

The Role of Perpetrator Acknowledgement
in Mediating the Impact
of Child Sexual Assault:
An Exploratory Study

Tracy L. Morris
Julie A. Lipovsky
Benjamin E. Saunders

ABSTRACT. Parent Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) data were obtained and analyzed for two groups of sexually-abused children: those whose perpetrator had acknowledged (n = 34) abusing the child and those whose perpetrator had not acknowledged (n = 32). Signifi-

Tracy L. Morris, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Psychology at West Virginia University. She received her PhD (1992) in Clinical Psychology from the University of Mississippi and completed her internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the Medical University of South Carolina, where the research for this article was conducted. Julie A. Lipovsky, PhD, is Assistant Professor at The Citadel, Charleston, SC. Benjamin E. Saunders is Associate Professor with the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Medical University of South Carolina.

Address correspondence to Tracy L. Morris, PhD, Dept. of Psychology, P.O. Box 6040, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506-6040.

Submitted for publication 4-8-94; revision submitted 7-15-96; accepted 7-30-96.

Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, Vol. 5(3) 1996

© 1996 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

agencies and law enforcement. Demographic characteristics for the subjects are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). The CBCL (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) is a parent-report inventory consisting of 16 social compe-

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Child Sexual Assault Victims Whose Perpetrator Did or Did Not Acknowledge the Offense

	% Acknowledging ^a	% Non-Acknowledging ^b
Gender		
Female	94.3	85.7
Male	5.7	14.3
Race		
White	82.9	74.3
Black	11.4	20.0
Other	5.7	5.7
Assault Type		
Penetration	47.1	37.5
Non-Penetration		
Molestation	52.9	62.5
Perpetrator Relationship to Victim		
Father/Stepfather	100.	40.5
Other Relative	-	21.6
Friend/Acquaintance	-	32.4
Stranger	-	5.4
	<u>X (SD)</u>	<u>X (SD)</u>
Age at Interview	12.2 (2.88)	11.3 (2.71)
Age at First Assault	9.6 (3.72)	8.3 (3.41)
Age at Last Assault	10.9 (3.28)	10.3 (3.24)

a. n = 34

b. n = 32

knowledging perpetrator groups whose scores on the CBCL were in the clinical range (90th percentile [T-score ≥ 63] for Internalizing, Externalizing, and Total Behavior Problems; and T-score ≤ 37 for CBCL Social Adjustment). Significantly more subjects in the non-acknowledging group received ratings from their mothers that were in the clinical range for Internalizing behavior problems than did subjects in the acknowledging group (61.9% vs. 26.5%; $X^2(1,66) = 6.8, p < .01$). Values for Externalizing (59.1% vs. 33.3%) and Total Behavior Problems (68.1% vs. 45.7%) demonstrated a similar trend, but fell short of statistical significance ($p < .10$). There were no statistically significant differences between the groups on Social Adjustment.

Additionally, composite scores were derived for an experimental CBCL-PTSD Scale (as originally defined by Wolfe, Gentile, & Wolfe, 1989). An independent samples t-test was conducted comparing the composite scores of the sexually abused children in this study with the composite scores of the normative (nonabused) sample reported by Wolfe et al. (1989). A significant difference was revealed ($t = 9.6, p < .001$), lending support for the use of the CBCL-PTSD Scale in distinguishing abused and nonabused samples. The PTSD Scale data were also analyzed to assess differences between the acknowledging and non-acknowledging groups. Results indicated significantly higher scores for children in the non-acknowledging group ($t = 3.6, p < .001$).

TABLE 2. CBCL *t*-scores of Child Sexual Assault Victims Whose Perpetrator Did or Did Not Acknowledge the Offense

	Acknowledging	Non-Acknowledging	
	X (SD)	X (SD)	<i>t</i>
CBCL Social	39.9 (10.67)	39.4 (10.97)	0.16
CBCL Internalizing	57.3 (9.87)	65.4 (13.99)	2.73**
CBCL Externalizing	57.8 (9.61)	64.8 (13.37)	2.46*
CBCL Total	59.5 (11.19)	68.5 (14.06)	2.87**
CBCL-PTSD Scale Composite Score	.40 (.26)	.71 (.42)	3.63**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

- Saunders, B.E., McClure, S.M., & Murphy, S.M. (1986). *Profile of incest perpetrators indicating treatability—Part I*. Final report submitted to the U.S. Department of the Navy, unpublished manuscript.
- Saunders, B.E., Villepontoux, L.A., Lipovsky, J.A., Kilpatrick, D.G., & Veronen, L.J. (1992). Child sexual assault as a risk factor for mental disorders among women: A community survey. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 7, 189-204.
- Tufts New England Medical Center, Division of Child Psychiatry. (1984). *Sexually exploited children: Service and research project* (Final report for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Wolfe, V.V., Gentile, C., & Wolfe, D.A. (1989). The impact of sexual abuse on children: A PTSD formulation. *Behavior Therapy*, 20, 215-228.

for faculty/professionals with journal subscription recommendation authority for their institutional library . . .

If you have read a reprint or photocopy of this article, would you like to make sure that your library also subscribes to this journal? If you have the authority to recommend subscriptions to your library, we will send you a free sample copy for review with your librarian. Just fill out the form below—and make sure that you type or write out clearly both the name of the journal and your own name and address.



() Yes, please send me a complimentary sample copy of this journal:

_____ (please write in complete journal title here—do not leave blank)

I will show this journal to our institutional or agency library for a possible subscription.

The name of my institutional/agency library is:

NAME: _____

INSTITUTION: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

Return to: Sample Copy Department, The Haworth Press, Inc.,
10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904-1580