



Focus On Subspecialties

Things you may not know (but should) about child sexual abuse

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High-profile cases in the media have raised the issue of sexual abuse outside the home, yet statistics continue to show that most children know their abuser from their home, family or circle of friends. In addition, child sexual abuse continues to decline in the United States.

The full picture of sexual abuse may take years to develop as many victims do not disclose abuse right away.

States are changing mandatory reporting laws

Some states have changed their laws to add additional categories of mandated reporters, and many other states are considering additional changes. Pediatricians should find out how these revisions affect their patients and their practice.

The U.S. Child Welfare Information Gateway (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/mandated.cfm>) offers information about mandated reporting and additional information about changes in state laws.

You can help families understand and prevent child sexual abuse

Families are worried. You can help reassure them by sharing the facts about the real risks, especially during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

Sexual victimization using the Internet has gained recent interest in the press and among law enforcement agencies, but the numbers of children affected remain small (Jones LM, et al. *J Adolesc Health*. 2012;50:179-186, Wolak J, et al. *Am Psychol*. 2008;63:111-128).

Commercial sexual exploitation, which includes sex trafficking, remains a hidden epidemic among segments of the child population, and children maltreated in this way have complex medical, emotional and psychosocial needs (Macy RJ, Graham LM. 2012;13:59-76. Teixeira SA, Taquette SR. *Rev Assoc Med Bras*. 2010;56:440-446). While these numbers are less certain, they also are only a small proportion of the victims.

An increasing proportion of victims are children with disabilities and behavior problems, often in families with additional problems, including poverty, mental illness and substance abuse (Hibbard RA, et al. *Pediatrics*. 2007;119:1018-1025; Sinanan SN. *J Child Sexual Abuse*. 2011;20:657-676). These families need extra time, attention and help.

Some centers report seeing more child offenders, sometimes comprising more than half of their cases, so our work in identifying and

referring victims and teens with problems is even more important to protect the next generation.

We are learning more about best mental health treatments

Increasing evidence shows that specialized treatment is more effective than just “counseling.” Sexual abuse victims have a variety of reactions and needs related to their experiences that call for evidence-based treatments such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and other trauma-informed approaches. These require a trained, knowledgeable clinician to achieve the best results.

You don't have to care for victims on your own

Most physical examinations are normal, but new evidence is emerging on interpretation of physical findings, and new methodologies are being developed to diagnose sexually transmitted infections.

The Academy is updating its clinical report, *The Evaluation of Sexual Abuse of Children* (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/116/2/506.full.pdf>), which outlines the physician's role in the medical assessment of suspected sexual abuse; determining the need to report sexual abuse; assessment of the consequences of sexual abuse; and coordination with other professionals to treat victims. The report is expected to be published in early summer.

More medical services are being provided at specialized centers such as hospital-based clinics, diagnostic and treatment centers, and child advocacy centers (CACs). More than 700 CAC member organizations provide these specialized medical assessments.

The AAP Section on Child Abuse and Neglect has developed a listing of medical diagnostic child abuse programs in each state that practitioners can use for referral (<http://www2.aap.org/sections/childabuseneglect/MedicalDiagnostic.cfm>).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.nctsn.org) also has resources and referral information that can help to get your patients to the services that meet their mental health needs.

Educational opportunities are available

The AAP Section on Child Abuse and Neglect (www2.aap.org/sections/childabuseneglect/) offers educational materials about child sexual abuse and periodically provides educational sessions at the AAP National Conference & Exhibition.

The National Children's Alliance (www.nationalchildrensalliance.org) offers training and accreditation for child advocacy centers. In addition, the American Board of Pediatrics (www.abp.org) offers

subspecialty certification in child abuse pediatrics. The next certifying examination is on Nov. 12. Currently, 264 pediatricians are certified.

We can do something to prevent child sexual abuse

While most sexual abuse prevention strategies, including sex offender monitoring and mandatory reporting, have not been evaluated, increasing evidence shows that community-based prevention programs are effective. Pediatricians should learn about programs that are being used in their community.

The AAP New Jersey Chapter (www.aapnj.org) and Martin Finkel, D.O., FAAP, a member of the AAP Section on Child Abuse and Neglect, have suggested prevention strategies, including educating young children and families about the importance of personal space, privacy and appropriate “touch” as well as engaging men to enhance male/female respect, especially among teens (see Resources).

We also can advise parents to allow only those they trust to provide genital, perianal and bathing care to their children, and encourage them to teach their children the appropriate names for their private parts so they have the language to communicate about their bodies.



Dr. Palusci is a member of the AAP Section on Child Abuse and Neglect Executive Committee.

RESOURCES

- The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children supports professionals who serve children and families affected by child maltreatment and violence, www.apsac.org. It has published *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: The Medical Provider's Role in Identification, Assessment and Treatment*.
- *Child Sexual Abuse and Prevention: Addressing Personal Space and Privacy in Pediatric Practice* by Martin A. Finkel, D.O., FAAP, <http://www2.aap.org/sections/childabuseneglect/>.
- The AAP clinical report, *The Pediatrician's Role in Child Maltreatment Prevention*, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/4/833.full.pdf+html>.