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Silence and Invisibility

Emotional pain has a rightful passage of exit, of expression.

As this presentation will demonstrate, for so many survivors of sexual violence, this rightful passage is often denied, blocked, silenced, convoluted....

Hence, trauma is compounded and made more complex; recovery and healing are compromised

The inability to disclose; delay disclosure remains one of the greatest impediments to effective therapeutic healing and criminal justice interventions

This presentation

- Social and environmental responses and factors impact upon children at different stages of childhood/youth.
- Increasing focus on the crucial social/environmental buffers, dilemmas, responses and barriers victims experience and negotiate, especially post disclosure
- Social Death and identity

continued

- Family and social dynamics can significantly alter following disclosure of sexual abuse.
- Individual and collective responses to child/youth crucial in determining outcomes and can be more important than objective elements of the victimisation itself
- Intrafamilial abuse has greatest potential to affect impact of victimisation and hence capacity and trajectory recovery outcomes.
- Some service engagement, including law enforcement can escalate, protect, nurture or further fracture environmental and social buffers needed to aid recovery

Current dialogue and focus

- In a society where we have so much media around CSA and community awareness we have a duty to reflect and interrogate the ongoing silences and the lack of engaged voices and services for the majority of childhood victim/survivors

Sexual violence in childhood and duration

- **Time variable analysis:**
- Multiple incidents: 20% abused more than 10 years (N=41) ; 23% abused 6-10 years (N=47) and 29% abused 2-5 years (N=59) Out of 205 respondents.
- Overall of the 204, 43% abused for 6 years or more
- Overall 72% abused 2 years or more
- Those who reported abuse by a family member in early childhood more likely to endure long term abuse; experience multiple offenders over time and to report sexual re victimisation in adulthood. A number of studies suggest that abuse in childhood that goes undetected/not disclosed makes the child more vulnerable to repeat victimisation in both childhood and adulthood.
- Source: Taylor, et al. Policing Just Outcomes Project. Large ARC Linkage Project. (2012)

Multiple versus single incidents

- Majority experienced multiple offences
- 76.5% of respondents reported feelings of 'guilt' as a consequence of sexual victimisation as opposed to 23.5% where it was a single incident.
- This exponential rise in negative feelings remained a feature for respondents of multiple incidents as opposed to single with regard to feelings of 'fear' and 'fear of the offender'. 84.8% of respondents reported a fear of family members where the abuse was multiple (and more likely within the family unit) with 84.9% reporting they feared causing family breakdown where incidents were multiple as opposed to 15% where it was a single incident.
- 76.5% feared being disbelieved versus 23.5% where it was a single incident
- Fear of losing family support 80.4% versus 19.6% where it was a single incident
- Lack of family support post-disclosure 81.6% versus 18.4% in a single incident
- Strong correlation between feelings of fear and stigma and being unable to seek support from others and thus being less likely to disclose/report
- Source: Policing Just Outcomes Project, Large ARC Linkage Project

Victim beliefs and impact

- 2 types of self directed 'blame' victims experience: behavioural and characterological. Behavioural : (situational) Context (environment) and behaviour (what was going on at time). Can aid or hinder victim recovery.
- Characterological: a belief that the child somehow merits the abuse because of something intrinsic about themselves.
- Second type considered most damaging; frequently linked to abuse within the family or other known person and multiple offences over time. Both impact – especially if 'blame' made explicit or alluded to by others. Alleviating blame is an enormous step in helping survivors.
- Note the role and attitude of significant others and others also important to consider as well as duration of abuse.
- Self-blame is anti-ethical to empowerment and recovery

A voice speaks and breaks a silence that must be overcome

- Disclosure
- The landscape of one's life may change irrevocably from that moment
- Possible domino effect post disclosure (a real fear expressed by many victims and can serve to inhibit disclosure)
- Feeling you are without peer (isolation and shame and that no one can *truly* understand)
- Social death
- Becoming a 'social orphan' through lack of familial support or outright rejection and familial expulsion following disclosure

SOCIAL DEATH

- *As a concept, social death has been used to explore the impact of stigma affecting individuals and groups around race, class, illness, but not sexual violence.*
- *Social death implies a diminished sense of self and a shrinking of the social world that is characterised by a declining association and connection with family, friends and community (Williams, 2004:34).*

EMOTIONAL LEAKAGE

- (Taylor) has developed this term to refer to the increased struggle experienced by victim/survivors as a consequence of enforced silence and fear of disclosure. It manifests in an inability to regulate emotional feelings and composure that may lead to disorganised and crisis driven disclosure or emotional outbursts that are misunderstood. This often leads to victim/survivors experiencing further distress and the risk of others misunderstanding the behaviours.
- Linked also to 'triggers' leading to psychological distress reaction via communication to others through verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Causes intense distress and discomfort
- Feeling they will 'explode'; inability to cope leading to outbursts and behaviour that is often not understood;
- Can result in disorganised and 'chaotic' disclosures
- May lead to inappropriate responses and communication that impacts further
- Also linked to struggles relating to prior disclosure experiences and ongoing psychological distress; lack of self worth and esteem leading to repeated and pressure driven disclosures. Can lead to inappropriate responses causing additional harm to young person.

stigma threat and shame

- Fear of being stigmatised as a consequence of public knowledge (*Stigma threat* – awareness, even among younger children of profound feelings of being seen as ‘damaged’; ‘spoiled goods’, being stigmatised and rejected by family, peers and others)
- Being stigmatised through victim blame and treated around stereotypes
- Linked to feelings of shame or being shamed or fear of others applying shame.
- Linked to self-harm (non suicidal injury; suicidal ideation; risk taking including drugs and alcohol; inability to desire future goals or dreams)

Post disclosure trauma

- Emotion work – managing others; taking responsibility or being made to feel responsible for repatriation of familial relationships
- Differences in familial responses (intrafamilial versus extra familial abuse) where connection to offender may influence the attitudes, belief and support provided by family members.
- ‘Conditional support’ and what it means for support, recovery and healing
- a child feeling judged and confused by parental responses to disclosure
- Peer responses including peer to peer disclosure; issues of confidentiality and ethical behaviour (inappropriate sharing of information amongst peers)
- Becoming a social orphan
- Non-finite grief

Hope and belief

According to the theory of aerodynamics, a bumblebee cannot fly.....

- Stereotypes
- A fact is not fate
- We are affected by what is done to us but we are not determined by it
- Young people want and need to know there is real life and real change and authentic joy beyond their experiences – positive adult survivor role models are important to support recovery and success across the life span.

Reconstituting wounded identity

- Identity issues for youth people a critical issue made all the more complex and traumatic where there is childhood abuse.
- Fractured and fragile identity.
- The importance of re imagining the self in a safe, trusted and secure environment and relationships
- Working with strengths and not a deficit model of self
- Re-narrating a new and changed biography of self
- Integration of trauma and authority over memory

Post traumatic growth

A bird sitting in a tree is not afraid of the branch breaking, because her trust is not in the branch, but in her own wings.



Coping mechanisms

- Retreat through physical and/or emotional isolation
- Changing name or appearance in belief it creates a new person
- creating symbolic markers of journey and identity
- May assist short term but can become maladaptive (unhelpful) coping pattern
- May be successful. May also create identity confusion; lower self-esteem; seeking to please external others as opposed to internal self
- Often regarded as very successful and satisfying. Sense of control, innovation in self biography

New growth

- Trauma and recovery is not sign posted for survivors.
- For some positive growth was quicker than for others and some struggled to recognise growth viewing change as something alien, fearful or negative (not their true self);
- Growth may also create problems for family, siblings, peers who are not accepting of change; or are confused or challenged by change.
- Positive growth may lead to significant changes in dynamics in their relationship with self and with others
- Important to find ways for young person to explore this and there is a role for the counsellor/therapist to assist supportive parents and others to understand this growth

Reconstituting identity

- Developing or discovering a passion
- Name change or biographical change that was positively incorporated
- Imagination: deep reflection and a future focus of self
- Letting go of current relationships and choosing others not necessarily because they are negative but survivors spoke of outgrowing people or place
- Strength building; skill sets; re-narration of self; purpose and meaning
- Name or biographical change linked to something positive; meaningful that strengthened self
- Supported to see this is not selfish but an act of kindness and love to self
- Can have sense of grief attached for self and others but can be a necessary and profound element

Summary of major trauma themes linked to environmental and social influencers

- Feeling you are tainted by abuse (even for very young children)
- Will never recover
- Will not have successful life
- Males and sexual identity and masculinity (interesting observation of many male survivors choosing hypermasculine trades and work)
- Males and fear of being viewed as future offender (need to address myths about male victims)
- Importance of legal literacy for young people and psychological literacy to negate stereotypes and given context to abuse and impact.

“For a star to be born, there is one thing that must happen: a gaseous nebula must collapse...crumble. This is not your destruction. This is your birth.”

Zoe Skylar

CHRYsalis

It is in the darkness of a cocoon that a butterfly finds its wings

- Many survivors interviewed expressed many angles in how they sought to understand change and growth.
- Those abused in adolescence or adulthood were often more able to link a past self with post-trauma self but for those who experienced long term abuse from a very young age believed they had no sense of an earlier 'self' prior to when abuse began leading them to consider what is an 'authentic' self.
- Some questioned: is this my 'authentic' self – has the metamorphosis revealed the 'true' me. Has the shedding of trauma layers enabled the authentic person to emerge or has the trauma destroyed an authentic self and created a 'false' self.

**Though winter takes of her leaves,
the tree exults in what is revealed (S. C.
Taylor)**

