

Communication – Context - Curiosity

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel set out to explore the specific challenges in identifying, assessing, and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment. The report “I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment explores how local and national safeguarding practice can change to better protect children from intrafamilial child sexual abuse.

- ☐ An estimated 500,000 children in England and Wales are sexually abused each year and around one in ten children will be sexually abused before they are 16.
- ☐ Between a quarter to a third of child sexual abuse victims and survivors said a family member had been involved in their abuse.
- ☐ Those most likely to harm a child within the family environment are fathers/stepfathers, siblings and other children followed by uncles, grandfathers and other relatives. Most people who have sexually abused a child in the family environment are male, although abuse by women and girls does occur.
- ☐ Compared to extrafamilial abuse, child sexual abuse in the family often starts at a younger age, involving more serious and frequent abuse over a longer period.
- ☐ Intrafamilial child sexual abuse often overlaps with other forms of sexual abuse.
- ☐ In surveys, girls are at least 3 times as likely as boys to describe experiences of child sexual abuse.
- ☐ Around one third of victims and survivors report that their abuse started before the age of 9. Another third said that it started when they were aged 9 to 12, and the remaining third that it started between ages 13 to 15.
- ☐ Pre-verbal children face particular risks..
- ☐ Disabled children are at least twice as likely to be sexually abused than non-disabled children.
- ☐ Over half of children who are sexually abused are also subject to other forms of child abuse, most frequently emotional abuse or experiencing domestic abuse.
- ☐ Children who are neglected are 5 times more likely to be sexually abused than those with no experience of neglect.
- ☐ Children who live in a household with someone misusing alcohol or drugs, or with mental health difficulties are 3 times more likely to be sexually abused than children not exposed to parental substance misuse or mental health issues.

Communication – Context - Curiosity

Whilst there is no single agreed definition of child sexual abuse within the family environment this is broadly understood as sexual abuse by a relative or someone within the home environment with caring responsibilities. Some definitions are wider, and included family friends, neighbours and babysitters.

Barriers: There are many barriers faced by children in telling someone they are being or have been sexually abused. These involve a complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual, societal and cultural issues. Fear of disrupting family relationships or breaking up the family, possibly being placed in foster care or involving their family with the criminal justice system, can all prevent children from reporting abuse.

Impact: Research suggests that the physical and emotional impact on children who are abused by someone within their family is greater than for those who are abused by someone external to their family. This may be due to intrafamilial sexual abuse often occurring over a longer period of time and involving a greater level of intrusion, with children also reporting higher levels of mistrust, insecurity and self-blame. However, the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors is influenced by a range of factors, including its duration, the age that the abuse started, and the relationship between the child and the person who abused them.

Responding: A large body of research, including national reviews of evidence such as for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, highlights an enduring tendency to disbelieve reports of child sexual abuse and the profound effect this has on both the multi-agency response to children and, crucially, the likelihood that a child will tell someone what has happened to them.

Supporting parents and carers: We also know from research that the support a child receives from their main caregivers and wider family will have a significant influence on how they understand and respond to what has happened to them. However, parents themselves need support as they often experience high levels of distress and increased isolation following discovery of their child's abuse

Key Findings: Professionals need to hear children's voices and understand their needs. They should not rely on children to tell of abuse. It is crucial that the vulnerabilities of parents' and carers' contexts, vulnerabilities and needs are understood. Professionals need to address the challenges in identifying signs, understanding risk and raising concerns as well as addressing the issues in responding to concerns of intrafamilial child sexual abuse

For More Information Please Read: ["I wanted them all to notice": Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment](#)