SEXUAL ABUSE IN CANADIAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES: A BROAD REVIEW OF CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

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Research Question

- Child sexual abuse (CSA): A prevalent problem across cultures and countries.
- Divergent reports on the rates of CSA among Aboriginal people in Canada have created confusion.
- This research was undertaken because these incongruent and preoccupying trends required careful analysis and interpretation.
Research Question

Objective: To present the current evidence on CSA by reviewing the data from:

**Prevalence studies** – where adults are asked if they were sexually abused as children.

In Canada: about 25% women and 15% men were sexually abused before age 18. (Bagdley, 1984)
Some limitations

The most all-encompassing review (Ø systematic)
Descriptive analysis (Ø meta-analysis)
Despite our effort, data could not be disaggregated to take into account the three major cultural groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis), or to reflect the experience of Aboriginal peoples living off or on reserve.
20 Canadian prevalence studies published in the past 20 years.

Varied results: Rates of CSA from 16 to 100%.
- 8 studies “moderate” rates (16 to 36%)
- 7 studies “high” rates (44 to 67%)
- 5 studies “very high” rates (75 to 100%)
Prevalence Studies

8 studies “moderate” rates (16 to 36 %)

Some examples

- 85 Aboriginal women from one community in the province of Quebec (Gagnon et al., 2007).
  - 22 % in the context of residential school.
- 523 Native adults from one Canadian Aboriginal community (Embree & De Wit, 1997).
- 60 Métis people in and around Edmonton (Métis National Council, 1992).
- 969 Inuit people aged 15 and over (Lavoie, Fraser, Boucher, & Muckle, 2007).
- 939 Aboriginal youth in grades 7-12 from the province of British Columbia (Van der Woerd, Cox, & McDiarmid, 2006).
Prevalence Studies

7 studies “high” rates (44 to 67 %)

Some examples

- 621 Aboriginal adults from various urban centers in Canada (La Prairie, 1995).
- 104 Aboriginal women on and off reserve in Ontario (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989).
- 368 Aboriginal women attending a community health center in Winnipeg (Young & Katz, 1998).
- 59 Cree girls aged 4 to 16 (Minde & Minde, 1995).
Prevalence Studies

5 studies “very high” rates (75 to 100 %)

- Three of these studies were conducted on specific high-risk subpopulations of Aboriginal people:
  - Prostitutes (Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, 2005; Kingsley & Mark, 2001)
  - Litigants against the federal government of Canada and churches for abuses they suffered while they were students at residential schools (Corrado & Cohen, 2003).
Prevalence Studies

5 studies “very high” rates (75 to 100 %)

- Misquoted studies
    - False interpretation: “80% of Aboriginal women under the age of 18 were sexually abused”
    - Interviews were conducted with 50 service agency workers, native elders, community leaders, sex offenders and victims of sexual abuse from 6 communities of the Western Arctic. From these interviews, the author deduced that up to 80% of the Aboriginal Arctic girls have been sexually abused.
Prevalence Studies

5 studies “very high” rates (75 to 100 %)

- Misquoted studies

  - False interpretation: “75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have been sexually abused”.

  - From reviewing 596 files of federally incarcerated Aboriginal sex offenders, 75% of victims of Aboriginal sex crimes were Aboriginal females under the age of 18. This study therefore shows that 75% of Aboriginal offenders’ victims were Aboriginal children and youth, and not that 75% of the entire population of Aboriginal girls were sexually abused.
Conclusions

After discarding misquoted research and studies conducted with at-risk populations (5 studies), we found an estimated 25 to 50% CSA prevalence rate in Aboriginal peoples surveyed in several communities across Canada in the past 20 years.

The results of 14 studies over 15 fall into that range (23 to 57%).

Comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples indicate the former to report similar to higher rates of victimization; CSA is a prevalent problem in both groups.
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