PRACTICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Social work is at an important stage in its development. All professions must be responsive to changing social and economic conditions if they are to meet the needs of those they serve. This series focuses on sound practice and the specific contribution which social workers can make to the well-being of our society.

The British Association of Social Workers has always been conscious of its role in setting guidelines for practice and in seeking to raise professional standards. The conception of the Practical Social Work series arose from a survey of BASW members to discover where they, the practitioners in social work, felt there was the most need for new literature. The response was overwhelming and enthusiastic, and the result is a carefully planned, coherent series of books. The emphasis is firmly on practice set in a theoretical framework. The books will inform, stimulate and promote discussion, thus adding to the further development of skills and high professional standards. All the authors are practitioners and teachers of social work representing a wide variety of experience.

JO CAMPLING

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Hilary Walker and Bill Beaumont (eds)

Child Sexual Abuse

Second Edition

Danya Glaser and Stephen Frosh

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First edition 1988
Reprinted four times
Second edition 1993

Published by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-57602-1 ISBN 978-1-349-19270-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-19270-0

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

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Authors' Note and Acknowledgements

We have been very grateful for the positive response to the first edition of this book, published in 1988. Since that time, there have been some important changes in legislation affecting professionals working with child sexual abuse, and there have been advances in social work, investigatory and therapeutic practice from which we have learnt. In addition, there has been some useful research filling out the background understanding necessary for good professional practice. This second edition of *Child Sexual Abuse* has been updated and supplemented to take account of these changes and advances, with every chapter augmented or altered in some significant ways.

We would like to acknowledge our debt to our current and past colleagues in the Lewisham and North Southwark Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Team. Danya Glaser would also like to acknowledge the support of past colleagues in the Child Sexual Abuse team at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London, particularly Arnon Bentovim and Tilman Furniss. Both authors are grateful to Suzanna Tetsell who rescued the manuscript of the first edition from indecipherability.

DANYA GLASER
STEPHEN FROSH

Introduction

Child sexual abuse has a relatively brief history in the awareness of professionals working with children. Until recently, accusations of sexual abuse originating from children were interpreted either as maliciousness, or more commonly, as the product of the child's fantasy life. Allegations of sexual abuse, and incest in particular, were often seen as instances of children's failure to distinguish between their own sexual wishes and reality. The major contributors to this lack of recognition of the problem were the secrecy surrounding the abuse and the denial of its existence once it was disclosed. The effects of this attitude were that most cases of child sexual abuse were overlooked, even when a child tried to tell someone about what was happening, and that many adults carry with them a history of sexual victimisation which they have never been able to confide to anyone.

While the secrecy and denial still prevail, professionals working in the child-care field have nevertheless become sensitised to the reality of child sexual abuse and are increasingly likely both to believe in children who confide in them, and to attempt to take appropriate action. General awareness of sexual abuse has also been heightened by extensive media coverage which has encouraged the victims of abuse to make themselves heard. Training for professionals, therapeutic modalities for helping victims and statutory child-care procedures have all been improved, culminating in the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the publication of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The factors that have brought about this change in public awareness are by no means obvious. To some extent, it may have been an extension or by-product of the increased clarity of thought and practice surrounding physical child abuse that developed during the 1970s. In addition, debates on sexuality,

victimisation and power that were instituted and developed by the women's movement on both sides of the Atlantic have been crucial in challenging accepted notions of sexual practice and in drawing attention to the way women and children can be made into sexual victims. The work of the various Rape Crisis Centres in Britain has been particularly noteworthy in this regard, and it is probably fair to say that it is the arguments of feminists that have set the pace for debates in the whole area of sexual abuse.

Although child sexual abuse has become more visible as an area of professional concern, its management continues to prove complex and problematic. On the child-care side, it raises difficult questions for social workers concerning ways of protecting children, the use of fostering or other substitute care arrangements, possibilities for family rehabilitation, and liaison or co-work with the police. On the investigatory side, ways of helping children to give accurate and reliable information while reassuring them that they are not being blamed for the events (however they may feel about them) are still being developed. On the therapeutic side, evaluation of the indicators for, and efficacy of, family, group and individual approaches, as well as the further development of appropriate interventions in all these areas of treatment has just begun. Behind these uncertainties there is intense controversy over the best way to understand child sexual abuse: for example, is it properly viewed as a product of disturbed family interactions, or as a representation of the general violence of patriarchy? Finally, the personal issues raised for professionals dealing with child sexual abuse can be very powerful.

Aims and structure of the book

This book arises in large part out of debates with colleagues and clinical experience of providing both a direct service to the victims of child sexual abuse and their families, and a support and consultative service to local-authority social workers engaged in such work. Our perspective is thus that of professionals involved with children and their families at the time of the abuse, rather than (as has often been the case in books on sexual abuse) the adult victims of child sexual abuse. Our aim is to provide an integrated factual and theoretical account of child sexual abuse, alongside a clear and detailed discussion of appropriate ways in

which to deal with it, directed particularly at social workers but from the point of view both of statutory and therapeutic action.

This dual aim has determined the organisation of the book. Part I deals with the theory of child sexual abuse. Chapter 1 summarises research data on the frequency, severity and relevant characteristics of child sexual abuse. Chapters 2 and 3 outline a general model for understanding child sexual abuse and discuss the links between abuse, adult sexuality, the status and sexuality of children, the position and actions of the mothers of abused children, and the structure of family life. Part II provides guidance on therapeutic and welfare practice. Chapter 4 describes the main pathways to disclosure of child sexual abuse and discusses ways of assessing suspicions and alerting signs. Chapter 5 contains a detailed look at the validation process, emphasising procedures which maximise the clarity of information obtained from a child and the effectiveness of the resulting interventions, while also being as 'therapeutic' as possible and acting in the least detrimental manner. Chapter 6 describes the post-disclosure needs of victims and their families and attempts to guide social workers through the difficult task of long-term planning. Chapter 7 presents an outline of the most promising modes of therapeutic work, with a particular emphasis on group and family work, but including discussion of individual and dyadic interventions. Finally, Chapter 8 considers professionals' needs, interprofessional roles and relationships, and the place of specialist child sexual abuse treatment teams. One important area that is not specifically addressed here, because it falls outside the reactive brief of social workers, is that of prevention of child sexual abuse. It is our belief that while there is considerable virtue in enterprises which aim to give children guidance in ways of protecting themselves against sexual abuse, genuine primary prevention awaits some central changes in our social attitudes to children's vulnerability and rights to safe dependency and most significantly, to the sexual socialisation of men and the recognition of children's vulnerability.

The styles of Parts I and II are rather different, as a result of their different contents. Part I is more discursive and argumentative; Part II is more 'instructive', and attempts to provide clear principles upon which a professional response can be built. The suggestions in Part II are informed by the arguments of Part I, as well as by research and our own experience.

Note on pronominal usage

Since the vast majority of child abusers are men, we have throughout the book referred to abusers as 'he'. Since more victims are girls, in Part II we have referred to victims as 'she'. However, in the theoretical sections of Part I we are concerned to present as full a picture as possible of the parameters of child sexual abuse. As this includes the information that a substantial number of victims are boys (possibly around a third of the total), we have adopted the usage 'she or he' for this section of the book.