Sexual abuse in Canadian Aboriginal communities: a broad review of conflicting evidence


Résumé

Child sexual abuse (CSA), a prevalent problem across cultures and countries, threatens the well-being of victims, their families, and communities. Reports on the rates of CSA among Aboriginal people in Canada differ on the extent of this problem in the communities, with some studies reporting epidemic rates of sexual exploitation of Aboriginal children. Careful analysis and interpretation is required to more accurately capture the scope of CSA in Canadian Aboriginal communities. This broad review of evidence on CSA clearly shows the striking differences between adult reports of CSA experiences that occurred many years or decades ago and current cases of children and youth investigated for CSA. On one hand, after discarding misquoted research and studies conducted with at-risk populations, we find an estimate of 25–50% CSA prevalence rate in Aboriginal adults surveyed across Canada in the past 20 years. Based on the review of this literature, CSA seems to be a prevalent social problem in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults, although research indicates the former group is more at risk than the latter. On the other hand, recent cases investigated by the Canadian child protection services show CSA is a less common problem for Aboriginal children and youth (0.53 by 1000) than for their non-Aboriginal counterparts (0.62 by 1000). Given that most CSA cases, across all cultures, never come to the attention of the authorities, the striking difference between current CSA rates among children and youth and adult reports of CSA experiences raises several critical questions. Are Aboriginal children experiencing significantly lower rates of sexual abuse than their parents, or is sexual abuse being dramatically underreported both for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children? Exploring both sides of this problem increases our understanding of CSA in Aboriginal communities and brings critical new light to this social problem. Future directions for research are proposed to generate sound statistical data that will provide the basis for developing appropriate policies, legislation, and services for victims.
Canada’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, research is beginning to show. Extensive interviews with social scientists, Indigenous leaders and victims undertaken over the past few months by The Canadian Press show that the prevalence of sexual abuse in some communities is shockingly high. The abused in turn became abusers, creating a cycle of childhood sexual violation that has spread in ever-expanding ripples from one generation to the next. But the prevalence of abuse among Indigenous populations is difficult to assess accurately, experts say — in part because of conflicting evidence, and also because the issue is so taboo within communities that it often remains shrouded in silence. To ascertain the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in a community sample of Australian women. Retrospective study, done in 1994, of cross-sectional data on the prevalence of CSA, collected as part of a larger two-stage case-control study of the possible relationship between CSA and alcohol abuse. Data were appropriately weighted to adjust for the different selection probabilities of cases and controls. Putting the picture together: Inquiry into response by Government agencies to complaints of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities. Western Australia: Department of Premier and Cabinet. Voices from childhood: A survey of childhood experiences and attitudes to childrearing among adults in the United Kingdom.