

Narrative Differences in Children's Disclosure of Sexual Assault

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INTRODUCTION

- One in ten children in the US will be sexually abused before the age of 18 (Townsend and Rheingold).
- Somewhere between 60% and 80% of victims do not disclose they abuse until adulthood (London et al).
- Forensic interviews are critical in CSA investigations since there is often a lack of witnesses and forensic evidence.
- Identifying narrative similarities and differences in cases of suspected sexual abuse will help lead to a better investigation of CSA cases and better identification of which children are actually being abused.

METHOD

Participants

- N = 53
- Treatment sample of children aged 4 – 18 in the Cincinnati region

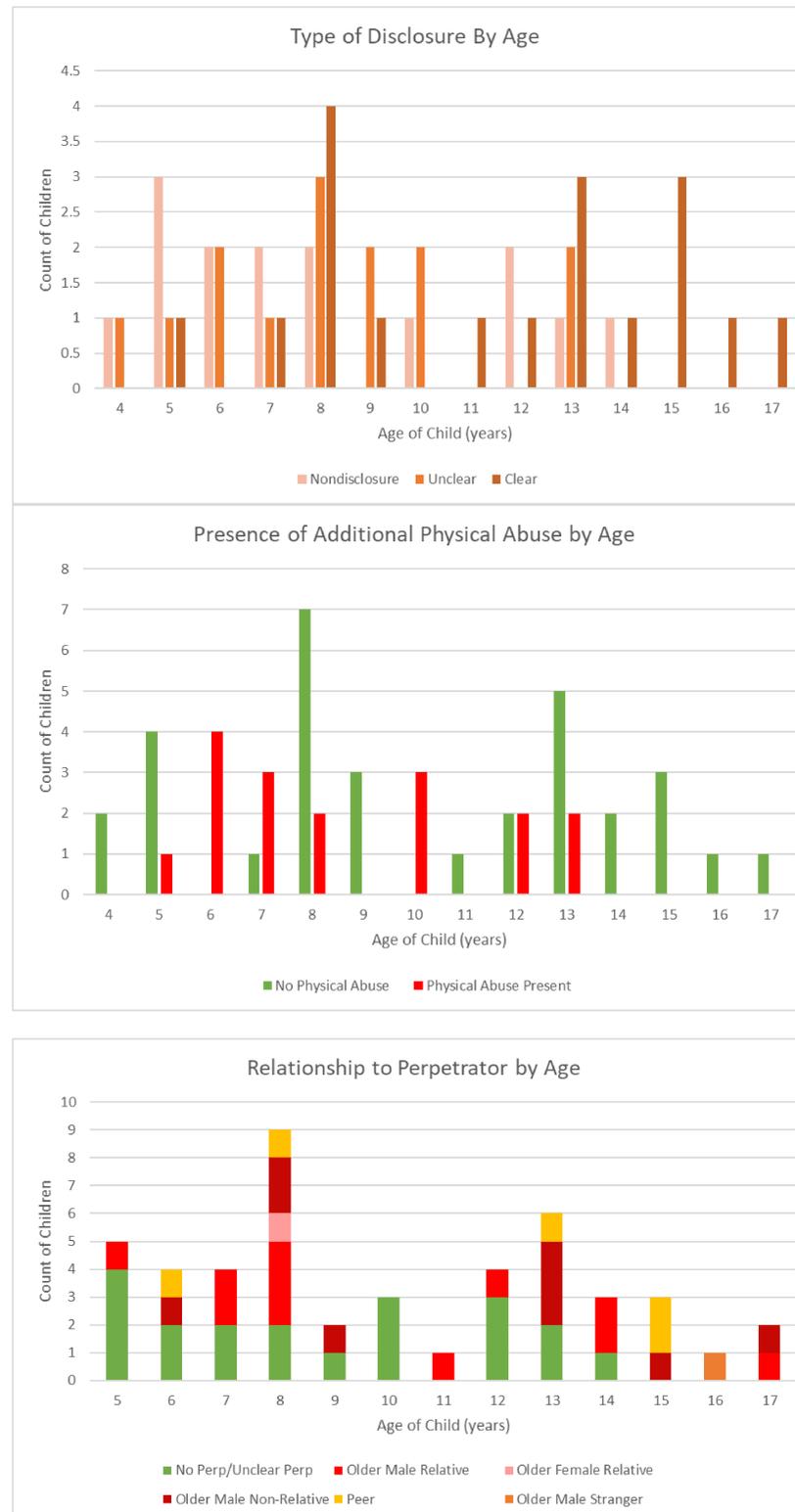
Measures

- Demographics were gathered using patient records and police reports.
- Narratives come from transcriptions of the forensic interviews.

Procedures

- Two coders went through the transcripts of forensic interviews with special attention for narrative differences in disclosure, offender relationship, and presence of physical abuse.

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

- While younger children are less likely to disclose, there are a surprising amount of unclear disclosures or nondisclosures from older children (specifically looking at the nine-year-old to thirteen-year-old range).
- There is a high number of children who potentially experience both physical abuse and sexual abuse. Most of these children are under the age of ten, but older children are also abused.
- Older male relatives and older male non-relatives (not biological family but known to the child, such as a family friend or an “uncle”) are the most represented perpetrators, and they are fairly evenly distributed among different ages of victims.

Limitations

- Sample sizes among the different age groups varied and was also small. Children between eight-years-old and thirteen-years-old were better represented, but the lower and higher ends of the age range often only had one or two representatives.
- These findings are skewed by what the victims could tell or chose to tell their interviewers. It is possible that the data would look quite different if a clear disclosure was obtained from every victim.

Implications and Future Directions

More research could be done into why older children sometimes offer unclear disclosures. Another direction would be to look more into the home lives of affected children to understand the risk factors associated with victimization by male relatives and non-relatives.