

# INNOCENCE DESTROYED: A STUDY OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

JEAN RENVOISE (1993)

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Jean Renvoise, Research Associate of Wolfson College, Oxford, is the author of "Incest: A Family Pattern" which has come to be recognised as a classic work on this taboo subject. Her new book is more comprehensive, it enlarges on her earlier work and explores professional management for victims and abusers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and northern America.

The single issue that makes this book important is that it includes personal communications from professionals working in the field such as Liz Drew from Royal Brisbane Hospital and Kim Oates from Camperdown Children's Hospital, Sydney, as well as published research material. This centres the book firmly in actual management practice and removes from the reader the comfortable myth that child sexual abuse is an obscure problem of interest only to "ivory tower" academics.

Renvoise includes all accepted definitions and data on incidence and retrospective reporting of child sexual abuse, including some incidence figures for the abuse of developmentally delayed or deaf children and adults. However, her putative figures for the sexual abuse of boys were clearly compiled before Watkins and Bentovim (1992) reviewed the sexual abuse of boys, and these data are thus somewhat out of date. Her discussion of the use of anatomically correct dolls and the art of interviewing sexual abused children notes the differences of professional opinion.

Throughout the book, four detailed case studies demonstrate issues such as generational abuse, sibling abuse, the combination of sexual and severe verbal abuse, and the relationship between social class and abuse. Only one parent of one of these cases of child abuse could be described as "working class", while one of the abusive grandfathers was from the Russian aristocracy.

Anecdotal data on the characteristics of child sexual abusers suggest that they are "over the top" charming with the propensity to turn very nasty indeed" (p.106), and incestuous fathers are described as "passive, dependent, isolated, somewhat paranoid and lacking a core masculine identification" (p.105). Research data from ex-members of the now banned Paedophile Information Exchange in U.K., who had not been charged with any offences, indicated that they are confident, assertive, well educated, and "not only over-

representative of professional men, but particularly so in jobs where their work might bring them into contact with children such as teaching or social work (West, 1987)" (p.110).

There is professional documentation of satanic and ritual sexual abuse of children and one instance of a sexual abuse ring that was being maintained by young boys for profit. The section on child pornography is the only one in which the objectivity of the author slips for a moment, and genuine anger rings out in just a few of the closing sentences.

Treatment options for victims and abusers, including juvenile abusers, are included in the last chapter of the book. Survey data obtained by the National Children's Home (U.K.) on the treatment offered in facilities that deal with victims and child sexual abusers showed that 83% offered behavioural modification techniques, 58% offered psychotherapy, 54% offered skills training, and 24% offered play therapy. No comparative data on preferred Australian treatment options were cited. The work of Hank Giarretto, Lucy Berliner, the Tavistock Centre, and Alan Fugler is outlined.

Having worked with the survivors of child sexual abuse, I found that this book spoke directly to many of my unanswered questions about the issue, and I recommend it with confidence to student and professional alike. All the material has been dealt with objectively and no opportunity has been taken to shock the reader. For the general reader, this objectivity and the mass of data accumulated about the subject will be chilling enough. For professionals dealing with child abuse there is enough professional and research data for them to explore in some detail the similarities and differences between the preferred management options of each country.

Watkins, B., & Bentovim, A. (1992). The sexual abuse of male children and adolescents: A review of current literature. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 33, 197-248.

West, D.J. (1987). *Sexual crimes and confrontations* (Cambridge Studies in Criminology LVII). Aldershot: Gower.

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