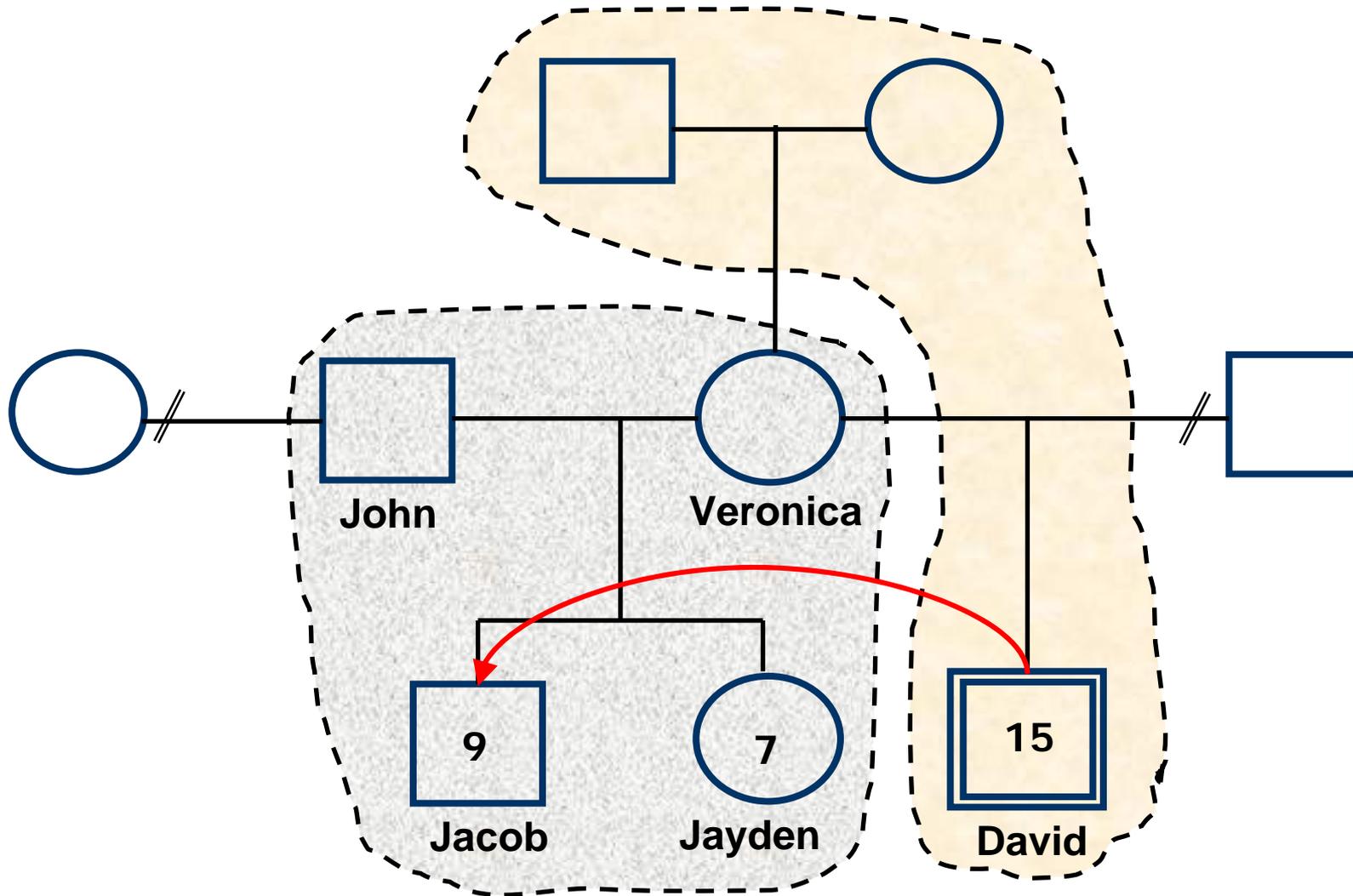
adolescent males who abused younger siblings ($n = 32$)

vs.

adolescent males who abused younger extrafamilial children ($n = 28$)

Adolescents who abused siblings reported more...

- marital discord
- parental rejection
- negative family atmosphere
- dissatisfaction with family relationships
- physical punishment
- childhood sexual abuse



Family Dynamics



Family Dynamics

So what does this mean for siblings?

- Turn to one another for comfort, nurturance, support, protection, validation
- As adolescents come into puberty they may sexualize their relationships with their siblings
- Marital discord, physical abuse and negative communication may serve as source of modelling
- May be pursuing a means of getting back at sibling or parents for perceived inequalities

Why?

- There is no specific profile of a family where intrafamilial sexual abuse occurs
- Often there is not a simple answer
- Parents and youth may never know why

When Sibling Sexual Abuse Occurs...

ALL MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY ARE AFFECTED



The Sexually Abused Child's Identified Needs:

- Sexually abused children may be traumatized by the sexual abuse and/or parental or systemic response to the disclosure
- They may experience relief and/or guilt if the offending youth is removed from the home
- They may experience pressure to present as more or less traumatized depending on parental and systemic response
- What they feel and what they articulate regarding the above may not be congruent at times

The Non-Abused Child's Identified Needs:

- The non-abused children may be impacted by the sexual abuse and/or parental or systemic response to the disclosure
- They may experience loyalty binds
- They may also experience confused feelings in regards to the parental and systems response
- They may lack information as to what has happened
- What they feel and what they articulate regarding the above may not be congruent at times

Offending Youth's Identified Needs:

- Offending youth may deny/minimize/distort their behaviour and/or feel tremendous shame and guilt
- They may experience pressure to deny/minimize their behaviour in order to “keep the family together”
- They may experience relief and/or guilt and loss if removed from the home depending on the family dynamics and system response

Parent(s) Identified Needs:

Parents may be united or divided, depending on a number of factors, including but not limited to:

- Sexual abuse histories
- Degree of marital stability, support and communication
- Ability to utilize external supports
- Parents may be more aligned with their biological child or more angry

Practice Challenges

- To view each family as unique with diverse strengths and challenges
- To be flexible in our beliefs and approaches within Best Practice guidelines
- To work collaboratively with families and other service providers

Best Practice Guides

- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA: 2003) Practice Standards and Guidelines
- Costin, Schuler, Curwen (2009). Responding to Adolescent Sexual Offending: Recommendations for a Regional Protocol.
- DiGiorgio-Miller, J. (1998). Sibling Incest: Treatment of the Family and the Offender
- Hodges, C.E. (2002). A 5-Step family therapy protocol to treat sibling on sibling sexual abuse.
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Offence Specific

Victimization
Specific

Reunification

Family

Element 1: *TEMPORARILY* remove adolescent sibling who sexually offended

Goals

- Prevent further abuse and establish safety plans
- Support the child who was abused to feel safe
- Encourage adolescent who abused to take responsibility
- Set the stage for completing the assessments

Potential Problems

- * Denial of abuse
- * Protracted removal
- * Refusal to remove teen
- * Lack of resources

Element 2: Complete Comprehensive Assessments

Goals

- Develop specific treatment plans for adolescent who offended and assess strengths and risks
- Develop specific treatment plans for child who was abused and assess strengths and risks
- To assess other family member's strengths and concerns
- Outline relationships among systems involved

Potential Problems

- * Denial of abuse
- * New disclosures
- * Mental health concerns
- * Lack of specialized services

Adolescent Sexual Offence Specific Assessment

- Every adolescent is unique
- The combination of factors that lead to sexual offending for one adolescent will likely be very different for another
- To determine estimate of risk for re-offence
- Gain understanding of unique treatment needs
- Placement considerations and reunification
- Often further or new information is disclosed





Adolescents are Not Adults



- When it comes to sexual offences, adolescents are not younger versions of adults who commit sexual offences (ATSA, 2000)
- It is important to utilize risk assessment tools that are designed specifically for the adolescent population

Element 3: Begin individual treatment

Goals

- Reduce risk for adolescent who offended sexually
- Reduce distress for child who was abused
- Establish therapeutic alliances

Potential Problems

- * Minimizing abuse
- * Pressure to speed up process
- * Poor individual progress
- * Lack of specialized services

Element 1: Separation

Element 2: Assessments

Element 3: BEGIN individual treatment

Element 4: Involve parents/caregivers

Element 5: Family remediation

Element 6: Therapy termination

**Sibling
Contact???**



Element 4: Involve Parents/Caregivers in Children's Individual Treatment

Goals

- To provide parents with resources to cope with issues specific to child who was abused—and to support child's treatment
- To provide parents with resources to cope with issues specific to adolescent who offended sexually—and to support adolescent's treatment

Potential Problems

- * Not enough preparation
- * Pressure to speed up process
- * Mental health concerns
- * Lack of specialized services

General Issues to Work Through

- Safety and safeguards
- Acknowledgement of abuse occurring
- A commitment that the abuse will stop
- Will of both siblings
- Communication
- Home environment
- Appropriate supervision

What is Important?

- For parents to see that the sexually abused child's safety needs are paramount
- Emotional readiness of the child who was sexually abused and other family members
- For youth to understand how s/he gave themselves permission to sexually offend
- For youth to understand how they will prevent themselves from offending again in the future

Element 5: Involve Family Members in Reunification

Timing & intensity dependent on child who was abused

Goals

- To remediate/reconcile sibling relationship
- To further develop and monitor safety plans
- To further enhance family functioning

Potential Problems

- * Systems clashes
- * Pressure to speed up process
- * Timing
- * Incomplete individual work

Guiding Principles

- Reunification is a process
- Safety is the overriding factor
- The victim's needs are paramount
- Accountability and responsibility are necessary to move beyond safety
- Resolution is part of a reunification process
- Resolution is the process of restoration, making amends, making peace
- Family relationships are changed through a resolution process

Non Offending Sibling Involvement

- Determine level of impact/secondary victimization
- Gain understanding of child/youth's strengths, needs and safety
- Included in reunification/safety planning

Increasing Degrees of Sibling Contact

- letters (or audio recordings) between the children—*with* therapist support and guidance



- in-therapy apology session
- joint therapy sessions
- out-of home, supervised visits
- in-home, supervised visits
- overnight visits
- return home

Factors that Enhanced Reunification

- Hope/Belief that reunification is possible
- Treated within the same agency
- Close collaboration with other agencies
- All family members supportive and involved
- Supervisory system and a unified approach

Safety Planning

- Communication
- Physical contact
- Supervision
- Chaperones
- Positions of trust/authority
- Privacy/Nudity/Bathing
- Media and access
- Monitoring risk factors
- Consequences



Rules move from being external, rigid, and explicit to being dynamic and created/monitored by parents

Element 6: Treatment Termination

Goals

- To review and celebrate treatment successes
- To empower all family members
- To establish transitional goals (if needed) and facilitate referrals (if needed)

Potential Problems

- * Timing
- * Pressure to speed up process
- * Safety plan “glitches”
- * Incomplete individual work

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QUESTIONS
OR
COMMENTS?

