Online and offline sexual exploitation and abuse: Children’s memories and reports

Sven Å. Christianson
Professor, Ph.D, Lic Psychologist
Department of Psychology
Stockholm University
sven@psychology.su.se

The “Alexandra”-man -- A case of Internet-initiated sexual abuse

A man-made catastrophe

The “Alexandra”-man -- A case of Internet-initiated sexual abuse

Victims:
- Remembering and reporting online vs offline abuse
- Mental health before, during, and after the abuse

Remembering and reporting about emotionally stressful events

Vivid and highly accurate memories among adults for traumatic (extraordinary) events:
- Witnesses to a murder (Yuille & Cutshall, 1986)
- Victims and witnesses to bank robberies (Christianson & Hubinette, 1990; Fahsing et al 2005)
- Natural disasters (Rubin et al)
- American students’ most traumatic experiences: affect strength corr memory vividness (Christianson & Loftus, 1990)
- Chocking news events (Brown & Kulik, 1977; Christianson, 1989)
- Eyewitnesses to extreme violence (Porter et al, 2001)
- Etc...

Remembering and reporting about emotionally stressful events (non-sexual abuse events)

Superior memory for negative emotional events compared to neutral events:
- Public events
- Real-life studies
- Laboratory studies
Vivid and highly accurate memories among children for traumatic (extraordinary) events:

- Painful medical experiences (Ornstein et al, 1997)
- Physical trauma (Howe et al, 1996)
- Kidnapping (Terr, 1990)
- Witnessing murder, suicide, or rape (Pynoos & Eth, 1985; Christianson et al in press)
- Children who kill other children (Christianson, 2010)

Remembering and reporting about sexual abuse events

A variety of patterns that vary in both richness and accuracy

**Richness:**
- Detailed account – Fragmentary report - Amnesia

**Accuracy:**
- Entirely accurate account - Accurate gist - False account

Remembering and reporting about sexual abuse events

- **Scientific case studies**
  (access to verification of the abuse)

- Analyzing police interviews with sexually abused children regarding the patterns of their testimonies.

Study A: Children abducted and sexually abused by an unfamiliar perpetrator (same MO)

- Transcribed police interviews from 8 victims (3-10 years)
- Six girls, two boys.
- Retention interval 1 day – 5.5 years

- Verification data:
  - The photographs taken by the perpetrator.
  - The detailed reports of the perpetrator
  - Technical records (e.g., medical examinations, identified sperm)


Method - Category coding

1) Before the assault (e.g., “I followed him to the elevator”)
2) During the assault – sexual information (e.g., “he showed me his willie”)
3) During the assault – sensitive information (“He told me to take my clothes off”)
4) During the assault – neutral information (“we sat on the couch”)
5) After the assault (“I went home to tell my father”)
6) Additional informative details from the event (e.g., “it was at daytime”)
7) Denial/“unwillingness to report” about the abuse (“e.g., I don’t want to talk about this”, “I don’t remember”)
8) Unsupported sexual allegations
Study B: Children exposed to obscene phone calls: perpetrator phoned children, falsely introducing himself as working for the university with a survey concerning 'relations and sex'. (After some neutral questions the offender soon began to ask questions of a sexual nature that severely violated the children's integrity.)

- Transcribed police interviews from 64 victims (8-16 years, M=11.8)
  - 51 girls 13 boys
- Retention interval: 1 – 21 months, M=14.8
- Verification data:
  - Computer files: Questions asked and the answers received were documented on offender's computer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Addition</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Study C: Children exposed to obscene phone calls – follow-up study:

Factors related to the interviewer that predicted richness in the children's report:

- Verbal warm up
- The interviewers inform more about themselves and the interview per se
- Open-ended questions
- No effect on accuracy!

Leanders, Granvig & Christiansen, Psychiatry, Psychology & Law, 2006

Study D: Child sexual abuse: perpetrator known or unknown to the victims:

- 27 children (5-17 years, M=10.6)
  - 22 girls 5 boys
- Verification data:
  - Photographs
  - Films
  - Computer files


Children exposed to obscene phone calls:

- Richness (number and type of information):
  31% (neutral questions) 4% (sensitive) 2.8% (sexual).
- Accuracy:
  75 - 89 % correct
### Type of abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children's Age</th>
<th>Touching (n=11)</th>
<th>Masturbate (n=8)</th>
<th>Sexual penetration (n=8)</th>
<th>Sum (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-7 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-17 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relation to the perpetrator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Touching (n=11)</th>
<th>Masturbate (n=8)</th>
<th>Sexual penetration (n=8)</th>
<th>Sum (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological father/ stepfather</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance/ relative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Type of information when reporting about the abuse occasion per se

1. Sexual information: 11%
2. Sensitive information: 18%
3. Neutral information: 70%

### Interview occasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children's reporting</th>
<th>First Interview</th>
<th>Second Interview</th>
<th>Third Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual information</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>10.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive information</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral information</td>
<td>10.60</td>
<td>15.30</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total information reported</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>48.80</td>
<td>30.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance*</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denials</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conclusions: Children's remembering and reporting about sexual abuse events

- Report neutral information rather than stressful information
- High levels of omissions and denials for sensitive and sexual information
- Highly accurate in their reports (low level of commission errors)
- Retention interval affected the richness of the statements, but not accuracy
- Interviewers affected the richness of the statements
- Repeated interviews promote richness of the statements

### Internet study: The "Alexandra"-case

Background: A perpetrator developed a false identity "Alexandra" on the internet and contacted a lot of girls to lure them into conducting online and offline sexual acts.

Offender MO history:
- Offline 1993 - 2002: parties, trainer, photographer, masseur
- Online followed by offline 1999 – 2005

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Offender’s arguments during the grooming procedure

“We are only working with younger men 23-30 years, who are very rich and want to enjoy life, but they have very special positions (politicians, executives...) so they are very cautious. Therefore I can GUARANTEE you that they are 10 times more afraid then you about this”


Sample of the offender’s arguments during the grooming procedure

“The photos you send will only be showed to a few VIP clients abroad, mostly in USA and Canada in a printed version on a special paper (that is, not possible to scan or copy). Very expensive procedure, but everything is for your own safety”


Sample of offender’s arguments during the grooming procedure

“We are arranging blind dates to big parties around the country, our clients want to have some nice company on dinners or cinema, a little ‘surprise’ is just a bonus and nothing the men expects, there are girls working for us who just meet the men outside, but to be honest there are girls who go all the way”


The ”Alexandra”-case

• Victims’ remembering and reporting of online vs offline abuse?

Predictions:

Gap between what the victims remember about the sexual activities and what they report in the police interview. Victims more hesitant to report about severe sexual acts than about less severe acts.

Internet study: The “Alexandra” - case

• Transcribed police interviews from 68 victims (12-19 years, M=16.1)
• Retention interval 1 – 17 months, M= 8.6
• Verification data: - Chat logs, entire internet conversation between the perpetrator and victims (first encounter to the end of contact) - Revealed photographs and web shows


Number of victims who participated in the different acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of act</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal information</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activities</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nude photos</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webclean email</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webclean sexual</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion room</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting one-on-one</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting including sex</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several meetings</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percentages of victims who reported or omitted/denied the online activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of online act</th>
<th>Reported %</th>
<th>Omissions/ Denials %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal information</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual preferences</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nude photos</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web show strip</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web show sexual</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages of victims who reported or omitted/denied the offline activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of offline act</th>
<th>Reported %</th>
<th>Omissions/ Denials %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting no sex</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting “voluntary” sex</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting forced sex</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions
Victims’ reporting (“Alexandra”)

• The children left out or denied a great deal of the online activities, particularly the sexual acts.
• In contrast with previous findings, victims reported about offline activities.
• Is it a representative sample?
• Effects of media (they feel like victims)?

The “Alexandra”-case

• Victims’ reporting of mental health/psychological well being following online and/or offline abuse

Conclusions
Victims’ mental health (“Alexandra”)

• A range of consequences among victims, but distrust most frequently reported.
• Most difficult period after the contact with the perpetrator was at the time of disclosure.
• Majority of victims rated current mental health at the positive end.
• Is it a representative sample?
• Effects of support during interrogation and trials on mental health today!

Overall conclusions

• Higher reporting of non-sexual traumatic events compared with offline sexual abusive events
• Higher reporting of offline sexual acts than online sexual acts
• Disclosure the most difficult part to handle
• Majority of victims rated good rather than bad health
• Has the Internet added another type of victim experience?
• Findings to consider in interviewing victims!
• Findings to consider in therapeutic intervention!
Thank you!