

Defenses, excuses and rationalizations of perpetrators of sex offenses against children

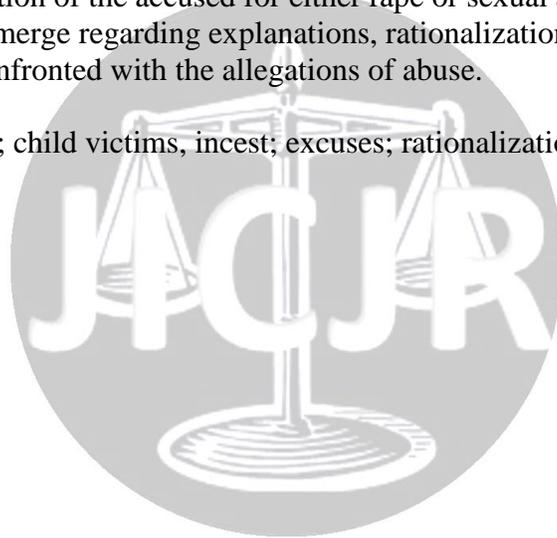
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ABSTRACT

One of the most abhorrent crimes is the molestation of children. Studies suggest that most of these offenses involve victims and offenders who have a familial or social relationship. This paper is a qualitative study of statements provided to a criminal investigator in a mid-southern city by offenders in 47 child sexual abuse cases from 2004-2010. All of the subject cases resulted in a conviction of the accused for either rape or sexual assault. The study will explore the themes that emerge regarding explanations, rationalizations and justifications offered by the offenders when confronted with the allegations of abuse.

Keywords: Sex offenders; child victims, incest; excuses; rationalizations; qualitative



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DEFENSES, EXCUSES AND RATIONALIZATIONS OF PERPETRATORS OF SEX OFFENSES AGAINST CHILDREN

The sexual abuse of a child is one of the most disturbing of criminal offenses. It has been estimated that over a quarter of a million children are sexually assaulted annually in the United States (Finklehor, Hammer & Sedlak, 2008). The Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (OJP, 2012) reports that there were 243,800 cases of sexual assault reported to police in 2011. It has been suggested that the notion of “stranger danger,” while not certainly unknown, is, in reality, far less common than portrayed in the mass media. In fact, strangers commit only 25.9% of rapes or sexual assaults (OJP, 2008). Other estimates suggest that the number of such crimes perpetrated by strangers is even less at 18% (Finklehor, et al, 2008). Thus, it is clear that friends or relatives of the victim commit the great majority of sex offenses against children. This is not a recent phenomenon, as it has been reported that incestuous child sexual abuse was an acknowledged problem in nineteenth century America (Adams, 2009 citing Gordon, 1988). Yet, the study of incest has experienced periods of significant underestimation such as a 1975 report stating that incestuous relationships between father and daughters were extremely rare and occurred in only one in one million families (Kluft, 2011, citing Henderson, 1975). Studies suggested the problem was much more prevalent and occurred in as many as one of twenty families of daughters and biological fathers and as many as one of seven families involving daughters and stepfathers (Kluft, 2011, citing Russell, 1986).

In reported cases, over 20% of perpetrators are family members, caretakers or family friends. Slightly over half are friends or acquaintances of the victim (Finklehor, et al, 2008). Take note that these data reflect *reported* assaults or attempts. Studies suggest that as few as 30% of victims of sexual abuse report the crime to law enforcement (Finklehor, et al, 2008). The fact that relatives or family friends are responsible for a large percentage of child sexual abuse offenses may have a negative impact upon reporting. The 30% of victims that disclose the abuse are usually older children or adolescents. Studies suggest that 43% of those who disclose do so accidentally (Kluft, 2011). The reasons for not disclosing the abuse include fear of reprisal by the offender, the desire to protect the family from the truth, shame, the wish to avoid the extreme embarrassment and stigmatization that will result from disclosure of the abuse, along with lack of confidence in the ability of the legal system to protect the victim (Kluft, 2011).

The take-home lesson is that there are so many disincentives to revelation that many incest victims will undergo several rounds of psychiatric treatment before they risk revealing this aspect of their histories (Klufft, 2011, p. 6) .

Just as most victims do not come forward and report the abusive conduct, the government, in some jurisdictions, is also reluctant to act in cases of incestuous rape and sexual abuse. It has been suggested that less than 10% of child sexual abuse cases are prosecuted, with the blame for this systemic failure being laid on prosecutors who refuse to go forward with criminal charges in these cases (Adams, 2009, citing Noy, 1993). Explanations for low prosecution rates include inherent problems in dealing with child witnesses, perceived lack of corroborating evidence, shifting of legal actions to the overlapping jurisdiction of civil and administrative agencies, and the use of lesser offenses such as incest as the primary offense instead of the much more serious offenses of rape or sexual assault (Adams, 2009; Mitchell, 2007).

Another suggestion is that of a patriarchal cover-up whereby researchers and legal authorities propagated false information to hide the fact that the perpetrator of child sexual

assault was most often the father of the victim. It has been asserted that pioneer psychologist Sigmund Freud falsified his own research that disclosed the fact that child sexual abuse was not a crime associated with the lower classes and mentally impaired persons, but was perpetrated by members of all classes and frequently by fathers. It has been claimed that Freud instead, falsely targeted uncles, nannies and other children as the offenders of child molestation cases. Freud also proposed his "seduction theory" that stated the child was the instigator of the sexual behavior (Mitchell, 2007, citing Bolen, 2001). Freud later modified his position and said that claims of abuse by the purported victims were simply false, being "fantasies, based on their own incestuous wishes" (Mitchell, 2007, 415, citing Bonaparte, 1954, 1887-1902).

Regardless of which set of falsified data were propounded by Freud and others, this attempt to draw attention away from fathers as perpetrators may be a part of the origin of some of the defenses, excuses and rationalizations sometimes offered by persons accused of child molestation.

Researchers have described different categories of motivations of incestuous conduct. The perpetrator may be motivated by affection and use the sexual contact as a substitute for normal fulfilling and nurturing familiar relationships. The perpetrator may be aggressive and physically abusive toward the victim. The perpetrator may be even more hostile and act out feelings of rage toward the victim. It has been reported that in some families there is more than one perpetrator and that the otherwise normal relationships are characterized by erotic conduct (Kluft, 2011, citing Maddock & Larson, 1995).

Studies have reported progressing patterns of behavior in the sexual abuse of victims by the perpetrators. The first stage of the process is "engagement" where the perpetrator begins to give special attention to the victim. Using games or other play activities that slowly incorporate sexual contact may demonstrate this engagement process. This process is also referred to as "grooming" of the victim for sexual contact (Kluft, 2011, p. 4). The next stage, "sexual interaction," is that of increased sexual contact between the perpetrator and the victim and may involve advancing the sexual conduct from exposure and sexual contact to penetration of body parts (Kluft, 2011, citing Sgroi, et al, 1982).

The third stage is that of ensuring "secrecy" for the purpose of continuing the sexual conduct without interruption or apprehension. The perpetrator will blame the child or others for the conduct. The perpetrator will explain that no one would believe the child if she did disclose and that any disclosure whether believed or not will have devastating consequences for the child and the family (Kluft, 2011, citing Sgroi, et al, 1982).

The fourth stage is that of "disclosure," either deliberately by the victim or accidentally. This stage may result in very different responses by the family, which may depend upon the role of the perpetrator in relation to the family. A stepparent or boyfriend of the parent of the victim may face a family that supports the victim. If the perpetrator is a parent, the family may come to the defense of the perpetrator and blame the victim. This compounds the victimization felt by the child. In this scenario the next stage is that of "suppression" in which the family may actively support the perpetrator and bring pressure to bear on the victim to not tell authorities or to recant a disclosure (Kluft, 2011, citing Sgroi, et al, 1982).

It appears that many perpetrators are successful in deflecting blame to the victim. "The pervasiveness of shame, guilt, self-loathing, and self-directed disgust experienced by many incest victims cannot be overstated" (Kluft, 2011, p. 8). As noted above, studies suggest that few victims disclose the abuse.

The literature includes relatively few qualitative studies of sex offenders. One proposed reason for this dearth of qualitative research is that criminologists are reluctant to have direct contact with the offenders. (Beauregard, Rossmo & Proulx (2007). In fact, it appears that most of the qualitative studies related to sex offenders focus on the efficacy of treatment programs (Grady & Brodersen, 2008; Hatcher & Noakes, 2010; Scheela & Rochelle, 2001; Wakeling, Webster & Mann, R., 2005; Williams, D. 2004). Typically, it appears that the motivation of the offender is the focus of the study. Gilgun and Connor (1989) interviewed volunteer offenders and considered the motivations for their actions. Sources of pleasure reported by offenders were orgasm, touching and looking, and control of the situation and planning of the offense. Many of the offenders in the study objectified the victims and did not view them as persons during the sexual activity.

A qualitative study of British child pornography offenders identified primary themes of “obsession and compulsion, isolation, escapism, enjoyment and self-distancing” (Winder & Gough, 2010, p. 128). This study focused on self-distancing including efforts by offenders to minimize and rationalize their behavior. One recurring rationalization by these offenders was that the children who were the subjects of the pornographic images were smiling and appeared to be enjoying the process. The appearance of happiness by the subjects is suggested as a means of minimizing any harm to the victims (Winder & Gough, 2010). The offenders in this study also distinguished themselves from other sex offenders in that they never touched a child. This draws a bright “distinction between immoral contact and innocent looking” (Winder & Gough, 2010, p. 133). These offenders attempt to ignore the fact that their possession and use of these images creates a market for the exploitation of child victims of the child pornography industry.

A study of the behavioral characteristics of rapists reviewed police reports and court transcripts of Australian rape offenders (McCabe & Wauchope, 2005). However, this study involved perpetrators of rapes against adult victims. The study considered the type of assault, the relationship of the offender and victim, victim activity and communication behavior of the offender toward the victim. Interestingly, this study of adult victims and offenders reports that the most common relationship status between victims and offenders was that of strangers. This is in contrast to the statistics found in the general crime report data (O.J.P., 2008). As to communication patterns, the most common theme was what was described as a “caring/persuasion/reassurance theme” in the police reports and an “angry/demeaning/threatening theme” in the court transcripts (McCabe & Wauchope, 2005, p. 245).

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative review of archival data. Specifically, these data are statements given to criminal investigators by persons who have been accused of child molestation. It is hoped that the study will provide insight into the perceptions and attitudes of the offender along with the deflections, rationalizations, defenses, and possibly acceptances of the offender and the consequences of their behavior. The goal of the study is to identify the following:

- (1) How the abuse was detected;
- (2) Why victims do not disclose the abuse;
- (3) How perpetrators conceal the abuse from discovery;
- (4) Methods used by perpetrators to gain access to victims;
- (5) Reasoning of knowledgeable parents in covering up perpetrators' abuse;

(6) Rationalizations and justifications offered by perpetrators.

The study population is that of persons who have been convicted of the felony level sex offenses of rape or sexual assault of a child in a rural city in Northeast Arkansas. This is a form of purposive sampling in that the subjects are known to have relevant experiences connected to the particular socio-legal phenomenon that is the subject matter of the study (Devers & Frankel, 2000). The same criminal investigator interviewed all of the offenders within a time period of approximately five years. Audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews of 47 offenders were obtained by requesting the information from the investigating agency pursuant to the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act.

The request was limited to offenders who had been adjudicated to be guilty of the criminal offense of rape or sexual assault of a minor. Rape, as related to a minor, is delineated as sexual intercourse or deviate sexual activity by an unrelated offender with a person under 14, or by a guardian or other related offender with a person under 18 (A.C.A. § 5-14-103). Deviate sexual activity includes any act of sexual gratification involving penetration of the anus or mouth of another by the penis of the offender or a body member or foreign object manipulated by the offender (A.C.A. § 5-14-101). Sexual assault includes sexual contact which includes touching for sexual gratification (A.C.A. § 5-14-125).

The request was further limited to offenders who had been interviewed by one specific criminal investigator. The recordings all indicate that the defendants were fully apprised of their constitutional rights and privileges against self-incrimination and the right to have assistance of counsel during questioning. All defendants appear to have made knowing and voluntary waivers of their rights and consented to the interviews. Again, all defendants were adjudicated to be guilty by plea of guilty or a guilty verdict by a jury of the offense of rape or sexual assault.

The study will utilize an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005) in the analysis of the offenders' statements. The transcripts of statements were reviewed and analyzed for the emergence of themes (Groenwald, 2004) for the purpose of analyzing the data using a strategy of phenomenological analysis.

Cases were divided and analyzed by age of victim (all but three being under 14), relationship to perpetrator, and type of offense. Archival data from 2004-2010 included case file summaries, forensic interview reports, affidavits for warrant of arrest, arrest reports, reports submitted to prosecuting attorneys, police reports, witness statements, judgment and commitment orders, interview forms, victim and offender statements, and medical records. It should be noted that one of the authors is a part-time prosecuting attorney in the jurisdiction in which these cases were investigated and adjudicated. All of the data used herein was collected and compiled by criminal investigators. As noted above, interview data was obtained pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act request. Work product of prosecuting attorneys or interview notes compiled by prosecutors was not a part of this project.

Of the 47 cases, 55.32% (n=26) were classified for the purposes of this research as incestuous perpetrators (familial). The perpetrators range in age from 17-56 years, (M=39.19, Md=36.00, SD=15.05). Eleven (23.4%) of the perpetrators were known prior sex offenders.

FINDINGS

The total population of the perpetrators is 47 persons who were found guilty by plea or trial of the offenses of rape or sexual assault. The age range of the perpetrators is 16-73. Almost all (97.8%) of the perpetrators were Caucasian. This is consistent with county

demographics which was reported by 2010 Census data as being 96.4% white (U.S. Census, nd). The gender breakdown of perpetrators is 85% male and 15% female. Victims ranged in age from eight months to 14 years (M=8.7, Md=7.00, SD=4.58). Victims were 77% female and 23% male. The offenses involved in the study resulted in five pregnancies. In 54.8% of the cases, victims reported that the offenses occurred repeatedly.

The majority of cases (78.7%) met the relational elements of the Arkansas definition of incest. Incest is defined in the Arkansas Criminal Code as marriage, sexual intercourse or deviate sexual activity by defendant and victim both of whom are 16 years of age or older and related as follows:

- (1) An ancestor or a descendant;
- (2) A stepchild or adopted child;
- (3) A brother or sister of the whole or half blood;
- (4) An uncle, aunt, nephew, or niece; or
- (5) A stepgrandchild or adopted grandchild.

This offense requires knowing conduct on the part of the defendant. (A.C.A. 5-26-202). The perpetrators in this study were not charged with incest, but were charged with the more serious offenses of rape or sexual assault first or second degree. The relationship elements of incest were present in 78.7% of the cases studied. All of the perpetrators either had a familial relationship with the victim (76.9%) or were the live-in boyfriend of the mother of the victim (23.1%).

EMERGENT THEMES: RATIONALIZATIONS, JUSTIFICATIONS AND EXCUSES

The data suggest several themes that may be described as rationalizations, justifications and excuses offered by offenders to mitigate or otherwise minimize their conduct.

I WAS JUST "CHECKING" HER TO MAKE SURE SHE WAS CLEAN

"You know what the doctor's told you, to wash your privates really good. She used to get urinary tract infections." (Thomas, December 13, 2005)

He stated he had nothing to hide and he had done nothing wrong. He stated sometimes babysat his nephew out of the goodness of his heart and that he had given him a bath and washed his bottom and his front, saying he washed him with a washcloth and that he was very careful. He stated his finger might have slipped without knowing. "I never molested him. I gave him a shower one time, that's all I done... My finger might have slipped out not knowing it. It might have slipped out of the rag, not knowing. The day before I was just asking him if he's getting abused at home and he would start crying and then he would come over, he would have no underwear on. He told me and my wife that he was kept from food." Later confessed that he gave his nephew a shower and stuck his

finger in his butt. He stated it happened one time. He stated it is possible that he may have injured his nephew when he stuck his finger in him. **(Thomas, June 9, 2008)**

This interview is very instructive as to how perpetrators will confess to investigators. These offenders will concede the physical contact, but try mightily to put an innocent, even helpful, spin on the activity. "***My finger ... might have slipped out of the rag, not knowing it.***" (Thomas, June 9, 2008) The perpetrator has been caught, but hopes that he can explain himself to the investigator. That offender would slowly, concede one point after another. He first conceded giving the child a shower, but no sexual contact; then admitted he might have touched the child with his finger, but with no sexual intent; then admitted putting his finger in the child's "butt" one time. Finally, admitting that he may even have injured the child when he penetrated the child's anus with his finger. Investigators will discover these facts in incremental steps. It appears to be important to let the suspect concede certain actions, while continuing to deny criminal intent. As seen from these interviews, they often will eventually admit each element of the offense.

"I feel real bad about it. I wish I could go back and I would never have done it."
(Thomas, June 18, 2008)

"I gave her a bath. Her mother was there, but she was in bed sick. I washed her with a washcloth on her vagina. She has not been wiping herself properly when she urinates. I used my hand to inspect her vagina to make sure she was clean. Her mother had been onto her quite a bit about not wiping and washing carefully. Normally, she bathes herself. In the past two months, I have bathed her about two times." **(Thomas, June 9, 2008)**

Mother confronted stepfather; he stated that he had put diaper rash cream on her vagina while the mother was at work. He admitted to investigator that "...she said she was hurting up there and I was looking at it and she had white stuff all around it and everything. I told her to go take a shower and when she got done taking a shower I would take medicine and put it on her. And I did that, I put medicine on her. I read the instructions on what you're supposed to do with it, so I took and put it right where it said to put it around." She said he admitted to having sexual thoughts about sticking a play item into the child's vagina but that he never acted on those thoughts. The mother then told him to leave the house. When the child was interviewed, she said her daddy touched her in her private areas. When asked when the last time this happened- yesterday—he played with her private and stuck his pee pee into her butt. She stated it happened in Mommy and Daddy's bedroom. She stated her mom was at the store when this happened. **(Thomas, June 3, 2008)**

It appears that bathing of children along with application of medicated ointment or lotion presents opportunities for child molesters to have contact with their victims. Bathing is an opportunity for "grooming" victims to accept contact by the perpetrator with parts of their bodies that are not otherwise touched. This is consistent with the literature on "grooming" (Kluft, 2011). As stated above, the offender may admit this contact as a normal, and even essential, part of child rearing. However, the offender also admitted sexual thoughts about contact with the child, but still denied any actual sexual intent in his contact. In some cases one admission then

follows another until the suspect has admitted all elements of the crime. In other cases, such as this, the offender admits only selective elements of the offense, but these admissions are enough to be strong corroboration of the victim's allegations. Be aware that while corroboration of the victim's testimony is not required, it is very compelling to a jury.

BLAME IT ON THE VICTIM: SEXUAL ENTICEMENT

"The child was seductive towards me." . (Thomas, August 4, 2009)

"She's just so lovey." (Thomas, December 11, 2009)

He stated that he did not make them touch him anywhere or do anything else they did not want to do. (Thomas, March 30, 2007)

This is a good example of shifting blame to the victim. The child victim is the sexual aggressor in the mind of the offender. By casting the victim in the role of aggressor, it is possible that the offender believes that he can gain sympathy from the investigator or from a jury. The investigator may encourage this belief by the perpetrator. The law is clear that the young child cannot consent to sexual conduct, so even if it is true that the victim solicited the activity, it is not a defense. However, these interviews suggest that the victims were groomed for sex and the conduct was planned by the offenders in nearly all of the incidents.

"...victim has bad mental problem and is hyper. Anytime you refuse her anything, she gets angry."

When asked if he put her penis in her. "I didn't but she thought I did. I was asleep and she was to and I guess I was in my sleep and she woke up and thought I was doing something to her." (Thomas, December 11, 2009)

"You know we'd watch television and she would want me to rub her leg and I just rub her leg and I just got too close and I just caught myself and jerked back". He stated he accidentally touched her between her legs and it was possible that he had an erection due to the fact that she is very aggressive and was wiggling around on his lap. When asked if he'd be willing to take a polygraph—"No, I'm too nervous, I don't think I would pass it." The little girl stated her grandfather would stick his hands in her pants almost every time that she was at his house and she loved him, but wanted him to stop touching her. (Thomas, March 7, 2009)

Again, the offender blames the initial contact on the child victim. She wanted him to "rub her leg." She initiated the contact and he merely followed her lead and pulled back upon getting too close to a problem area. Then the offender blames the little girl for wiggling on his lap giving him an erection. The young girl stated that the contact happened every time she visited her grandfather. She loved him, but wanted the conduct to stop. This conflict between continued love for the perpetrator and a desire for the abuse to end is also a recurring theme in this and other studies.

When her mom was at work, her dad put his "woohoo", in her mouth. She (age 5) stated that something yellow and nasty came out and it made her throw up. He stuck his

'woohoo' into her 'woohoo' and described pornography being on at the time (a movie with girls and boys doing things to boys and girls and licking privates. She gave the number 5, when asked how many times this had happened. The father (the perpetrator) said he didn't want her to be around him ever again until she had some counseling because she had some problems. He said one night, he just woke up and child was sucking on his penis and he ejaculated in her mouth. Child stated that he slapped her after she vomited. He did confess that she vomited. He told investigator that he and his wife were into a lot of sexual experimentation and he had a bad drinking problem. Stated they had pornographic videos, vibrator and massage oils. He stated that one night after his kids went to bed, he drank beer and his wife went to work at bar. He stated he was watching porn, passed out and feel asleep. That's when he awoke with child on top of him. (Thomas, August 4, 2009)

"I probably passed out from all the beer I had drank. I woke up, (she) was on top of me with her mouth on my penis and I ejaculated. I grabbed her by her shoulders and sat her down. I told her this was wrong and I explained to her that she could not do this. I told her that adults do act like this, and not children. I told her to go to bed. I gathered all the pornos out of the house and got rid of them. I also slowed down on the drinking. I also blame my wife for having things like pornos in the house. I am very ashamed and humiliated because my daughter was watching a porno video and got the wrong idea about sex. I have never touched my penis against her vagina. The only way that might have happened would have been when I was asleep or passed out from being drunk." (Thomas, August 4, 2009)

This offender blames the victim, his complicit wife and alcohol for the abusive behavior. He admitted to a lifestyle that included some "experimentation" with his wife that his young daughter must have witnessed. So, he first blames his wife. Then he points out that the girl has some "problems" and needs counseling. This is another extrinsic factor that he can attempt to use to deflect his own culpability. Then he blames alcohol, which we will continue to see used as an excuse by the subjects in this study. Finally, he puts the ultimate blame on the victim by saying that he woke up with his penis in her mouth. He is the true victim in this case, not his little girl. Finally, in his statement, he says that if he did have any penile-vaginal contact it was after he was asleep or passed out from drinking. This explanation provides the possibility that if he did initiate the conduct it was involuntary as it occurred during sleep or intoxication. While, voluntary intoxication is not a defense to criminal conduct, action taken while asleep is not "voluntary" and not the basis for criminal liability.

We continue to see this incremental admission of various elements of the offense of rape.

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY: DISORGANIZATION, PATHOLOGIES AND ISOLATION

In all of the cases studied, there was a blood, marital or pseudo-marital relationship between the victims and offenders. Over three-fourths (76.9%) were related by blood or marriage and the remaining 23.1% of offenders were live-in boyfriends of the mother of the victims.

_____The child stated that her daddy also put his finger into her private area. Both girls reported that their uncle had tickled them when they were wearing a dress and he takes his clothes off and tickles them between their legs. This happened when her parents were in another room. 3 YR OLD stated he touched her with his finger and that he kissed her under her diaper between her legs. Also reported her daddy touched her on her butt and her sister had touched her and poked something into her butt and twat (father passed polygraph). Uncle was living with family while her mother was in jail. When interviewed in jail, the mother was told of allegations against her brother and admitted he had done the same to her when she was a child. Also accused of raping another of his sister's nieces, but no physical evidence, and the case was not pursued. (Thomas, July 12, 2005)

This interview identifies multiple victims, multiple offenders and inter-generational sexual abuse. This is a literal cesspool of incestuous behavior. The mother was aware of her brother's sexual proclivities because he had abused her when she was a young child and she knew of previous allegations against him that were prosecuted due to lack of evidence. It appears that the mother of the victims did not disclose her brother's abuse at the time. This is consistent with the literature that most victims do not disclose the abuse (Kluft, 2011; Finklehor, 2008).

Had the mother of the victims disclosed her brother's abuse, would the other allegation of abuse have been taken more seriously and resulted in prosecution of this sex offender? If so, would his incarceration or treatment have interrupted this recurring cycle of abuse? But, this scenario also includes abuse by the father of the children. The mother of the victims was abused by her brother and she later married a man who was also a child molester. Does her victimization as a child leave her less able to take appropriate action to prevent the abuse of her own children by her husband and her brother? Interventions must include treatment for victims of child sexual abuse. This treatment must address ways and means of preventing the abuse of future generations of victims.

When 5-year old nephew was interviewed, he told investigators about uncle and it happened more than one time. Child said his own mother also touched him while he was taking a bath. (Thomas, November 4, 2004).

This illustrates another example of a victim being molested by multiple family members.

When niece (age 13) was interviewed, she admitted that Chester had touched her on her private areas and he licked her privates and made her touch his doo-dobber until white-milky stuff came out. She never told her mother fearing she would not believe her, because she didn't believe her about nothing. She was no longer in her biological mother's custody. Mother's husband (not her biological father) was in prison for molesting her 5 years prior. (Thomas, November 4, 2004).

The mother of this victim was the conduit for two separate men to abuse her daughter. The brother of the victim's mother was the current perpetrator of abuse and the mother's husband had already been sent to prison for abusing her daughter. This is another example of the mother of a victim failing to prevent subsequent acts of abuse against her child. Interventions should

include more effective modalities of treatment for parents and care-takers related to youth protection.

A 13-year-old female living in adopted mother's home. While the adoptive mother was at home, the biological mother and stepfather would spend the night. The biological mother performed oral sex on her biological daughter while forcing the child to perform oral sex on her stepfather. The stepfather repeatedly raped the girl both vaginally and anally. The stepfather's brother was also arrested on rape charges against two of his nephews, ages 5 and 6. The stepfather's brother and stepfather both admitted taking turns having sex with the 13-year-old stepdaughter. The 13-year-old female was arrested a few months later after she admitted to performing oral sex on her 5 and 6-year old brothers. (Thomas, March 17, 2005).

This interview illustrates multiple offenders against a victim with the additional element of the victim also becoming a perpetrator by abusing her younger brothers.

When victim was nine, she stated that her grandfather started touching her. Eventually the grandmother moved out. Granddaughter stated she stays with him every other weekend when she is there and he will make her go to bed with him. She stated, he will lick me and make me suck him. (This happened over 200 times over a three-year period). Her own mother confessed that he had done this to her and her sister.

When asked if he'd [the defendant] had his mouth on her vagina—

I've might have had my mouth on it. But that's not having intercourse is it? She comes to my house everyday. I love her. I have tried my best to give her things and cause she's always been an A-B student and I hope that she will be something. You know I went for years and thought that nothing like that would ever cross my mind. And she's so lovey. I mean she's so lovey and we spend time and time together.

When asked if he put her penis in her. "I didn't but she thought I did. I was asleep and she was too and I guess I was in my sleep and she woke up and thought I was." But you have performed oral sex on her? "Yea, it finally lead up to that (laughs). It didn't start out that way. It just started out being lovey and rubbing and talking. And I know little girls sleep with their mommas and daddy's and grandpa's and grandma's. That's normal." (Thomas, December 11, 2009).

This victim explains repeated acts of abuse by her grandfather who also had abused her mother and her aunt when they were children. This is intergenerational abuse by a perpetrator who would seemingly engage in sexual contact with the young girls with whom he had access and contact. The offender's statement to the investigator also reveals the incremental admissions described above. First, he "might have" had his mouth on her vagina. Later, he admitted performing oral sex on her, but that "...it didn't start out that way. It started out being lovey and rubbing and talking.... That's normal." This offender never admitted penile-vaginal intercourse. He seemed to be accepting of oral sex with his granddaughter, but drew the line at penile penetration of her vagina.

It is "all in the family" because that is where the opportunities lie. The perpetrators have access to prey. Other family members who should be protecting their children may include mothers who have been abused by the same or other perpetrators and fail to take steps to prevent abuse.

INCEST THRIVES IN SILENCE WHILE FAMILIES LIVE UNDER UMBRELLAS OF THREATS OF VIOLENCE OR OTHER ADVERSE OUTCOMES

The child stated that father choked and raped her mother and regularly beat her up.

Uncle admitted he had sex with her several times before he got custody of her. Victim was afraid to tell caseworker about the abuse. At the time, the 15-year old female was five months pregnant. The uncle admitted to fathering the child. (Thomas, April 5, 2010).

He told her if her mom found out, he would shoot her. (Thomas, March 8, 2010).

"Don't talk. Don't say nothin' or I'll hurt you".

She stated that she did not call police again because he had threatened to kill her and she knew he would do it. Stated she had been a victim of abuse for years and was even admitted to hospital because of abuse, but never told police for fear of what he would do. He had beaten her as recently as the week prior. (Thomas, June 8, 2005).

Daughter told mother two years prior that stepfather had been 'touching' her. Mother stated that she tried to move out at time, but he beat her up real bad that night she left. Daughter confirmed mother tried to throw him out, but he kept coming back to house. The victim said she was not mad at her mother and their family was all terrified of him. (Thomas, June 8, 2005).

These interviews all report violence or threats of violence by the perpetrators against the victims for the purpose of silencing the victims. The literature states that less than a third (30%) of victims ever report sexual abuse. Violence and threat of violence is one reason for this silence by victims. Sometimes the violence is against the victim. Sometimes it is against the mother of the victim. In both types of situation, the purpose is the same - to ensure the silence of the victim and the continued opportunity for this abusive sexual conduct.

Perpetrator told daughter that if she ever told, everyone would be mad at her and that she would get sent to a foster home. (Thomas, January 16, 2006).

This is a more subtle type of threat. The victim will be the one to suffer if she discloses the abuse. She will feel the brunt of disapproval by other family members. She will be the one

who is forced out of the family. When faced with this threat the victim will continue to tolerate the abuse in order to maintain her own place in this dysfunctional family.

"Your mom and your grandma will get in trouble if you tell" (Thomas, March 7, 2005).

This interview is another threat to associations of the victim. Others, to whom the child has close and loving connections will suffer if the child discloses the offenders abuse. This is not an idle threat by the offender. All states have criminal offenses for permitting abuse of a minor. The victim will be forced to face ongoing victimization or risk losing her mother and grandmother.

"He would threaten to take the video games away when I would try to stop the incidents." His Uncle stated, "I am going to return everything and take everything back and I didn't want that because I was so obsessed with it" (video games) (Thomas, February 14, 2006).

This statement indicates a threat to things that may be important to the victim. Part of the grooming process involves positive reinforcement for the abusive conduct. The child is given pleasurable things in return for engaging in the sexual conduct. The child in this case was given video games. This child appears to have compartmentalized the different behaviors. He became "obsessed" with the video games and was willing to accept continued abuse even when he wanted it to end in order to keep the games.

THE INCEST SPILLS OVER INTO PEER AND FAMILIAL INTERACTIONS WHILE CREATING A WEB OF CONTINUED MOLESTATIONS OF OTHERS OR REPEATED SEXUAL VICTIMIZATIONS BY OTHERS

When asked if he did this to his cousins, he admitted that he did put his "wiener in their butts." He stated that he stopped because he was thinking it was wrong. He stated that when he was 12, one of his cousins put his wiener in his butt. It happened about two years ago. He stated since that happened he has done that to his girlfriend. He said that his 5-year old cousin "wanted to". He stated that he told him to do it and he said ok. He said at the same time, his cousin (5 year-old female) was in room at the time and was playing with her dolls. He stated he put it in 1 time and then did it to her. He stated that he calls his private part "his meat". He stated that he did not make them touch him anywhere or do anything else they did not want to do. (Thomas, March 30, 2007).

This case demonstrates the seeming ease with which victims can morph into perpetrators even at young ages. This perpetrator was victimized at the age of twelve years and then started molesting his younger cousins. Will this then lead some of his victims to molest other children in the future?

She (15 year-old female) can't remember how many times they had sex. She told her uncle (age 33) that he really screwed her up and she is uncomfortable around men.

She (the offender) admitted that she had been accused of this before with a female relative when she was a teenager. She stated she was molested by her step-father as a child. (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

It was discovered that perp used to baby sit 4 year old girl (neighbor) and evidence was recently found that that child had been molested. The child stated that perpetrator touched her in a bad way. Ten years prior a report from 1997 found her abusing another 4 YR OLD boy.

Both of these interviews are further examples of perpetrators who had multiple victims over time. One exhibited the theme of the victim as a child becoming a perpetrator of abuse as an adult.

Fifteen year old female stated her Uncle had been having sex with her for 2-3 years, about the same length of time as it had with her own father. Abuse started with Uncle when she was 12-13, sometimes daily. When she lived with her father, he requested that she have sex with 63 YR OLD WM living with her father (for money) so that he could buy drugs and cigarettes and gas with the money. She doesn't understand why all these men are sexually abusing her, and not her sister. (Thomas, July 26, 2010).

This victim was molested by at least four different men, including her father, her uncle and two male friends of her father. This is interesting in that this victim had a younger sister who had not been molested by these men even though she was also in the home. Would she have felt less victimized if her sister had also been involved? In any event, this case illustrates the devolution of this particular family environment into sexual depravity.

OFFENDER ATTRACTED TO YOUNGER VERSION OF THE MOTHER, LEADING HIM TO MOLESTATION OF THE CHILD.

"He would tie me down every time he did it and he kept saying, I don't want your mother, I want you. You know you are pretty, you're young. I need someone who is young and he then would feel happy for his self." He didn't want to be with the mother because they were the same age. Mother knew about it and advised her not to tell anyone because that would get her in a world of shit.

--14-year-old female (Thomas, March 8, 2010).

While not a recurring theme as to the perpetrator's motivation, this is a unique element of this case of abuse. The perpetrator views the victim as a younger and still attractive substitute for his wife whom he appears to no longer find physically attractive. We do see a recurring theme as to the failure of the mother to recognize and perform her duty to protect her child from her abusive husband. Was the mother fearful as a result of her own criminal exposure or was she afraid of losing her husband? Either or both factors may have contributed to the mother's crime of omission.

BLAME IT ON MARITAL PROBLEMS

"This will be our secret" when she asked him why he did it. He told her that "when she's married, she will understand."

--41 year-old uncle/15 year-old female (Thomas, May 1, 2007).

The stepfather admitted that he had molested his own children 20 years prior (1982)—it was handled in family court and the children were all returned to him. He stated he had just been through a divorce at the time and told his oldest daughter that "daddy just hurts all the time—please help daddy feel better." He stated that's how he got her to suck on his penis and his younger daughter watched. He had also been arrested 10 years prior to that (1973) for approaching an underage neighbor girl. (Thomas, December 9, 2005).

It is not fault of the offender for his perverse sexual urges. These men had been through bad marriages or relationships. These young girls were made to feel sorry for the perpetrators and engage in conduct suggested by the men to help them feel better and get through their personal troubles. It was the bad relationships that caused the criminal behavior.

BLAME IT ON DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Uncle stated he drank 1½ pints of whiskey and some beer. On a scale of 1-10 he thought he was probably an 8 as far as how drunk he was and denied raping his 12 year-old niece. He stated that he had never been questioned about anything like this before. He later changed his story and advised that he had been questioned once about five years ago about something like this."

"I am not that type of person. If it wasn't for the drugs, I wouldn't have done it." (Thomas, April 26, 2006).

Mother admitted to performing oral sex on her baby. Husband found out and threw up in her face and threatened to leave her. Admitted she is bi-sexual and uses methamphetamine with her husband. (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

He confessed and admitted he would not have done this if it wasn't for the drugs and he is not that type of person. Stated the night of the offense he used cocaine and had been up for days when the incident occurred. He knew it was wrong and didn't mean do it and as soon as he realized, he stopped. He had been in trouble once before for stabbing someone (had a prior felony battery conviction from 1998) (Thomas, April 26, 2006).

Drugs, including alcohol, are blamed for all manner of bad and criminal conduct. Child molestation is well included in this social phenomenon. All of these perpetrators sought to use the excuse of intoxication. As noted above, voluntary intoxication is not a defense to criminal conduct. Yet, it seems to give the offenders some solace in being able to blame their conduct on drugs. This factor can provide a tool for investigators when questioning suspects. Perpetrators of sexual abuse appear to admit to their conduct more readily if they can blame some extrinsic factor such as intoxication.

BLAME IT ON CURIOSITY OR ACCIDENT

“While I was changing (her daughter’s diaper), I looked at her and got curious to how a baby felt and I stuck my right index finger into her bottom. She cried and I stopped. I then placed my finger into her vagina she cried and I stopped”.

--22-year old perpetrator/eight-month-old daughter (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

“It’s really, really hard to explain. It’s almost like something there at that minute that there is no control over it. And then after it’s over you think, why did I do that?”

--61 year-old grandfather (admitted raping his own daughters and granddaughter) (Thomas, December 12, 2009).

Curiosity is to blame. The 22 year old perpetrator has such an inquisitive mind that he just had to find out what it would feel like to insert his finger into the child's anus and vagina. The uncontrollable urge of the grandfather is probably a much more plausible explanation of a pedophile. When the act is complete he knows it was wrong and searches for a reason as to why he did this despicable thing. This lack of control has implications for the criminal justice response to the sexual abuse of children by repeat offenders. Incarceration to protect future victims and treatment of pedophiles so as to reduce continued victimization are the primary interventions for such offenders.

"I slipped up. It was an accident." (Thomas, January 10, 2006).

She said she tickled him on his sides and upper legs. She said she might have touched his penis when she was tickling him. (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

She said she did not pull his pants down. She was not sure if he pulled down his pants. She said she did not remember his pants being down. She stated that she could have touched his penis while she was tickling him. She said she did not intend any sexual contact. (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

“We were playing video games and before I knew it I done slipped up and touched her. (four-year old female niece) I put my hand down her pants and fondled her.” When asked if he inserted his finger inside her, he replied, "I think I did. I didn't mean it.” He stated that he had done this before when he was about 12 or 13—to an 8 or 9 year-old girl
--21 year-old male (Thomas, January 10, 2006).

I accidentally touched his penis while he was crawling across my lap. (Mother speaking of small son). (Thomas, August 18, 2004).

We was playing and accidentally grabbed her. He further said she accidentally touched his penis.

He was rubbing her back and it went too far. On at least two occasions he put his Hands down her pants and rubbed her buttocks. He acknowledged that victim had seen his penis, but it was

an accident. He stated he came out of the bathroom and had boxers on. He stated it was hanging out of his boxers and he was scratching it. (Thomas, January 10, 2006)

These cases are similar to the "it just slipped in" case discussed above. But these perpetrators did not immediately go on to confess to criminal intent. The act may have happened, but they did not mean anything by their conduct. They had no sexual intent.

Admitted he had six-year-old niece sitting on his lap and realized his finger was in her vagina. He stated that as soon as he realized it was there, he moved his hand because "I knew it was wrong." He further disclosed that it "could have happened before, that that was too much [for him] to remember." "Hey, some days I got a bad memory. It was just accidentally"
--72 year-old male perpetrator/6 year-old niece (victim) (Thomas, July 22, 2005)

This interview includes a partial admission of accidental sexual contact, but hedges as to the allegation of prior incidences of contact. The prior sexual contact may have happened, but the offender just has memory lapses and cannot say if it did or did not occur. This is a recurring theme. The suspect states that it "could have happened." He does not admit nor deny the allegations. This theme is also related to the intoxication claims in which perpetrators say it might have happened, but they were too intoxicated to remember.

She (six-year old granddaughter) had been sitting in his chair and was on his lap. He stated he was rubbing her leg and that he got up too high and accidentally rubbed her vagina. He disclosed that he may have accidentally touched her between her legs, but he didn't mean anything by it. On the occasion when he accidentally touched her between her legs, it was possible that he had an erection due to the fact that she very aggressive and was wiggling around on his lap. He lost himself for a minute, but as soon as he caught what he was doing, he quit. He disclosed that he knows he was wrong and feels like his punishment should be counseling and probation. "I'm not a pervert." When asked if he'd be willing to take a polygraph he stated that he would not—he was too nervous and would not pass it.
--63 year-old male (grandfather) (Thomas, March 7, 2005)

This offender blames the sexual stimulation on his little granddaughter. If she had not been wriggling around on his lap he would not have had an erection. He does, however, admit that he responded to this stimulation by touching her inappropriately. This is another illustration of the need for perpetrators of sexual abuse to have something to blame, at least in part, for their actions.

We were in the bathroom fighting when 5 or 6 guys started fighting, so we were trying to hurry up get out of there and I hurried up and turned around and my penis went up his anus." He later stated, "I knew what I was doing, but I really wasn't thinking about it. I really didn't care at the time. I know I need some help and I know he's gonna need some help for what I did to him."
--20 year-old male perpetrator/10 year-old male cousin (Thomas, January 20, 2005)

This is the most inventive of all of the excuses, justifications and rationalizations in this study. The offender "...turned around and my penis went up his anus." But, as you see this suspect went on to admit his actions, that he was well aware of what he was doing and that he

really did not care. It appears that he just had to break the ice for his confession with the initial claim that he just turned around and it just slipped in the victim's anus.

IT'S ALL ABOUT SEX EDUCATION FOR HER FUTURE AND THE REAL MEANING OF LOVE

"When it's bedtime ya'll go to bed together and ya'll love around on each other. She performs oral sex on you and you perform on her. And I know that little girls sleep with their mommas and daddy's and grandma's and grandpa's. That's normal." (Thomas, December 12, 2009)

Uncle regularly invited her over for drinks and raped her several times. Perpetrator explained to niece about kinds of lovers—and falling out of love with wife (Thomas, May 1, 2007)

These children must learn the ways of the world. It is hard to determine as to whether these perpetrators really believed that they were helping their victims or if they were just putting the abuse into a broader context.

LIMITATIONS

The cases examined in the study only represent incidences (offenses) from one county in one state (Arkansas), which significantly limits generalizability. The study is also limited to transcripts of victim and offender interviews along with investigator summaries of interviews that were not transcribed. The investigator summaries are not verbatim transcripts and may include some investigator bias in the descriptions.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that many cases involve perpetrators who commit these offenses against multiple victims. This incestuous behavior often appears to be spread throughout the family and crosses generational lines before perpetrators are apprehended and prosecuted. The reports indicate that eleven (23.4%) of the offenders had criminal histories as perpetrators of sexual offenses. This suggests that any punishment of these offenders was not an effective deterrent to the criminal acts for which they were now being prosecuted; or any treatment received failed to prevent the abuse resulting in their most recent prosecution.

Victims report that perpetrators use techniques of fear, terror, guilt and punishment to prevent them from disclosing the offenses. Victims may be threatened with physical violence or withdrawal of favors or property. More subtle threats are those related to causing disruption of the family if the abuse is disclosed. These themes of silence through real or perceived threats of harm or familial hardships appear to be effective and consistent with the low reporting rate of these offenses. The threats by the perpetrators herein are consistent with the third stage of abuse (maintaining secrecy in order to continue the abuse) described by Kluff (2011). However, victims in these cases did disclose the abuse. Though, over half of the victims (54.8%) reported multiple acts of abuse. This suggests that there was a delay in reporting that allowed the repeated acts of abuse. The familial relationship along with the young age of the victim may be offered as being among the factors that contribute to delayed reporting (Smith, et al, 2000). As

observed above, as few as 30% of victims of sexual abuse report the crime to law enforcement (Finklehor, et al, 2008). It has also been stated "...indeed, many childhood victims of sexual abuse do not readily report the abuse, and a fair number of them never report the abuse" (London, et al, 2008, p. 31).

The study reveals a number of emergent sub-themes including rationalization, justifications and excuses for the behavior of the perpetrators. These include blaming the victim for being sexually enticing or aggressive. Another common excuse is that it was not sexual in nature, but related to hygiene. The sexual contact was accidental during the non-sexual act of ensuring the cleanliness of the victim. Perpetrators describe innocent and acceptable conduct of cleaning and medicating victims as leading to unintended sexual behavior. Simple curiosity on the part of the perpetrator was also a recurring theme.

A frequent theme in the data studied was that of perpetrators using a coping strategy of blaming the conduct on intoxication. Were it not for the alcohol or the drugs the abuse would not have taken place. While not a recurring theme, but certainly an interesting as well as disturbing justification, was that of one perpetrator who identified sex education for the victim as the reason for the offense.

Some of the offenders were more pointed in the casting of blame. One blamed his wife for having pornography that was viewed by the victim who then "got the wrong idea about sex." Direct deflection of blame to the victim was also a recurring theme. Offenders claimed that the victim was seductive. In another case, the offender described the victim as being the aggressor and demanding. Blaming alcohol and others, including the victim, was a common theme among the offenders in this study.

This deflection of blame to victims, alcohol, marital problems and other extrinsic sources appears to be useful to offenders in admitting their conduct, but offering some rationale for why the conduct occurred. The interviews often show incremental admissions by the perpetrators. He first denies any wrongdoing, then concedes that it might have happened, then admits that it did happen, but because the victim initiated the contact, or because he was intoxicated. Criminal investigators may find such excuses and rationalizations to be very useful in their conduct of interviewing suspect of child sexual molestation. The suspect may more readily admit what he did if he can blame it on one of these factors. The excuses and rationalizations revealed in this study are not defenses that will be recognized in any criminal litigation. A child under the age of consent cannot give a valid consent to engage in sexual behavior. All of the victims in this study were under 14 years of age and well below the age of consent. As such, when the perpetrator admits that he had sexual contact with child because the child wanted to engage in this conduct, he has not created a defense, but he may find it easier to confess. Similarly, if he can blame it on intoxication, it may ease his mind in making the confession, but it does not provide a defense to the offense in court.

CONCLUSION

Victims of incest undoubtedly grow up to lead lives of distrust. Although the ramifications of incest and sexual abuse tend to plague victims for a lifetime, perpetrators appear to quickly rationalize their behaviors as appropriate and acceptable. In creating a web of self-deceit, the sexual abuse perpetrator justifies his/her actions while destroying the victim's self-worth and boundaries--leading to a haunted world of anxiety, shame and depression, crippled with self-doubts about their own sexual identities and the meaning of love. The reluctance to

accept blame by perpetrators of sexual abuse of children is a consistent finding of this study. This factor together with the interfamilial and intergenerational nature of this offense makes this type of offense all the more troubling for the criminal justice system in general and correctional and treatment providers in particular.

As stated above, it is "all in the family" because that is where the opportunities lie. Pedophiles have access to potential victims in the family environment. Some of the seemingly rampant sexual conduct involving parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins is consistent with the literature that report substitution of erotic conduct for other normal behavior in the relationships (Kluft, 2011; Maddock & Larson, 1995). Mothers and other family members who are expected to provide care, supervision and protection of children seem to tolerate and even accept this type of abuse. How do we stop this from occurring? Is it more vigorous investigation and prosecution? Is it more use of incarceration to separate repeat offenders from society and victims? Is it treatment for offenders and victims that can interrupt the continuing cycle of abuse? Can social service agencies identify victims and potential victims? Criminal justice and social service agencies must continue to improve detection and prevention of this insidious behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings in this study suggest further research to examine the issue of re-victimization of sexual abuse victims. In particular, are these victims more vulnerable to continued abuse? If so, then why are these persons more susceptible as targets of perpetrators? Victims not only delay or fail to disclose the abuse, some victims take this behavioral dynamic even further by actively attempting to cover up the abuse or frustrate investigations or prosecutions. This factor should be the subject of future research. Studies indicate that Caucasian males herein predominantly perpetrate offenses such as those reviewed in this study. While the racial identity of the perpetrators in this study are not inconsistent with the overall population of the county, the implications of these racial and gender differences should also be considered in future research.

Were any of these victims and perpetrators receiving any form of family or individual social services? If so, were there missed opportunities to intercede and prevent some of the abuse in these cases? Criminal and social service records could be compared to ascertain any such relationships and suggest possible interventions.

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