

STUDYING INCEST



Prof. Philip D. JAFFÉ
Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences

Philippe.Jaffe@pse.unige.ch

OUTLINE

1. Case histories
2. Definitions of child sexual abuse / incest
3. Myths – Facts
4. Incestuous versus incestual
5. Prevalence
6. Child Sexual Abuse accommodation syndrome
7. Definitions of paedophilia
8. Generic CSA versus paedophilia
9. Theories of incest and paedophilia
10. Incest offenders' perceptions of their motives

Case histories

- As a young intern... trying to get a vacation away from 120 h / week duties... I spotted a very good looking lady on a ferry to Nova Scotia...
- A young woman treated for depression and suicidal ideation at Harvard Univ. psychiatric hospital. Could not climb the stairs to my office...
- A middle-aged woman from India disclosed yesterday that she had been sexually abused by her cousin from age 9 to 11
- Philippe... a 15 year old boy caught trying to have intercourse with his 5 year old sister
- Hubert... a 50+ y old man, marginalized homosexual, spent years in prison for swindling rich employers... disclosed having been a « boy toy » for the local count's friendly gay parties...

Definitions of incest

- "...the sexual abuse of a child by a relative or other person in a position of trust and authority over the child. It is a violation of the child where he or she lives -- literally and metaphorically. A child molested by a stranger can run home for help and comfort. A victim of incest cannot." (Vanderbilt, 1992, p. 51).
- Sexual contact or interaction between family members who are not marital partners;
- Oral-genital contact, genital or anal penetration, genital touching of the victim by the perpetrator, any other touching of private body parts, sexual kissing and hugging;
- Sexually staring at the victim by the perpetrator, accidental or disguised touching of the victim's body by the perpetrator, verbal invitations to engage in sexual activity, verbal ridiculing of body parts, pornographic photography, reading of sexually explicit material to children, and exposure to inappropriate sexual activity (Caruso, 1987).

Legal definition: Switzerland

Art. 213

- 1 L'acte sexuel entre ascendants et descendants, ou entre frères et soeurs germains, consanguins ou utérins, sera puni de l'emprisonnement.
- 2 Les mineurs n'encourront aucune peine s'ils ont été séduits.

ASSERTION: Most child sexual assaults are committed by strangers in isolated locations.

TRUE or FALSE?

- **FALSE:** The overwhelming majority of children are assaulted in their own home or indeed in the home of the offender who is, on the whole, a male they know and trust. In most cases the perpetrator is the father, stepfather, grandfather, brother, uncle, etc.

ASSERTION: Incest mainly takes place in "dysfunctional", working-class families.

TRUE or FALSE?

- **FALSE:** Incest occurs in families of every description and across all socio-economic groupings. Research indicates that there is little to distinguish between families where incest takes place and those where it doesn't.

Incest does not discriminate...

Incest does not discriminate...

- takes place in families that are financially-privileged, as well as those of low socio-economic status.
- happens to those of all racial and ethnic descent, and to those of all religious traditions.
- victims of incest are boys and girls, infants and adolescents.
- incest occurs between fathers and daughters, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters and mothers and sons.
- perpetrators of incest can be aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, step-parents, step-children, grandparents and grandchildren.
- in addition, incest offenders can be persons without a direct blood or legal relationship to the victim such as a parent's lover or live-in nanny, housekeeper, etc. -- as this abuse takes place within the confines of the family and the home environment

INCESTUOUS versus INCESTUAL

INCESTUAL CSA

Incestual CSA entails verifications, explorations under the guise of maintaining the hygiene of sexual orifices; too great physical proximity; frequent intrusions into the private sphere; parental exhibition; buddy-like sharing of erotic experiences verifications; etc...

(Manciaux et col., 1997).

PREVALENCE

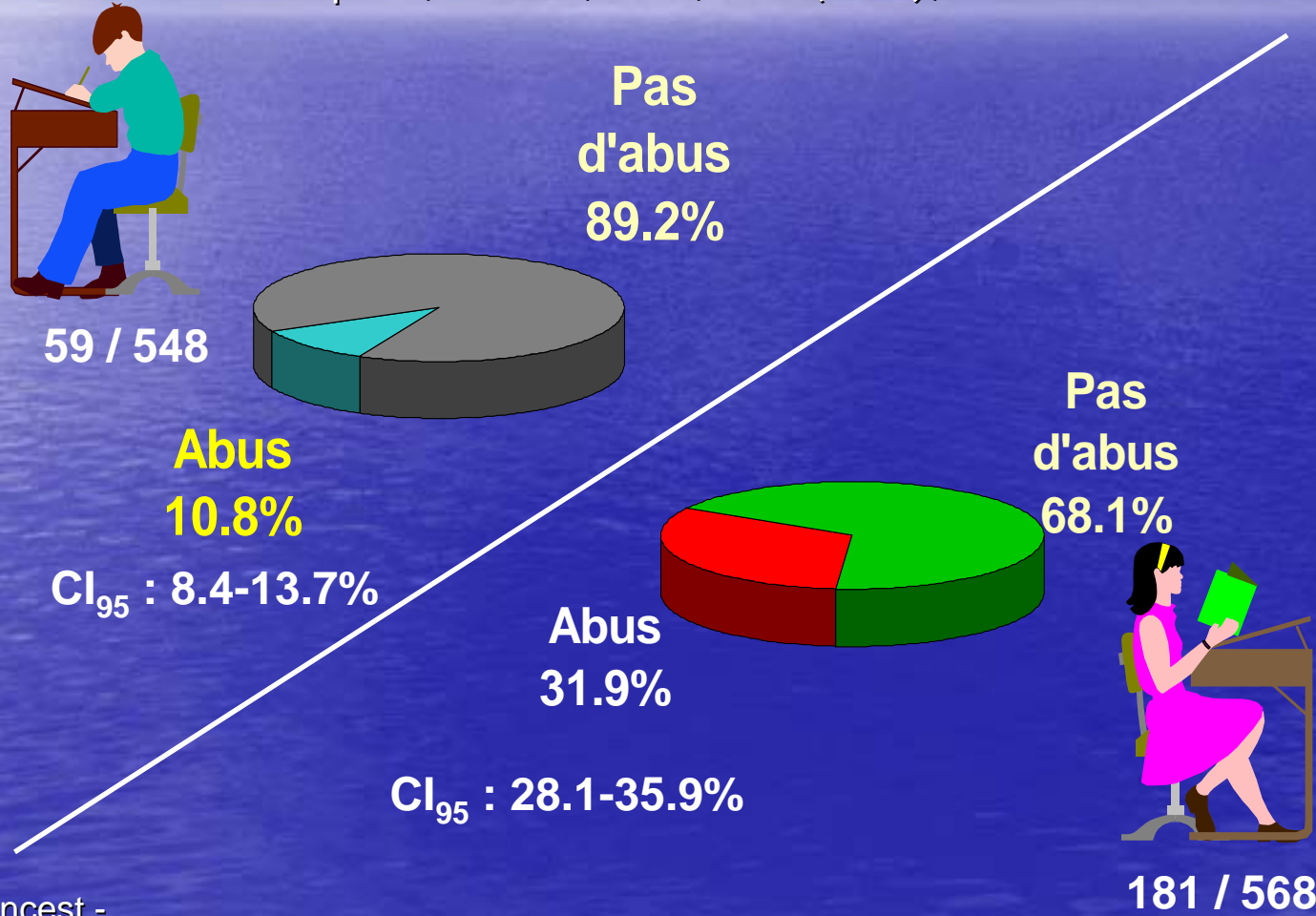
- the prevalence and severity of child abuse has been given an increasing amount of attention, even though attitudes, definitions and statistics continue to vary.
- incest may incite some of the greatest discrepancies, for it remains one of the most under-reported and least discussed crimes.
- an almost international taboo, incest often remains concealed by the victim because of guilt, shame, fear, social and familial pressure, as well as coercion by the abuser

PREVALENCE

What is the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the general population?

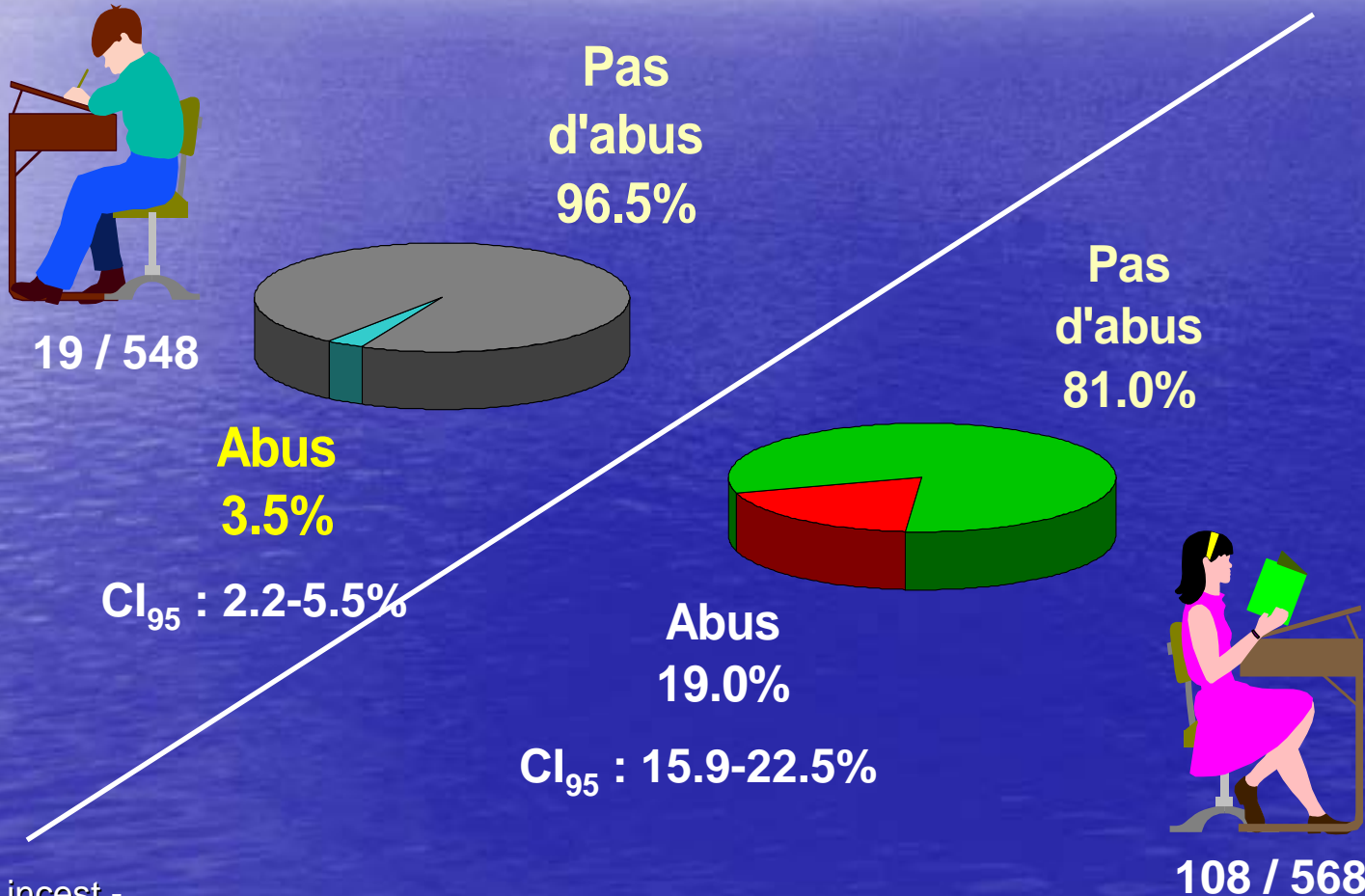
Prevalence of child sexual abuse in a 1000+ population of adolescents in Geneva (all types of CSA collapsed)

Halpérin, Bouvier, Jaffé, et al (1996), BMJ



Prevalence of child sexual abuse in a 1000+ population of adolescents in Geneva *(CSA with physical contact)*

Halpérin, Bouvier, Jaffé, et al (1996), BMJ



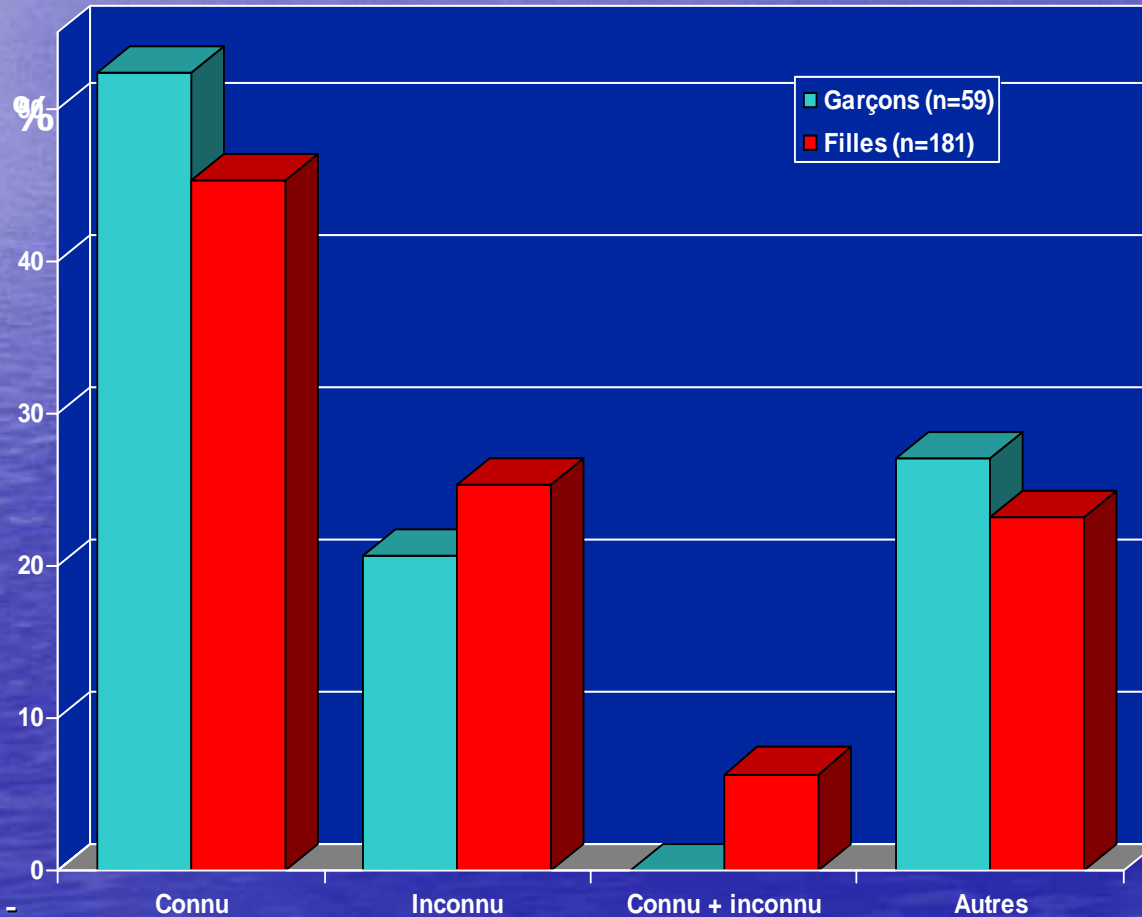
PREVALENCE

- Incest has been cited as the most common form of child abuse, but this is difficult to substantiate
- for example, one research 43 percent (43%) of the children who are abused are abused by family members, 33 percent (33%) are abused by someone they know, and the remaining 24 percent (24%) are sexually abused by strangers (Hayes, 1990).
- other studies estimate that incest is experienced by 10 to 20 percent of children in the general population
- In Brazil, for example, prevalence estimates range widely from 0.05 percent to 21 percent (Flores, Mattos, and Salzano 1998).

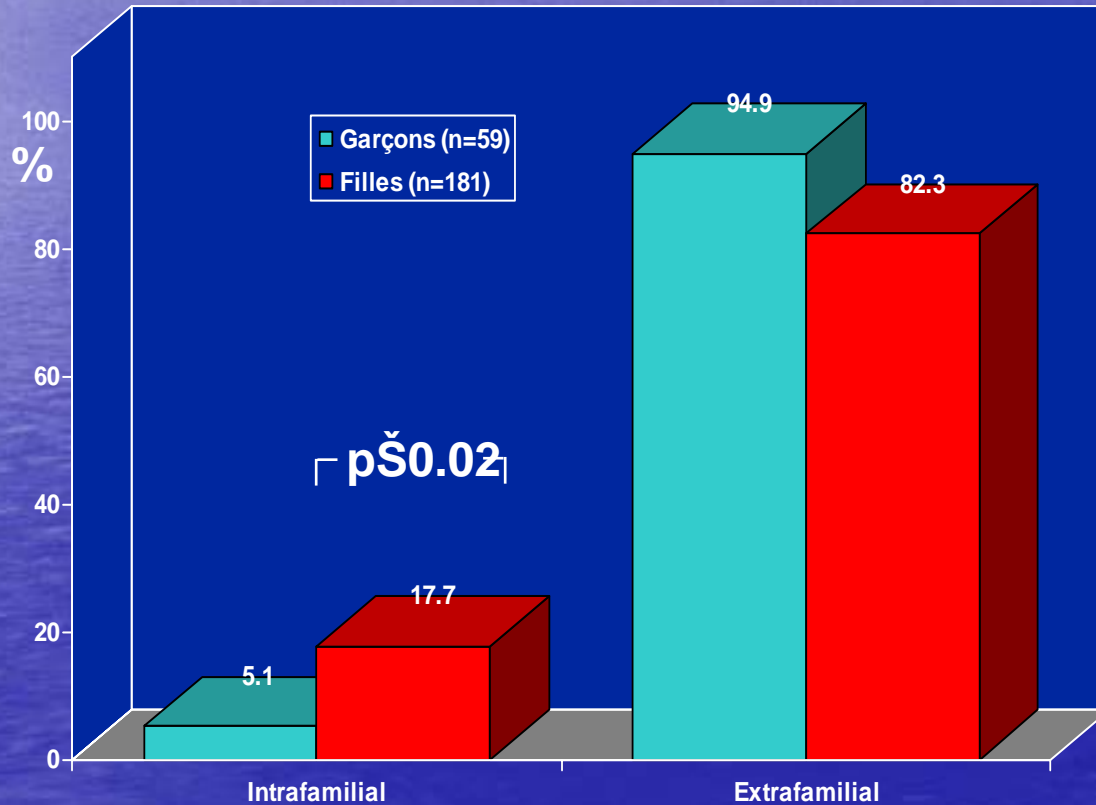
Prevalence of incest

- in Finland: 2% with father and 3,7% with father-in-law (Sariola & Uutela, 1996)
- in France, incest cases represent 20% of all high court trials, 75% of sexual assaults on minors (SNATEM, 1999) and over 57% of rapes committed against minors (Source CFCV).
- intra-familial sexual abuse (Fisher & Mc Donald, 1998).
 - occurs earlier than extra-familial abuse
 - lasts longer
 - creates greater trauma
 - implies less physical abuse
 - entails more direct and indirect pressure to maintain secrecy [Child Sexual Abuse accommodation syndrome, (Summitt, 1983)]

Link to the abuser (1)



Link to the abuser (2)



Child Sexual Abuse accommodation syndrome

- Child abusers (and particularly incestuous abusers) use their authority to impose their behavior on the child, but also the secrecy that must prevail.
- The child has no choice, s/he must accept the abusive behavior and accommodate to the situation

Child Sexual Abuse accommodation syndrome (Summitt, 1983)

5 levels of accommodation:

1. secrecy,
2. helplessness,
3. entrapment,
4. disclosure
5. retraction

1. Secrecy

The sexually abused child submits not only to the abusive behavior, but is brought to believe that disclosure is a dangerous course of action.

« It is our Secret, do not tell anyone, nobody would understand, nobody will believe you. »

« Do not tell your mother:

(a) she will hate you

(b) she will hate me

(c) she will kill you

(d) she will kill me

(e) she will kill herself

(f) she will kick you out of the home

(g) she will kick me out of the home

(h) it would destroy our family

(i) you would end up in an orphanage

1. Secrecy

- Most victims respect the Secrecy clause. Those who attempt premature disclosure are confronted to disbelief and blame

*« How can you think such a thing?"
« This talk is ridiculous. Stop making things up ! »*

- And if disclosure is some time after the abuse, suspicion is a classic reaction:

*« Why did you not tell me before?"
« How could you hide this from me for so long?"
« How can I believe such a story?"*

1. Secrecy

Conventional moral values are inverted:

- Lying to maintain secrecy becomes virtuous, i.e., the child protects him/herself and his/her family...
- Telling the truth is dangerous and possibly a sin

2. Helplessness

- The child learns to obey an authority figure. S/he does not have the choice to say « no » to a parental figure and is not able to anticipate the consequences of sexual relations with an adult. The child is unable to resist and to rebel. S/he is helpless, unable to flee or resist. S/he become passively obedient.
- Not complaining does not mean the child consents. Nor is the child the seducer.

3. Entrapment and adaptation

- Once the sexual abuse starts –and unless there is an improbable discovery- the only course for the child is to learn to accept the situation and survive. At what cost?
 - Self hate (*« it is my fault"*)
 - Psychological fragmentation (*« My father cannot be bad, I am the bad person"*)
 - Pseudomaturity (*« I must protect my family"*)
 - Dissociative survival techniques (*imaginary companions, multiple personalities, altered states of consciousness, etc.*)

3. Entrapment and adaptation

- And if rage is mixed with helplessness
 - Self-mutilation truancy, hostility, promiscuity, delinquency, drugs, suicidality, etc.
- The rage sometimes incubates until the next generation and is revealed by further abuse!

4. Late and unconvincing disclosure

- Most cases of incest are never disclosed. Those that are disclosed take place during early adolescence as autonomy increases and family dynamics heat up.
- From the child's perspective, it is the worst moment to disclose. Adolescents are not easily believed, they are often punished.

5. Retraction

- Retraction is a very frequent course of action.
- The child discovers that the threats belying Secrecy are very real and that the abuser abandons him/her and designates him/her a liar. The mother does not believe the child. The family does fall apart. The child may end up in an institution. The father goes to jail.
- The child has the responsibility, once again, to preserve or to destroy the family. Under these circumstances, retraction seems like a very reasonable choice, unless s/he gets unfailing support.

Research with survivors of incest

- difficulty accessing sufficiently large samples
- dealing primarily with clinical populations
co-morbidity: ETOH, promiscuity, suicidality, personality disorders, serious psychiatric pathology, etc.
- ethical issues – do good, do no harm
- memory distortions

etc.

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

- Defining sexual attraction (Freund et al, 1984)
 - Gynophilia – sexual interest in physically adult women
 - Androphelia – sexual interest in physically adult males
 - Heterosexuality – the sustained erotic preference for persons of the opposite sex
 - Paedophilia – a long term interest in children who have not clearly reached puberty
 - Paedohebephilia – same as paedophilia but also a keen interest in pubescent minors
 - Hebephilia – interest focused on pubescent minors

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

- «Pedophilic behavior is a any sexual contact, forced or nonforced , between an adult and a minor» (Levin & Stava, 1987)
- «Child molestation is defined as any sexual contact between an offender and a victim who, due to age and/or immaturity, is incapable either legally or realistically (because of lack of true appreciation of the significance or consequence of the act) of giving consent. The specific sexual acts may range from mutual touching and fondling to actual intercourse, but access to the victim is achieved through pressure, coercion, or deception» (Hobson, Boland, & Jamieson, 1985)

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

A specific type of paraphilia, that is:

1. A highly sexually arousing long term and unusual erotic preoccupation or fantasy
2. A pressure to act out this preoccupation
3. Sexual dysfunction during conventional sexual behavior with a partner, such as problems of desire, arousal or orgasm

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

- According to the Groth model, two types of paedophiles:

1. **Fixated**

2. **Regressed**

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

- «Fixation is defined as a temporary or permanent arrestment of psychological maturation resulting from unresolved formative issues which persist and underlie the organization of subsequent phases of development. A fixated offender has from adolescence been sexually attracted primarily or exclusively to significantly younger persons. Sexual involvement with peer-age or older persons, where this has occurred, has been situational in nature and has never replaced the primary sexual attraction to and preference for underage persons»
(Groth and Birnbaum ,1978)

DEFINITIONS OF PAEDOPHILIA

- «Regression is defined as a temporary or permanent appearance of primitive behavior after more mature forms of expression had been attained, regardless of whether the immature behavior was actually manifested earlier in the individual's development. A regressed offender has not exhibited any predominant sexual attraction to significantly younger persons during his sexual development –if any such involvement did occur during adolescence, it was situational or experimental in nature. Instead, this individual's sociosexual interests have focused on peer-age or adult persons primarily or exclusively»
- Groth and Birnbaum ,1978)

GENERIC CSA VERSUS INCEST

- Current theory tends to consider there is little difference between generic CSA and incest

Myth: Incestuous fathers do not abuse outside the family.

Fact: 1/3 to 1/2 of abusers who offended inside the home against girls have also molested females outside the home, and one in ten have offended against boys outside the home

Theories of incest and paedophilia

- Paedophilia as sexual learning
Sexual activity with children during childhood is reinforced and learned.
- Paedophilia as preconditions
Finkelhor's theory is that :
 - there is emotional congruence with children because paedophiles lack self esteem, are immature, self-centered
 - sexual arousal is experienced for a variety of reasons
 - blockage occurs with appropriate sex partners because of lack of social skills, anxiety, etc.
 - desinhibition occurs because of an impulse disorder, mental retardation, ETOH, etc.

Theories of incest and paedophilia

- Paedophilia as cognitive process
Pathological distortions occur based on a reinforced learning process
- Paedophilia as psychodynamically determined
A type of perversion
Unresolved oedipal issues
Identification with the aggressor
Anger and re-enactment of trauma

Theories of incest and paedophilia

- Paedophilia as gender politics
All men are abusers and maintain dominance via sexualized violence against women
Male genitalia = weapon
- Paedophilia as biological anomaly
Structural brain differences
Neurochemistry differences

Incest offenders' perceptions of their motives

Hartley, J. Interpersonal Violence (2001)

- Need for sexual satisfaction
- Seeking an outlet from dissatisfaction ... depression, feelings of rejection, need for acceptance
- Contact as an expression of anger toward one's wife or abuser
- Contact as an inappropriate way to show affection or love
- Making right the distance or unavailability of one's own parents
- Current life stress: marital conflict, ETOH, low self esteem, lack of sex, medical problems, work stress
- Problematic marital/partner relationship... poor communication, sexual problems, etc.