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1.
Overview of the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in Europe

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Introduction

The sexual abuse of children occurs throughout Europe, from the Inuit in Greenland (Curtis et al., 2002) to the Balkans (Flander, Cosic and Profaca, 2009) and from Spain (Pereda and Forns, 2007) to the Russian Federation (Dalenberg and Palesh, 2004). In 2003, the Council of Europe published *Child sexual abuse in Europe* (May-Chahal and Herczog, 2003) containing chapters on sexual abuse in particular countries (Romania, Germany, Poland, England), and chapters focusing on legal obstacles to rehabilitation, therapeutic help for victims, working with perpetrators, and telephone helplines. A number of European prevalence studies from the late 1980s to 2000 were examined which varied in terms of method and sampling. The authors made some comments about child sexual abuse in Europe that are still true today:

- "the majority of cases are not known about by official agencies in any European country" (p. 10);
- differing definitions and methodologies make it difficult to suggest overall prevalence figures;
- reliable figures on trafficking are "impossible to obtain" (p. 13); the exploitation of minors through prostitution is widespread "although accurate data on its nature and extent is not available" (p. 13).

In this chapter, we first consider the issue of varying definitions and research methodologies, a prerequisite for interpreting the research findings. Secondly, we summarise recent research findings on prevalence of sexual violence against children in Europe, largely focusing on studies published from 2003 to 2010. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for the future.

Definitions and methodological considerations in child abuse research

In order to contextualise the literature on prevalence a preliminary discussion of the methodological issues pertinent to this field of research is necessary. These methodological issues need to be taken into account in any interpretation of the research presented in this chapter. Such issues include definitions of child sexual abuse, methods of data collection, gender of victims and abusers.

Definitional issues

The Council of Europe defines sexual abuse as:

> a) engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities (this does not apply to consensual sexual activities between minors), and b) engaging in sexual activities with a child where use is made of coercion, force or threats; or abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence (Article 18, Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, CETS No. 201).

It is important to outline this definition at the beginning of this chapter as the reader will note that variations in definition is one of the many issues that has plagued the child abuse literature for many years, and not least the prevalence literature. Three key issues of note in this definition are age, specificity of behaviour and consent.

Age. Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years. As the age of consent to sexual behaviour varies from country to country within member states of the Council of Europe, so too do definitions of child sexual abuse. Some studies have only investigated sexual behaviour in children under 12 years of age (Curtis et al., 2002) while others, variously, have explored sexual behaviour below the age of 16, 17 and 18 years. Some studies use a five-year age difference when investigating abuse between minors, but this does not always capture the power imbalance evident in sexually abusive interactions between peers. Curtis et al. (2002) included two questions related to child sexual abuse in their study in Greenland: "Have you ever been forced to have sex?" (p. 61), using under 13 years as the cut off age and "Who was the offender?" (p. 61). This suggests that sexual violence against 14-year-olds was not counted as child abuse, and confining the definition to require force excludes a broad range of sexually abusive behaviours.

Specificity of behaviour. The term "child sexual abuse" is probably the most commonly used term when reference is made to sexual violence against or exploitation of children. Such a definition as outlined above takes account of a broad range of sexually abusive behaviours, the intentionality of this behaviour and the power imbalance in the relationship between the abuser and the victim. As can be seen from the studies reviewed below, there is considerable variation in the definitions used in studies. According to Manly (2005), child maltreatment is difficult to operationalise because of the social stigma attached to the phenomenon; the fact that it often occurs in the privacy of family homes and may result in severe consequences if disclosed. Manly notes that difficulties and variations in defining demarcation lines between abusive and normative behaviours are evident from one locale to another and one country or state to another.

Consent. In addition to considerations of definitions of the actual behaviour that constitutes child sexual abuse, there is the question

of consent. Most studies include the concept of consent and many stipulate age differences, usually that of five years. However, this masks the considerable problem of peer abuse. In a 2002 study in the United Kingdom, between 58% (touching) and 70% (sexual penetration) of respondents who reported abuse described the perpetrator as boyfriend or girlfriend (Cawson et al., 2000).

Differences in sampling

Variations in sampling methods and ensuing sample characteristics have also been identified as possible contributors to the significant differences found in prevalence rates from study to study. Such differences include sample size, age group of respondents (in particular adult versus child samples), gender of sample and whether the sample is drawn from the general population, student groups, child protection agencies or clinical services. Studies relying on adult samples only have found higher prevalence rates than those based on reports from children.

It would appear, at least in some countries, that child abuse rates are in decline. If so, different age cohorts will report variable prevalence rates. McGee et al. (2010:3) examined data from an Irish prevalence study for cohort effects. They found lower rates of experience of child sexual abuse in young adults compared to older adults, suggesting that levels of sexual abuse in childhood may be decreasing. The results showed lower levels of child sexual abuse among those born before 1930. Child abuse was most frequent among those born between 1930 and 1986, "so it may be fair to say that the 1980s heralded the beginning of a decline in child sexual abuse". This is consistent with findings from the US (Jones, Finkelhor and Kopiec, 2001) and Australia (Dunne et al., 2003).

Access to representative samples of populations is a challenge for researchers and much more so in the case of gathering data on children and young people. Schools are generally considered to be a good means of recruiting participants and schools have been used to gather both information on young people themselves (such as

Edgardh and Ormstad, 2000, in Sweden) and on parents (such as Figueiredo et al., 2004, in Portugal). However, Edgardh and Ormstad also included a small sample (n=210) of school non-attendees in their study and found that female non-attendees reported a significantly higher prevalence of sexual abuse.

Child protection services use labels that are subject to evidentiary standards that vary across locales. Manly (2005) notes the limitations of relying on authorities such as child protection services for sampling, suggesting that the behaviour that comes to the attention of authorities may be at the more extreme end of the spectrum of child maltreatment. Significant numbers of unsubstantiated reports of child maltreatment are typically excluded from research studies. Gilbert et al. (2009:69) note that there is frequently a 10-fold difference in the reporting rates of child abuse in community surveys, compared to official figures, and conclude "that only a few children who are maltreated receive official attention". Due to the low reporting rate of sexual crimes to law enforcement agencies and to questions regarding substantiation of children's reports to child protection services, official statistics held within governmental agencies or departments are not considered reliable sources (ISPCAN, 2008). Hussey and colleagues (2005) found no significant differences between outcomes measures for children aged 4 to 8 years with substantiated reports of child maltreatment and children with unsubstantiated reports. In fact, the children with unsubstantiated reports differed on more dimensions from a group of children with no reported maltreatment than did those with substantiated reports. As Manly points out, studies such as this lend support to the argument that many reports are deemed unfounded due to lack of evidence or other systemic issues rather than the absence of child maltreatment.

Not unexpectedly, clinical samples have shown the highest prevalence rates of all. Studies of parents have found especially low prevalence rates.

Methods of data collection

Variations on how data are collected have been cited as reasons for the considerable variation in prevalence rates noted from country to country and from study to study. Responses to survey questionnaires are highly dependent on question construction, with responses varying according to how the questions are asked. This is particularly evident in the case of questions that address sensitive topics such as sexual behaviour (Tourangeau and Smith, 1996). Fricker et al. (2003) examined the effect of context and question type on endorsement rates of childhood sexual abuse. They found that the use of behaviourally specific questions increased the endorsement of child sexual abuse in line with previous research by Finkelhor (1979). Both studies also found that endorsement of sexual victimisation increases with the number of screening questions asked. Response rates in themselves have been shown to influence reported prevalence rates with higher response rates resulting in lower reported prevalence rates (Gorey and Leslie, 1997). Studies using face to face interviews have elicited higher prevalence rates than those relying on questionnaires.

Self-report methods, therefore, according to Manly, raise significant concerns as a reliable method of investigation given that any self report could potentially result in criminal prosecution. Nevertheless, most studies do in fact rely on self reports, though these are predominantly adult studies with the accompanying limitations of retrospective recall. Few studies have attempted to ask children or young people directly. Ethical concerns are an issue – informed consent and the potential to cause distress. However, studies which have looked at the impact of participating in such studies with adult populations indicate that most people report a positive benefit from participating (Newman, Walker and Gefland, 1999; Griffin et al., 2003; McGee et al., 2005).

Delays in disclosure

Reluctance to disclose experiences of abuse and significant delays in disclosure have been found in both child and adult studies (Goodman-

Brown et al. (2003); Smith et al., 2000; McGee et al., 2002; McElvaney, 2008). London et al. (2007) conducted a review of 11 retrospective adult studies and noted a consistent finding that only one third of adults who suffered childhood sexual abuse revealed the abuse to anyone during childhood. McGee et al. found that in their sample of adults who disclosed childhood sexual abuse, 47% had never told anyone prior to the survey. Studies of adults have found delays of up to 50 years (McElvaney, 2002). Lamb and Edgar-Smith (1994) found that the mean age for first disclosure was 18 years, while the mean age of abuse onset for those in the sample was 8 years, resulting in an average delay of 10 years in their sample of adults. In the Collings, Griffiths and Kumalo (2005) study of children who had experienced penetrative abuse, 47% had reported the abuse within 72 hours, 31% from 72 hours to one month after the abuse, and 22% more than a month after the abuse. However, Smith et al. (2000) estimated that 48% of young women in their survey had told no one for more than five years after the event. Clearly, significant delays in disclosing sexual abuse inhibit any attempt to reach an accurate estimate of the extent of the problem of child sexual abuse in society.

Response rates

A further feature of research into child sexual abuse are response rates that are rather low relative to other, less sensitive, topics. For example, Niederberger (2002) reported a response rate of 56% and May-Chahal and Cawson (2005) a response rate of 69%. Non-response rates of 30% are common. Whilst many studies report that non-respondents are similar to respondents (in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status and so forth), we can never be sure that non-respondents are choosing not to participate due to painful or uncomfortable memories about childhood maltreatment.

Towards common data collection strategies

The Concerted Action on the Prevention of Child Abuse in Europe (CAPCAE, 1997; May-Chahal et al., 2006) co-ordinated a project involving child welfare researchers in Belgium, England, France,

Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain over a two-year period. The aim of the project was to review the effectiveness of prevention strategies in the participating countries. They found significant difficulties in insufficient specificity of data in all countries studied, noting that prevention services in European countries need to collaborate in collecting specific data as a matter of routine. The lack of such specificity, the authors note, results in services basing intervention on unspecified risk that is unacceptable in many European countries and to many parents, thus impeding child prevention strategies.

There have been concerted efforts on the part of researchers to explore the commonalities between monitoring systems of child abuse across various jurisdictions. Fallon et al. (2010) compared three surveillance systems (two from the United States and one from Canada) identifying the strengths and limitations of each approach. They highlight that the United States National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS) includes those children not reported to child protection services because it includes reports from sentinels, while the United States National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) both include a "suspected" level of verification that includes those children where abuse has not been substantiated but remains a significant concern.

Although there are continued efforts in North America to create uniform approaches to the measurement of child maltreatment, there remain enormous inconsistencies and variations in definitions used in child welfare legislation and by agency officials and researchers (Runyan et al., 2005). Recent international efforts to develop standardised surveillance systems have been spearheaded by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect's Working Group on National Child Maltreatment Data, the progress of which has been documented in a special issue of the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2009, volume 33). In that issue, AlEissa et al. (2009) offer some examples of the systems that have been developed

and the difficulties experienced. In Belgium, there are plans in 2011 to introduce a centralised electronic database which will be available to social workers on teams within the Child and Family Agency and the six Confidential Child Abuse Centres in the country. The unique political context in Belgium makes it difficult to co-ordinate record keeping at a federal level. In England, data is collected on all children about whom there are reported concerns, according to national guidelines for safeguarding children, as is also the case in Ireland. According to AlEissa et al., government statisticians regularly meet with local authority representatives to review the data collection process and its uses. Finally, they describe the reluctance on the part of the German Government to systematically gather data in a standardised way at a national level and the lack of co-ordination between health services and child protection services. Professional fears of the potential harm of stigmatising families, relatively strict data protection laws and the responsibility of communities to guarantee child protection were cited as obstacles to the development of national data collection efforts.

The methodology employed in searching the literature for this chapter involved searches of the empirical literature, searches of governmental departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the field of child abuse, and contacting researchers in the field. The authors had recently completed an international literature review on prevalence commissioned by Unicef/ISPCAN (Lalor and McElvaney, in press) and were able to draw on this paper as a starting point. A search was conducted of the major databases of published studies in the social sciences (Social Sciences Citation Index; PsycINFO) with the following terms: “child abuse in Europe”; “child sexual abuse in Europe”; “prevalence of child abuse in Europe”; “child sexual exploitation in Europe”. More general search terms such as “child abuse prevalence” and “child abuse epidemiology” were also used and the results filtered by Council of Europe countries. We also searched Google and Google Scholar using the same search terms, and examined the bibliographies of all articles for further sources. This initial search highlighted a key point of this chapter: the lack of

any serious effort on the part of European governments to fund prevalence studies in Europe. Our search was limited to studies published since 2002. Finkelhor's (1994) review covered studies worldwide from the 1980s and the 1990s. Pereda et al.'s (2009) study covered up to 2007. In addition, the Council of Europe publication *Child sexual abuse in Europe* (May-Chahal and Herczog, 2003) brought together much of the work conducted in Europe up to the late 1990s. We did not confine our search as Pereda et al. did to English speaking articles, thus Lampe's (2002) review, published in German, was helpful in identifying studies not previously included in English published reviews. Our use of material from these initial articles was confined to studies that investigated prevalence. Bibliographies of these articles enabled the authors to use a snowballing approach to gathering further related published articles. The final method involved making contact with researchers in the field, requesting direction to national policies or unpublished works that would be relevant to this chapter.

The nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation in Europe

The sexual abuse of children takes many forms. Most prevalent is abuse by a relative or acquaintance, but it can also take the form of trafficking for sexual exploitation, pornography (including online pornography)[1] and sexual abuse by clergy and other authority figures. Most studies show females report more abusive experiences than males.

Global / regional prevalence of child sexual abuse

A number of studies have reviewed prevalence rates and suggested global or regional prevalence estimates. For example, Finkelhor (1994) found that epidemiological studies in 19 countries produced findings similar to North American research (incidence rates ranging from 7% to 36% for women and 3% to 29% for men).

1. We have not included images of sexual abuse of children ("child pornography") on the Internet in our review, as it is examined elsewhere in this book.

Lampe (2002) reviewed 24 European studies conducted in Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Spain and found overall prevalence rates of 6% to 36% in girls and 1% to 15% in boys under the age of 16.

May-Chahal and Herczog (2003) examined a number of European prevalence studies and reported rates of rape were 0.9% for females and 0.6% for males. When broader definitions of child sexual abuse are used, the rates were 50% for females and 25% for males.

The UN *World Report on Violence Against Children* reports a World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002 (Ezzati et al., 2004, cited in Pinheiro, 2006). Sexual violence predominantly affected those who had reached puberty or adolescence, and girls were at greater risk of sexual violence than boys.

Pereda et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 65 child sexual abuse prevalence studies from 22 countries.[2] The analysis showed that 7.9% of men (7.4% without outliers) and 19.7% of women (19.2% without outliers) had suffered some form of sexual abuse prior to the age of 18. Overall, the highest prevalence rates for child sexual abuse (34.4%) were reported in Africa (Morocco, Tanzania, South Africa). Europe showed the lowest prevalence rates (9.2%). America, Asia and Oceania have prevalence rates between 10.1% and 23.9%. Of course, these are very general conclusions, based on studies with varying methodologies and sample sizes.

Prevalence of child sexual abuse in Europe

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children occurs in all Council of Europe member countries. A comprehensive list of all studies is

2. Of the 65 articles, only three were conducted in a Council of Europe member state and published since 2002 – Figueiredo et al. (2004) in Portugal; May-Chahal and Cawson (2005) in the UK; Pereda and Forns (2007) in Spain. This reflects the low levels of research into child abuse in Europe. For example, at the time of writing, "child abuse in Europe" returned 32 results in the Social Sciences Citation Index, whereas "child abuse in the US" returned 247 results.

beyond the scope of this short chapter. Instead, the material below is presented in two sections. Firstly, brief descriptions of studies from across Europe are noted to indicate the geographical spread and the variety of forms of sexual violence against children in Europe. Secondly, studies notable for large samples or probability samples or cross-country comparisons are presented in more detail.

Selected studies indicating range and nature of child sexual abuse in Europe

- An estimated 4 000 children were trafficked to European countries from Albania between 1992 and 2002 (Gjermenia et al., 2008).
- In a sample of 2 880 10-16-year-old Internet users in Croatia, 27% (36% of males and 15% of females) were exposed to sexual content, mostly images of human nudity and sexual activity (Flander et al., 2009). Of those using chat rooms, 28% (35% of girls and 23% of boys) reported being asked inappropriate questions regarding sex in general, private body parts, experience of masturbation, sexual experience, clothes, suggestions implying a meeting or sexual activity.
- In north-west England, a survey of 2 420 children found that 19% reported that they had been the victims of attempted or completed sexual abuse or an abduction incident away from home, consisting of "indecent exposure (40.8% of victims), touching (25.8% of victims), and abduction (23.1% of victims), each occurring on their own; and incidents involving multiple types of act (10.2%)".
- Lay and Papadopoulos (2009) document the sexual maltreatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia) in England. Much of the maltreatment is perpetrated by compatriots.
- In a sample of 226 women surveyed three to eight months after delivery of a healthy child in a university hospital in Germany,

11.5% reported "unwanted sexual contacts with or without physical contact e.g. touching of genital organs, breast, kissing etc." before age 18 (increasing to 14.6% if "not sure" responses are included). A total of 41.6% of the perpetrators were related to the women and 83.3% were well known to the victim (Leeners et al., 2006).

- A convenience sample of 458 high school students (median age 17) in western Bosnia and Herzegovina found 13% of girls and 21% of boys were "sexually abused" before the age of 14. The authors (Sesar, Živčić-Bećirević and Sesar, 2008: 251) speculate that the higher prevalence rate found in boys may be due to the "anonymous nature of the questionnaire, which is better for collecting data on sexual abuse from men".

- A UNICRI (2003) report describes the trafficking of minors and young women for sexual exploitation from Nigeria to Italy. Exact prevalence figures are impossible to achieve, but the report speculated that Nigerians make up the majority of foreign prostitutes in Italy.

- A study of a representative sample of 1 629 10-18 year-olds in Moldova found that 10% of respondents reported "that they have been sexually abused/molested". Also, "One in ten children states that adults involve them in watching pornographic films" (Ministry of Education and Youth and Unicef, 2007).

- Situation analyses of child sexual abuse in residential institutions in Poland, Lithuania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Latvia, Ukraine and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" have recently been conducted as part of a Daphne III programme co-ordinated by Polish NGO Nobody's Children Foundation and are posted at: <http://www.canee.net>. For example, a survey of 495 children/youth in Poland aged 15-18 found 8% reported having been raped or forced to have sexual intercourse in the past year.

- The Vatican has struggled to deal with child sexual abuse by clergy for years. Particularly high profile scandals have occurred

in Ireland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Belgium, although instances occur in most European countries. The issue has received more academic attention in the United States than in Europe (for example, Frawley-O'Dea, 2007; Terry, 2008).

Studies with large samples, or probability samples, or cross-national comparisons[3]

In this section, we shall look in more detail at studies with large samples, or probability samples or cross-national perspectives. First, we examine two cross-national studies, the Baltic Sea regional study on adolescents' sexuality and the CAPCAE project, followed by a Dutch study that employed the US National Incidence Survey methodology of estimating prevalence of child maltreatment. Summaries of main findings of prevalence studies in a range of countries are presented in Table 2 below.

The Baltic Sea regional study on adolescents' sexuality. Mossige, Ainsaar and Svedin (2007) compare findings from the Baltic Sea regional study on adolescents' sexuality (see Table 1 below). Approximately 20 000 young people around age 18 participated. The child sexual abuse element of the study compares data from respondents in Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland (n= 11 528).

Table 1: Child sexual abuse in five Baltic states

	Norway N=1966		Sweden N=1571		Lithuania N=1336		Estonia N=285		Poland N=1094		All N=6252	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Indecent exposure	14.5	21.8	8.2	27.1	14.8	21.3	7.7	15.4	21.5	15.9	14.2	21.9
Indecent touch	17.7	33.6	14	56.2	12	31.9	10.1	42.5	23	20.6	16.4	37
Sexual intercourse	6	9.7	3.7	9.2	19.2	13.3	0	7	25.1	8.4	11.9	10

Source: extracted from Mossige et al. (2007, pp. 35-6).

3. The Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect is currently underway and will survey children and parents from nine countries across the Balkans using the ICAST instruments developed by ISPCAN: <http://www.becan.eu>.

As we can see, Swedish females report high levels of indecent exposure (27%) and indecent touch (56%), relative to neighbouring countries. Experiences of unwanted sexual intercourse among females range from 7% (Estonia) to 13.3% (Lithuania). Overall, this large sample of Baltic youth report that 10% have had unwanted sexual intercourse, 37% have experienced indecent touch and 21.9% report having experienced indecent exposure. Mossige et al. note that these rates are higher than most international studies citing the inclusion of peer abuse as a possible explanatory factor. The higher prevalence rates in men noted in Poland were also found in Sesar et al.'s study in Bosnia and Herzegovina mentioned earlier.

The CAPCAE project. May-Chahal et al. (2006) outline the results of the CAPCAE project, a two-year, nine-country child welfare study in Belgium, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. A total of 2 356 cases, reported to a selection of child protection services between October 1996 and 1997, were collected. This is one of the few studies where comparisons across European countries are made. Overall, child sexual abuse accounted for 34% of the cases reported to this sample of child protection services across nine countries. "Rape/penetration" accounted for 6% of all cases in this study (from lows of 0% in Ireland, Spain and Italy, to a high of 28% of cases in Belgium). "Sexual: contact" accounted for 24% of all cases (from a low of 2% in Ireland to 53% of all cases reported in Belgium). "Sexual: non-contact" accounted for 4% of all cases (with a range of 0% in England and Ireland, to 9% in the Netherlands).

Netherlands. Euser et al. (2010) conducted the first national prevalence study of child abuse and neglect in the Netherlands. It was not a self-report study, but rather relied on "concurrent, standardized observations of more than 1 000 professionals working with children and their families" in order "to obtain reliable overall prevalence estimates of child maltreatment". It is modelled on the National Incidence Survey in the US which is based on "reports of professionals working with children (sentinels) to calculate the prevalence

rates of child abuse and neglect" (p. 6). Data were collected over a three-month period and extrapolated to the calendar year 2005. Results show that an estimated 0.13% (n=4 834) of children were sexually abused in 2005. The authors conclude: "The absence of previous Dutch prevalence studies precludes any conclusions about the stability of the current rate, and repeated monitoring ... is therefore urgently needed" (pp. 15-16).

"Headline" findings on child sexual abuse in Europe

In Table 2, we have presented the main findings of recent (2002-10) European prevalence studies noteworthy for methodological features such as large samples and/or probability samples.

Table 2: "Headline" findings on child sexual abuse in Europe*

Country	Study	Prevalence	Perpetrators
Denmark	Helweg-Larsen and Larsen (2006), n= 5 829 15-16 year-olds (constituted 11% of all 9th grade students in Denmark)	Females: 15.8% "unlawful sexual experiences before age 15" with "someone much older"; 9.2% reported "attempted or completed intercourse". Males: 6.7% "unlawful sexual experiences before age 15" with "someone much older"; 4.2% reported "attempted or completed intercourse".	Most of the unlawful sexual experiences were not perceived as abuse by respondents. 15.8% of girls and 6.7% of boys reported sexual experiences before the age of 15 that were defined as child sexual abuse.
France	King et al. (2006) n=12 256 adults	1.3% (0.7% male; 2.1% female) reported a "forced sexual relationship" ("touching or attempted rape or rape") before age 18.	Not reported

**Findings should not be seen as comparisons in prevalence across countries, due to differences in study design, definitions and sampling*

Country	Study	Prevalence	Perpetrators
Georgia	Lynch et al. (2007-08), n= 1 050 11-17 year-olds living at home (or in "collective centres") and n=301 11-17 year-olds living in residential child care	9% reported "some form of sexual abuse happening in the home". 17.3% reported sexual abuse.	Most (61%) incidents involved another young person. Most involved being talked to in a sexual way or shown pornography (5% and 3.9% of total sample, respectively). 1.6% said someone "tried to have sex with them" (no breakdown for penetrative abuse). The "vast majority" of incidents involved other children showing pornography or unwanted kissing.
Greenland	Curtis et al. (2002), n=1 393 random sample of adult Inuit population	Females: 7.8% "forced to sex as a child (under age 12)" Males: 3.2% "forced to sex as a child" (under age 12)	Against females: 54% family members (18% fathers) Against males: 21% family members; 53% "more distant person"
Ireland	McGee et al. (2002), n=probability sample of 3 118 adults nationwide	Females: 20.4% contact sexual abuse before age 17, 5.6% penetrative abuse before age 17. Males: 16.2% contact sexual abuse before age 17, 2.7% penetrative abuse before age 17.	Against females: 24% family members; 52% known to victim; 24% strangers Against males: 14% family members; 66% known to victim; 20% strangers
Portugal	Figueiredo et al. (2004) n=932 parents of primary school children	2.6% report behaviours including "inappropriate touching, sexual fondling, intercourse/rape, and exhibitionism/flashing" – no breakdown reported. No difference in gender or age experienced abuse (under or over age 13).	Not reported

Country	Study	Prevalence	Perpetrators
Spain	Pereda and Forns (2007), n=1033 university students (30.7% male).	Overall, 17.9% (15.5% of males and 19% of females) reported contact sexual abuse before age 18. Of these abuse experiences, the majority (83%) occurred before age 13.	
Sweden	Steel and Herlitz (2005), n=random sample of 2 810 adults	13.9% of the women and 5.6% of men reported "unwanted or forced sexual contact during childhood or adolescence" before the age of 18. For 55% of males, and 50% of females, the abuse occurred once. 0.6% of males and 2.9% reported unwanted or forced "intercourse".	Not reported.
	Priebe and Svedin (2009), n=4 339 male and female high school seniors	"Someone has pawed you or touched your body against your will" – 54.7% for females and 15.2% for males. Sexual intercourse "against your will" was reported by 10.5% of females and 4.7% of males. When any form of penetration is included (sexual, oral or anal), this increases to 13.5% for females and 5.5% of males.	Most perpetrators of non-contact abuse (such as indecent exposure) were strangers. For penetrative abuse of females, perpetrators were family members (7.4%), friends/acquaintances (64.1%) and strangers (28.5%). For males, the equivalent rates are 5.7%, 56.6% and 37.3%, respectively. The authors speculate liberal attitudes towards adolescent sexual behaviour may be a factor; high expectations may make it difficult for a young person to say "no" or for this to be heard.

Country	Study	Prevalence	Perpetrators
Switzerland	Niederberger (2002) n=980 women aged 20-40 years old, general population probability sample	39.8% reported "abuse" (any sexual interaction (excluding those between children) before the age of 16). 14.7% reported "severe abuse" (any form of contact abuse). A breakdown for penetrative abuse is not given.	24.5% of perpetrators belonged to broad family circle, 24.5% were strangers. Most frequently used strategy was "seduction", rather than "force".
Turkey	Alikasifoglu et al. (2006), n=1 955 9th-11th grade females (age range 15-20; mean 16.3 years), randomly selected from schools across Istanbul	11.3% reported that someone touched their private parts in a way they did not like. 4.9% were forced to have sexual intercourse.	92.9% of perpetrators were male; 5.7% were female and 1.4% reported both male and female perpetrators. For sexual intercourse, perpetrators were strangers 35%; boyfriend 23%; acquaintance 12%; family member 1.5%; friend 13.6%; relative 15.2%
United Kingdom	Radford et al. (2010), n=random probability sample of 2 160 0-10 year-olds, 2 275 11-17 year-olds and 1 761 18-24 year-olds	Contact and non-contact child sexual abuse experienced by 1.2% of under-11 year-olds and 16.5% of 11-17 year-olds. Severe (contact) sexual abuse experienced by 0.5% of under-11 year-olds and 4.5% of 11-17 year-olds. Girls face the highest risk.	Very rarely caregivers; most frequently known adult men (sometimes women)

As can be seen from Table 2 and the comments on methodological issues earlier in this chapter, significant differences are evident between studies in age cut off points used and definitions across studies. Also, there is significant variation in the extent of detail given in studies in relation to type of abuse and information regarding the perpetrator. For these reasons, we cannot directly compare across studies. However, we can make some overall observations. Prevalence rates for penetrative child sexual abuse are higher for girls than for boys. For females, rates for penetrative abuse range

from 2.9% to 10.5% (Sweden); 3% (UK); 4.9% (Turkey); 5.6% (Ireland); 7.8% (Greenland). For males, rates for penetrative abuse range from 0.6% and 5.5% (Sweden); 1% (UK); 2.7% (Ireland); and 3.2% (Greenland). When broader definitions of contact sexual abuse are used, prevalence rates for females range from 10% (UK); 11.3% (Turkey); 13.9% (Sweden); 15.8% (Denmark); 19% (Spain); 20.4% (Ireland); 39.8% (Switzerland). For males the following rates for broader forms of child sexual abuse are reported: 6% (UK); 6.7% (Denmark); 15.2% (Sweden); 15.5% (Spain); 16.2% (Ireland).

Table 2 confirms the extent of child sexual abuse across European countries as a significant public health problem requiring urgent attention both nationally within European states and internationally at a regional level.

Recommendations and conclusions

The data gap

There is no co-ordinated centralised measure of the incidence of child sexual abuse in Europe comparable to the US National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS) referred to earlier in this chapter. Instead, independent research studies using a range of definitions and methodologies exist. These vary in size and sophistication. However, even the most comprehensive, using national probability samples, are generally "one-off" and provide only "a snapshot in time". They are rarely repeated using methodologies that would allow comparisons across time, so we have very little data on trends in child abuse.

Interestingly, those studies that use large probability samples are notable for being funded by bodies other than the state. In Ireland, the "Sexual abuse and violence in Ireland report" (SAVI) was part funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, with matching funding from the state. In the United Kingdom, the forthcoming prevalence study was undertaken by a charity, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. In eastern Europe, much of the extant research was initiated or funded by Unicef.

The lack of reliable empirical data on the sexual exploitation of children has been recognised for some time. The European Union's STOP II programme for the years 2001-02 was intended to prevent and combat trade in human beings and all forms of sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography. In reporting on a STOP II project (European Data Collection on Sexual Offences against Minors) Vermeulen, Dhont and Dormaels (2001:72) highlighted the need for "an international or European monitoring centre within the field of sexual exploitation of and trade in children".

Figueiredo et al. (2004:672) noted:

> Given differences in family organisation, rural versus urban living, religious affiliation and socioeconomic status in different areas of Europe, the widespread investigation of rates of childhood and adolescent abuse is required to understand both the different contexts of such abuse and its lasting ill-effects in different cultures and community settings.

In the "United Nations study on violence against children" Pinheiro (2006:27) recommended:

> that States improve data collection and information systems in order to identify vulnerable subgroups, inform policy and programming at all levels, and track progress towards the goal of preventing violence against children. [and]… develop a national research agenda on violence against children across settings where violence occurs.

CAHRV (2007:28) noted that "Childhood violence prevalence research is still underdeveloped in Europe". Unicef's (2007) overview of child well-being in economically advanced countries relied exclusively on mortality rates to reflect child safety, noting the lack of common definitions and research methodologies, inconsistencies between countries in the classification and reporting of child abuse as the reason for the omission of data in relation to the level of child abuse and neglect in each nation when discussing child safety standards.

So, there have been numerous calls for a co-ordinated approach to gathering data on child abuse prevalence in Europe. Euser et al. (2010:16) conclude:

> ... a European initiative is needed to co-ordinate child maltreatment prevalence studies in the various countries to compare the effects of country-specific policies on child maltreatment. We hope that these efforts will contribute to the ultimate goal: a childhood free of abuse and neglect for all children.

It is important that Council of Europe member states have accurate estimates of the prevalence of child sexual abuse. Reliable data are essential to inform society about the nature and prevalence of child abuse and to challenge those who deny or minimise the scale of the problem. In many regions, the secrecy and silence surrounding child abuse means that it is not widely recognised, which undermines efforts at prevention, reporting and treatment. For example, in Moldova "only 10% of parents surveyed admit that it [child sexual abuse] exists in the country at all and just 5% recognise it as existing in their community" (Ministry of Education and Youth and Unicef, 2007:39).

Measuring child maltreatment

Numerous measures exist for collecting prevalence data on child maltreatment. Given the data gap on child abuse in Europe, the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools Retrospective version (ICAST-R) is of note. The ICAST-R instrument has been designed to be cross-culturally robust and was designed by an ethnically and linguistically diverse group of international child protection experts. It is "based on consensus from international experts, translates clearly and has satisfactory properties for adoption as a survey tool to estimate prevalence and describe perpetrators and other contextual aspects of child abuse" (Dunne et al., 2009).

It would be useful to consider its use across Council of Europe countries, allowing cross-national comparisons for the first time. With just 15 core items, this is a short questionnaire, and has the advantage of being specifically designed to be useful across languages and cultures.

A model for multi-country studies already exists in the form of the WHO multi-country study involving 24 000 survey respondents in 10 countries (García-Moreno et al., 2005). Data were collected on child sexual abuse (defined as someone touching them sexually, or making them do something sexual they did not want to, before the age of 15) and the identity of perpetrators. Considerable variation existed across research settings, providing information on possible protective and risk factors.

This WHO multi-country study is a useful model for a comparable study in Europe.

Conclusion

It is impossible to know the true incidence or prevalence of child sexual abuse in Europe (or anywhere else). Victims rarely disclose to official sources. Prevalence studies must grapple with low participation rates and confounding definitional and methodological variations. However, well-designed studies, with large general population probability samples can give us a proxy estimate of sexual violence against children sufficient for policy making, prevention measures and therapeutic interventions. Such measures are amplified in utility if they are carried out regularly using uniform measures and sampling strategies.

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