

# DISCLOSING CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE: EXPERIENCES OF ADULT SURVIVORS

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## Childhood Sexual Abuse, Grounded Theory, Disclosure

**Background:** Childhood sexual abuse is not a new plague of the twenty-first century, yet, despite the growing number of researchers dedicated to understanding this phenomena, children continue to suffer in silence at the hand of perpetrators. Disclosure is often the first opportunity for others to assist an abused child and possibly remove them from an abusive situation. Unfortunately, the majority of victims of childhood sexual abuse delay disclosing, with many victims remaining silent into adulthood.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study was to explore the disclosure process by survivors' of childhood sexual abuse ages eighteen to thirty-five years old with a self-identified history of childhood sexual abuse by an adult acquaintance. Specifically, the goals of this research project was to take the first steps necessary in the development of a grounded theory of the disclosure process and to answer the research question; how do survivors of childhood sexual abuse disclose? The long-term goal was to use the knowledge gained in this study to create programs that will facilitate sexually abused children disclosing abuse sooner. In addition, this information will be useful in educating health care professionals and family members ways in which to assist children to achieve a more positive outcomes following sexual abuse.

**Methods:** Qualitative research methodology with a Grounded Theory strategy of inquiry was utilized for data collection and analysis. Data consisted of two semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into HyperResearch data management program. Data were analyzed consistent with grounded theory strategy of inquiry.

**Sample:** The sample consisted of twelve self-identified female survivors of childhood sexual abuse ages 19 to 35 (mean= 25). Nine participants were Caucasian and three African American and the majority of participant's had attended or were attending college (n=7) with one participant completing post college education. Five participants were married, one divorced, and six single. Nine participants were currently employed and three were college students.

**Findings:** Barriers and facilitators to disclosing both in childhood and in adult hood were identified from the interviews. Delayed disclosure pattern along with the purpose of disclosures were identified and described. Initial steps were made in the development of a grounded theory of the disclosure process.

**Conclusions:** Not surprisingly, the disclosure process is complex social process. Many factors appear to play a role in childhood and adulthood disclosure of sexual abuse. Although some findings are similar to previously published studies, several new findings were identified. New findings and the emerging grounded theory of the disclosure process provide new insight into how survivors of childhood sexual abuse disclose. Clinical implications and recommendations for future studies will be discussed.