

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS
By: LaKausha Sherrod

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science

in

Adult Education

Approved by Dr. Damira Grady

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Abstract

This paper examines coping techniques that would be useful for women and men who have survived sexual abuse. Sexual abuse means a variety of things, to different people, and can be included but is not limited to anything from rape to an inappropriate touch. Sexual abuse can leave a person feeling powerless, helpless, and even depressed. This paper examines the different ways sexual abuse affects people and ways they can cope with sexual abuse.

Keywords: Sexual Assault, Coping Techniques, Trauma, healing, Survivors

Chapter One: Introduction

Every two minutes an American is sexually assaulted (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016), and thus the reason, this paper will explore coping techniques for sexual abuse victims. Sexual abuse may affect all victims, although the effects themselves are unique to the individual. With so many people being sexually assaulted or abused there is a great need for information regarding techniques on how to cope with the abuse.

Background

Sexual abuse is a subjective term that is defined differently by each source. Sexual abuse can be hard to define because of the many different forms it can take on, the different levels of frequency, the variation of circumstances it can occur within, and the different relationships that it may be associated with (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016). Additionally, sexual abuse can be anything from touching by a relative or it can be a violent act committed by a stranger. People age 12-34 are at highest risk for rape and sexual assault (Rape Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016). This is why it's so important that survivors get help, so they are able to deal with the assault or abuse in an effective way. This paper explores what sexual abuse is and its effects. Sexual abuse of children will also be discussed. Since sexual abuse can happen to anyone the different survivors of sexual abuse are also discussed in this paper. Lastly, this paper will address non-effective and effective coping techniques.

Statement of the Problem

Sexual abuse is a problem that affects men, women, and children of all races and walks of life. When a person is sexually abused the effects of the abuse can last a lifetime, if not properly treated. The trauma that the personal experience from the sexual abuse can affect their lives in many ways such as making the person feel unsafe, they may also feel anxiety or have anger

issues. This is why it is so important to learn effective coping techniques to deal with these emotions properly.

Effective coping techniques help people deal with stressful situations. It allows a person to address the trauma they have experienced in a healthy effective way. It would be ideal if everyone could use effective coping techniques however, that's not always the case. Some people respond to sexual abuse by using non-effective coping techniques such as using drugs or alcohol, or other self-harming behaviors.

By choosing effective coping techniques people can learn to heal from their trauma by addressing their experience in a healthy manner. If individuals are unable to use effective coping techniques they may experience lifelong effects of the abuse. However, there is always hope for survivors. Survivors may start off using non-effective coping techniques, but then they may use effective coping techniques later on in life.

Significance of the Study

When a person experiences pain or trauma in their life, typically they try and replace those feeling with something that will make them feel better. Unfortunately, sometimes people turn to drugs and alcohol, or other self-harming behaviors to make them feel better or help them forget what happened to them. However, such self-destructive behaviors only make negative feeling go away temporary; additionally taking drugs and alcohol can cause major damage to the body. By increasing survivor's knowledge on effective coping techniques will allow them to apply healthy effective coping techniques to their life. Knowledge is the key to change and once a person starts making small changes in their life they could see a big difference.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight on the findings of effective and non-effective coping techniques for sexual abuse survivors. It is important to understand the difference between effective coping techniques and non-effective coping techniques. Some individuals experience sexual abuse as a child and they learn to cope with the abuse by using drugs or alcohol or acting out sexually. Learning about healthy effective coping skills can help change some people lives. Once they learn about different effective coping techniques, they may be able to apply it their lives or the lives of others.

Definition of Terms

Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent (APA, 2016).

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) includes a wide range of sexual activities, from fondling to non-consensual sex or rape. The term CSA is often used interchangeably with molestation, sexual assault, and rape (Walker, Hernandez, & Davey, 2012).

Non-effective coping technique refers to the goalless and/or negative coping techniques that survivors used during the abuse, or in the days and weeks following the abuse (Oaksforf & Frude, 2003).

Effective coping techniques refer to positive goal driven coping strategies adopted by survivors in the months and years after the abuse, including how they cope to the present day (Oaksforf &Frude, 2003).

Survivor refers to a person who survivor after an event where others have died.

Delimitations of Research

The data for this reach paper has been limited to the past ten years. During the research, the terms used to find articles were sexual abuse, coping techniques, and effects of sexual abuse. For this paper, resources were limited to peer-reviewed journal within the last eight years.

Chapter Summary

Effective Coping techniques can help a person heal and deal with the trauma associated with sexual abuse. Not all people use effective coping techniques when trying to heal. A person may engage in unsafe behaviors when trying to cope with the trauma. Since sexual abuse affects people in many different ways, there isn't one correct way to heal from sexual abuse. Sexual abuse survivors should utilize different effective coping techniques to help them heal.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Chapter two reviews literature regarding sexual abuse. This chapter takes a look at what sexual abuse is and its effects. Understanding who has survived sexual abuse will be discussed in chapter two also. Childhood sexual abuse will also be covered. Additionally, this chapter takes a look at effective and non-effective coping techniques for sexual abuse. The scope for this literature review is to increase the understanding that sexual abuse can happen to anyone, but the effects don't have to last a lifetime.

Sexual Abuse

The definition of sexual abuse varies depending on who you ask; the victim, the accused or mental health professionals. No two sexual abuse experiences are the same. The different perspectives create a controversial use of words and descriptions that are often debated depending on the source (Child Sexual Abuse, n.d.). Sexual abuse is defined as an unwanted touch from one person to another. This touch can leave a person feeling violated, powerless and so many other things. Sexual abuse violates a person and takes away their power, and sense of safety.

Beyond the scope of individual perspectives, differences in cultural and social systems may have an impact on how sexual assault is defined. Western and Eastern cultures have differing views on many life-based decisions including the age of adulthood, marriage, and sexual intercourse. For example, some cultures encourage arranged marriages, with husbands and wives being chosen by the family. Often, the wives are what many cultures consider underage, while the husbands are adults (Child Sexual Abuse, n.d.). Another example of how social and family systems impact sexual abuse is with the Arab-American families. Arab-American families have a close-knit family structure. This structure applies to the children and

the abuse that they may endure. Disclosure of sexual abuse may be prevented by concerns about shaming the family especially if the perpetrator is a family member. The value of closeness and respect in Arab-American families' means children are discouraged from engaging in any behavior that might disrupt the existing structure. Reporting abuse may be viewed as a defiant act that can have severe repercussions on the well-being of the familial system (Haboush, & Alyan, 2013). The theme of keeping family secrets is a theme among many families of all races, not just Arab-American. Some families value dignity over child safety and justice. When no one is talking about sexual abuse it becomes a person's dirty little secret. As everyone knows secrets can cause more damage than good.

Sexual assault, including rape, is one of the most underreported crimes to the police (Bachman 1998; Koss 1992; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in the United States, only 28.3 % of rapes and other sexual assaults are reported to the police. Reports estimated that at least 90 % of all rape cases in the United States have never been reported to the police. They also suggested that actual rape incidents are estimated to be at least 10 times higher than the statistics indicate. The underreporting of sexual assaults can produce harmful effects if a person does not report these crimes to the police. They might not receive the support that others survivors receive. Most survivors who report the crime have access to medical treatment, mental health providers, and might be able to have an advocate assist them in prosecuting the perpetrators. Statics show only 20 % of victims who did not report to the police received the same care. An additional if the survivor doesn't report the crime the perpetrators of sexual assaults won't be punished by the court of law (Chon, 2014). Some survivors may look at reporting the crime as a waste of time,

due to preconceived notions, however, the first step of taking back control of your life is speaking up for yourself.

As stated previously not everyone abused is affected in the same manner. Reasons that a person may not be affected the same way maybe based on duration, severity, the person who committed the crime and also the age of the one abused. After defining sexual abuse, the next section will discuss survivors. This session will look at the people who experienced such trauma and are still able to make it to another day.

The Survivors

A survivor is someone who managed to stay alive after a traumatic event when others did not. When people think of sexual abuse, they often state the victim of sexual abuse. For this literature review, we define people who have experienced sexual abuse as survivors. Survivors' survived an experience that others in the same situation were unable to survive or live with, thus the reason why it's so important to identify survivors correctly. Survivors of sexual abuse frequently blame themselves for the onset of the abuse, mistakenly believing that it must have been some character flaw in them or some action of their part that caused the abuse to occur. Sexual assault can happen to anyone of any age, race or ethnicity, religion, ability, appearance, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Disclosing sexual assault is an often complex and painful step for survivors to take, whether they disclose early on or later in their adult life.

With sexual abuse, women have higher rates of sexual assault than men. More than 23 million women in the United States have been raped. More than one in five African-American and one in eight Hispanic women have been raped (Women's Health, 2016). Most women who are raped are younger than 25. When you look at resources and supports for sexual abuse survivors, most are geared towards women because they have the highest incident rates.

Even though women have a high sexual abuse rate, men are survivors of sexual abuse also. Almost two million men in the United States have been raped. Almost 6% of men have experienced sexual coercion, and almost 11% of men have experienced unwanted sexual contact (Women's Health, 2016). Men that are sexually assaulted are often looked at as the invisible men due to the underreporting and/or the bias that comes along with men who are survivors of sexual assault. Men are often looked at as being weak if they report sexual assault. While disclosure is a challenging process for victims of both sexes, males must overcome environments that typically follow to traditional gender norms, potentially making disclosure even more difficult. Especially in the African American community, men masculinity and sexuality comes into question if they report sexual abuse.

When discussing survivors the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual community are also affected. Lesbians and bisexual women also have higher rates of sexual violence by a partner than heterosexual women. (Women's Health, 2016). Homosexuals often don't report their crime due to fear of judgment and backlash. Increasing support in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexuality community is important and much needed, they need support inside and out of their community.

With race, social class and other factors play a role in sexual abuse; women with other traumas are often survivors of sexual abuse. Subgroups of Black women are at even greater risk for sexual violence, women who are low-income, living with HIV, sexual minorities, and incarcerated Black women (Sigurvinsdottir, & Ullman, 2015). People of color in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community are more likely than Whites to have been victimized. These studies suggest that certain racial and sexual minorities may have different experiences with sexual abuse.

When walking down the street, we are all unaware of the survivors we pass by. Survivors don't have a certain look to them or a behavior. They are part of our society, families, friends, and community. They don't have a "tell tell" sign, however; if you pay close attention to your friends and family members you may see some of the effects of sexual abuse in their behavior. The next section will discuss the effects of sexual abuse.

The Effects of Sexual Abuse

In this section, the effects of sexual abuse will be discussed. Effects are hard to determine because sometimes they show up right away and sometimes they don't appear for years. In addition, this topic is difficult because usually if a person is being sexually abused there may be other forms of abuse occurring at the same times. It may be hard to determine if some of the behaviors are from sexual abuse or other forms of abuse or neglect.

Sexual abuse is a traumatic event and may affect a person's life and their sense of security. After experiencing a trauma such as sexual abuse the survivor may have some psychological issues and physical harm. Reduced feelings of safety and security are common responses to being traumatized, as the DSM-V-TR has defined trauma symptoms of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Trauma experiences may be a precursor to delays in cognitive, language, emotional, and motor development (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Traumatized children may also experience deficits in development in all parts of their life.

The effects of sexual abuse can be seen in survivor's personal relationships due to some survivors having a hard time maintaining personal relationships after the abuse. Female survivors tend to experience the most problems, including getting into arguments more frequently than before, due to them not feeling able to trust their family or friends, or not feeling as close to them as they did before the crime. Survivors of sexual abuse frequently experience

work or school problems. These problems can include they may lack focus at work, or have the inability to perform a task that they once did. Survivors sometimes have displaced feelings that are hard for them to process, so they take it out it out on the people closest to them.

With sexual abuse especially during development years, a person's sexual identity can become influenced. Sexual identity formation is a developmental task of adolescence where individuals begin to make sense of and embrace their sexuality, along with other significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. Many factors affect how individuals develop a healthy sexual identity, including internal processes, societal forces, family pressures, and other external societal influences; however, when sexual abuse occurs that interrupts normal healthy development issues may occur (Crete, & Singh, 2015). A person may be confused about their feeling or identity.

Sexual assault can affect a person's sexual function also. Low sexual desire and decreased orgasms are issues that some survivors of sexual abuse face. Male survivors who were sexually abused by males often report confusion about their gender identity and express doubts about their masculinity. This confusion may be related to a feeling that they were somehow responsible for the abuse, or perhaps to the awareness that the survivor experienced pleasure as well as disgust during the abuse.

The current research shows that one of the effects of sexual abuse is associated with psychological maladjustment. It is believed the maladjustment begins shortly after the abuse occurs and continues until treatment. One factor that facilitates this maladjustment process is social support (Gold, Hughes, & Swingle, 1996). Social support is very important; it can may a huge difference. Something as little as a phone call can save a life.

How a person views themselves as a parent of their child is another effect of sexual abuse. The experience of sexual abuse has been found to influence a variety of parenting behaviors. Parents who have experienced sexual abuse may have difficulty with promoting age-appropriate autonomy, excessive concerns about child safety, and difficulty dealing with the child's sexuality. They might over monitor their child's behavior, and they may also have difficulty with boundaries and overprotection (Allbaugh, Wright, & Seltmann, 2014). Parents may fear that what happened to them, may happen to their child, so they are doing their best to protect them the best way they know how.

The effects of sexual abuse may become long-term behaviors, and even worse if left untreated. These effects can be seen in physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral activities (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016). Signs and symptoms associated with sexual abuse of a child are; difficulty walking or sitting, bleeding, bruises, or swelling in the genitals. Survivors may exhibit signs of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, express suicidal thoughts, especially adolescents, and self-harm. The stress associated with experiencing and surviving sexual abuse directly influences overall health.

After a trauma such as sexual abuse, people may go through a wide range of responses. Such responses may be experienced not only by people who experienced the trauma first-hand, but by those who have witnessed or heard about the trauma. Many responses can be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma. Some reactions may appear totally unrelated (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016). A few common physical and emotional responses to trauma are aches and pains like headaches, backaches, and stomach or chest pain. There can also be changes in sleep patterns and appetite, and disinterest in sex. Some survivors increase use of alcohol or drugs, and/or food (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network, 2016).

Survivors are affected in every aspect of their life so it is common for different things to change in their life like eating or sleeping. The effects of sexual abuse can be very harmful to anyone, but when children are abused the damages can be more impactful due to the child's age and development stage. The next section will discuss childhood sexual abuse.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

The World Health Organization defines child sexual abuse (CSA) as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend (Women's Health, 2016). Which means the child is not mentally or physically developed enough to engage in such an activity as sex. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse range from infants to children in their teenage years. The issue with this definition is that different societies have different views on what a child can comprehend or not. Some countries see a child at the age of thirteen as being ready for adulthood, but some countries view everyone under eighteen as a child. The question is, at what age can a person comprehend sex? Is there a magic age, where a person can fully understand sex? This question may never be answered.

Childhood sexual abuse includes a wide range of sexual activities, from fondling to non-consensual sex. The term childhood sexual abuse is often used interchangeably with molestation, sexual assault, and rape (Walker, Hernandez, & Davey, 2012). Childhood sexual abuse is different from sexual abuse because the survivors are minors and are still growing and developing. Childhood sexual abuse rarely, if ever, occurs in isolation and is almost always accompanied by varying combinations of emotional, physical and verbal abuse and family violence, which causes additional trauma for the survivor to try and cope with.

One particularly devastating impact of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) can be that assumptions about the safety of their world are often shattered, which can lead to a loss to a few things such as loss of innocence in their childhood, their sense of security, and purpose in life. Childhood sexual abuse also include low self-esteem and self-worth, shame and self-blame, emotions such as anger, fear, despair and confusion and emotional detachment. There are often disorders linked to childhood sexual abuse, and one of the disorders most often linked to childhood sexual abuse is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bhandari, Winter, Messer, & Metcalfe, 2011). This disorder results from a traumatic experience that involves terror, fear of death or injury, and a feeling of helplessness. Symptoms include a re-experiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, and an increased arousal level.

A history of CSA has been associated with two patterns of sexual and behavior oversexualization and under sexualization (hyposexuality) (Robboy, & Anderson, 2011). Women with a history of CSA at a younger start having sex at a younger age, and they are most likely not to use birth control. They may be consumed with sex. Also, they may be consumed with sex and engage in unsafe sexual activities.

A history of childhood sexual abuse has been associated with high rates of psychological problems for adult survivors. Survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse, tend to have more pronounced psychosocial disorders, illnesses, increased risk of developing anxiety and depressive disorder, dissociative and trauma symptoms, as well as antisocial behavior (Sesar, Šimić, & Barišić, 2010). Survivors of childhood sexual abuse often experience a wide range of later adjustment difficulties, including depression, problems with intimacy, struggles in their parental role, and a heightened risk for later revictimization. For instance, compared with non-victims, former CSA victims tend to report greater psychological distress, more difficulties in

interpersonal relationships, and more physical health problems (Bhandari, Winter, Messer, & Metcalfe, 2011).

When an individual experiences a traumatic experience such as sexual abuse, they may feel they can't get past the trauma, but they can. For example, prior research with victims of other types of trauma has documented that some survivors perceive themselves as having become better persons as a result of coping with their experience. For some people, a difficult experience can provide an opportunity for growth and personal change and allow individuals to reflect on themselves. Research on posttraumatic growth points to the role that transformed meaning can play in the healing and recovery process.

There is potential for positive adjustment following traumatic life experiences such as sexual abuse in childhood. For example, prior research with victims of other types of trauma has documented that some survivors perceive themselves as having become better persons as a result of coping with their experience. Childhood sexual abuse survivors use different methods to rebuild and repair their lives and start creating a new normal. By being positive within themselves and their lives, understanding this was an event in their life, not their whole life. The survivor can begin to adapt to a new beginning in their life.

Childhood sexual abuse causes trauma at such an impressionable age. Before children are able to fully understand how their mind and bodywork, someone has caused confusion and pain to them that will affect them for a long time. During childhood, that's when children are discovering who they are and what they like. The next section will discuss how sexual abuse affects the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexuality community.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexuality Community

Research about sexual abuse in the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual community is still developing. However, research states that sexual abuse does have an impact on a person's sexual preference. Understanding that Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexual people are survivors of sexual abuse also will hopefully inspire people to acknowledge these survivors and help them gain access to proper support.

Being young and trying to develop healthy relationships without any trauma is hard, but experiencing sexual abuse during this time can make it even more difficult for individuals to have healthy intimate relationships, particularly if an individual was abused by someone of the same sex. Consequently, even after a sexual identity emerges, LGBTQ men and women with histories of CSA may still experience difficulty developing healthy intimate relationships (Walker, Hernandez, & Davey, 2012). Often traumatized individuals view themselves as inadequate, bad or helpless, and view others as dangerous, rejecting or unloving, sadly this is a common theme with survivors of sexual abuse in the LGBTQ community.

When it comes to sexual abuse, it can happen to anyone. A man, woman, child, heterosexual or homosexual, poor or rich, sexual abuse does not discriminate. Thankfully there are coping techniques for people to deal with sexual abuse. However, every coping technique is not effective or positive. In the next section non-effective, coping techniques will be discussed.

Non-effective Coping Techniques

Coping refers to range behaviors and/or attitudes used to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful or threatening situation. There are three main coping strategies that individuals use when faced with a stressful situation: problem-focused in which a person attempts to change the situation that caused the stress, emotion-focused in which a person

attempts to reduce or manage the emotional distress cued by the situation and avoidant where the person seeks to avoid the problem coping strategies (Johnson, Sheahan, & Chard, 2003). Each person has met someone who has displayed some of these coping techniques. Despite the coping techniques not being productive they serve their role for the survivor of sexual abuse.

Passive

Passive is demonstrated by little or no effort to deal with the sexual abuse. Some examples of a passive coping technique are; denial, dissociation, repression, and suppression (Johnson, Sheahan, & Chard, 2003). With passive coping technique a person may deny it ever occurred or state they have forgotten about the incident, which for some people it may be possible but for others it not. Being passive may mean for some survivors they are allowing this abuse to "pass" them by.

Maladaptive

Maladaptive is another coping technique that survivors of sexual abuse may use to address the stressful event that occurred in their life. Maladaptive are cognitive and behavioral techniques that lessen the distress without actually addressing the source of distress itself. These techniques can include cognitive disengagement (e.g., blocking out thoughts), behavioral disengagement (e.g., social withdrawal), denial, and use of substances to cope (Sesar, Šimić, & Barišić, 2010).

Dissociation

Some children use different coping techniques to address the trauma. One of the techniques they may use is dissociation, this when a child dissociates or shuts off the experience from his/her consciousness. Dissociation refers to the mental processes that create a lack of connection in the person's thoughts, memories, feelings, actions or sense of self. People who

face trauma use a variety of dissociative techniques (Oaksforf, & Frude, 2003). In dissociating, a survivor is trying to dissociate and "numb" themselves of the pain. Dissociation is commonly referred to as being 'spaced out,' 'blocking things out,' and 'being out of touch with one's emotions.' Children report going to a 'different place,' 'assuming the persona of heroes or animals,' or having a sense of 'watching a movie that I was in' or 'just floating'. Observers will report these children as numb, robotic, non-reactive, 'daydreaming,' 'acting like he was not there' or 'staring off into space with a glazed look (Oaksforf, & Frude, 2003).

Splitting

Splitting, which often related to early abuse and appears to be a technique by which people can preserve some semblance of happiness in the face of very negative experiences. Splitting refers to the failure to integrate the positive and negative qualities of self or others into cohesive images (Oaksforf, 2003). People who use the split coping technique struggle with viewing people as either entirely good or entirely bad. Splitting for a child appears to cause confusion, a child will have to split and label their feeling when they are just learning how to identify them. People are not just good or bad. People are a blend of things.

Denial

Another non-coping technique involves a person denying the abuse has ever happen then admit and confront the situation. The survival uses denial, a coping technique that simply denies thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs that cause anxiety. Denial seems to be the mind's way of preventing thoughts of trauma to occur. Denial may enable an individual to survive and function until a time at which he/she is able to come to terms with the event. In this context, the term 'denial' describes unconscious operations that 'deny' that which cannot be dealt with consciously (Oaksforf, & Frude, 2003).

Repression of Memories

One coping technique is repression of memories. Many trauma survivors have repressed or forgotten the incidents of abuse. Adults who recall traumatic events from their childhood, previously unavailable to recall are said to have repressed memories. Repression in memory is “an unconscious technique that protects the ‘self’ from being overwhelmed by the memories of the trauma. Some people have locked those unpleasant memories away. Traumatic amnesia may last for hours, weeks or years and recall can be triggered by sensory or affective stimuli reminiscent of the original event (Robboy, & Anderson, 2011). This may be a good technique for the moment, but what happen when the memories are no longer repressed? Do the person address the abuse or avoid it again?

Rationalization

Rationalizing is another coping technique is when victims avoiding reality becomes impossible; children may construct a rationale to justify their abuse. One common reaction is that children believe they are bad and deserve to be punished (Robboy, & Anderson, 2011). The rationalizing technique maybe the saddest coping technique, due to the fact that they blame themselves for the abuse. This may be a habit for the person; they might start blaming themselves for every bad thing that happens to them. They blame themselves for failed relationships, missed job opportunities, some things that may be out of their control.

Minimization

Minimization is the reduction of an experience to the smallest possible effect (Robboy, & Anderson, 2011). It is often used as a coping strategy for children surviving abuse when denial fails. One example is, ‘My boyfriend does hit me occasionally, but I’ve been through far worse.’ To minimize a sexual abuse is to discredit how important a survivor is. It takes away from how

valuable they are, how no one should abuse or mistreat them. Minimization makes things like sexual abuse "little" so they don't have to deal with it. If the issue isn't a big deal, they don't have to address it.

External Comfort

A coping technique survivor's use when they are unable to establish a sense of safety due to the abuse, they frequently seek external sources of comfort. Abused children sometimes seek the affection of the very individuals who abuse them (Oaksforf, & Frude, 2003). Survivors sometimes turn to the people who hurt them for help. There are stories of survivors dating the people who abused them. This is the perfect example of how detrimental sexual abuse can be because it causes confusion, and a person loses their sense of security. Another way survivors use external comfort is by using drugs and alcohol. There is high usage of drug and alcohol with survivors of sexual abuse. They attempt to numb their pain with these items. The numbness is only temporary. The use of alcohol and drugs only create more problems for survivors.

This section discussed non-effective coping techniques. Even though these coping techniques are not recommended, people have used them to help heal from the sexual abuse. As stated before, people heal differently. Some people may use these techniques in the beginning then eventually they use the effective coping techniques that are addressed in the next section.

Effective Coping Techniques

The concept of coping techniques for sexual abuse has been variously defined by different people; coping described as a response to a stressful situation with the goal of healing. Coping techniques are flexible, behavioral, and oriented towards positive adaptation to external reality. They produce greater mental health and wellbeing (King, Wardecker, & Edelstein, 2015). Coping techniques can be anything from meditation, relaxation, and physical activity or

even making jokes with friends. A person has to decide what kind of coping techniques they need to address the stressful situation.

Self-Care

Practicing self-care can be a coping technique when you practice self-care you are attempting to heal from the trauma you have experienced or experiencing. Examples of self-care are; walking, physical exercises, listening to music, reading, creative activities, hobbies, or meeting with friends. The basis of self-care is taking time out for yourself to take care of **yourself. You should do things you enjoy that will be relaxing and self-filling.**

Obsessive-Compulsive Tendencies

Obsessive-compulsive tendencies are ritualized behaviors that reduce anxiety and calms a person down when thoughts of trauma occur. A ritual may be repeatedly doing something over and over such as touching a doorknob or walking through the doors sideways. Each person that use obsessive compulsive techniques helps them deal with their trauma. Rituals may sound weird or unnecessary but they allow people to reduce their anxiety. This is an example of how the healing process can be different for each person. Healing doesn't always look the same or fit the cultural norm of what healing should be.

Posttraumatic Growth

An effective coping technique is posttraumatic growth, this is defined as the “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma (Walker-Williams, Eeden, Merwe, 2012). In this process of posttraumatic growth, growth does not occur as a direct result of trauma; it is instead the individual’s struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma. Creating a new normal is something that a lot of people have to do when dealing with

past trauma such as sexual abuse. Creating a new normal/life helps people heal from the past pain and use what they went through to create a fresh start.

Support Groups

Another coping technique is when survivors talk to each other for support. It is important survivors do not isolate themselves. Instead, make efforts to be with others. Survivors must choose their support people with care. With support from others, a survivor may feel less alone and more understood. They may also get concrete help with a problem they may have. Seeking support is very important to the healing process luckily Milwaukee, WI has some great social supports for survivors of sexual abuse such as The Women's Center, Healing and Aurora Advocacy Services, and Asha Family Services.

Personal Mastery

Personal mastery is a coping technique refers to people's beliefs about whether they have control over what happens in their life. People with high levels of personal mastery feel a sense of control over their life circumstances and their futures; they have confidence and they can solve life problems and shape their own outcomes. People with low levels of personal mastery, in contrast, believe that they cannot control life outcomes; they feel helpless or powerless to solve life problems and change their life circumstances. People who have experienced low levels of personal mastery usually has experienced some type of trauma such as sexual abuse. (King, Wardecker, & Edelstein, 2015). This coping technique is important because when a person is sexually abused they may feel helpless, feel powerless, and they feel like they have no control over their life. This technique allows a person to gain control back. They take charge of their life and choose what happens next.

Constructing Benefits

One of the most common coping techniques for survivors of trauma is the technique of construing benefits from the experience of trauma. Some studies reiterate the importance of making something good out of something bad as a way for survivors of sexual violence to know that their suffering was/is not in vain. When trauma survivors take direct action to cope with their stress reactions, they put themselves in a position of power. Active coping with the trauma makes you begin to feel less helpless. Active coping means accepting the impact of trauma on your life and taking direct action to improve things. Active coping occurs even when there is no crisis. Active coping is a way of responding to everyday life. It is a habit that must be made stronger. Knowing what happened to you and you moving on is active coping technique. This is the real-life version of when life gives you lemons you make lemonade.

Positive Coping Actions

Positive coping actions can help to reduce your symptoms and make things better. Plus, these actions can result in changes that can help you deal with the trauma and create a new life. Healing doesn't mean forgetting traumatic events. It doesn't mean you will have no pain or bad feelings when thinking about them. Healing may mean fewer symptoms and symptoms that bother you less. Healing means more confidence that you will be able to cope with your memories and symptoms. You will be better able to manage your feelings.

Summary

In this literature review, sexual abuse and its effects were covered. An overview of the survivors and survivors for the LGB community was discussed. A look at childhood sexual abuse was also covered in this section. Effective and non-effective coping techniques for sexual abuse were also discussed in this section.

After reviewing all the literature it's important to understand the impact of sexual abuse has on a person, a family, and society as a whole. Sexual abuse has long-term effects on a person's mental and physical well-being. Survivors may suffer from depression, anxiety as well as other things. The impact sexual abuse may have on a child will affect who they become as an adult. What kind of adult/ parent will they be? Discussing the different coping techniques will allow people to see the difference between each one and for they can understand how one may work for one person and another may work for another person. For example, Dissociate may be the "best" non-effective technique for one child, however, "splitting" maybe better for another. The common goal for all techniques is to heal. Some people search out temporary relief while others objective is to find long-lasting treatment.

People who have never been sexually abused can only imagine the pain and hurt victims of sexual abuse feels. Studies suggest that coping techniques following a stressful event can help prevent long-term suffering. Using any of these coping techniques is nothing short of awe-inspiring, they are taking everything they have and trying to move forward after a traumatic event happens. Some survivors pull their strength from confronting and moving past the sexual abuse and that's all anyone can ask of them.

After someone has been sexually abused they need time to heal. Healing for others may take a few months while others may take a few years. There is no timeline with healing. Each person's journey is different and the path of healing is determined by the supports survivors have and their own person's determination.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

Sexual abuse is never an easy topic to discuss. With so many different opinions and feeling about what sexual abuse is, makes it even harder to talk about. Sexual abuse is defined differently by the victims, professionals, and different cultures. Even though when a person is sexually abused they are violated in some shape or form. Their experiences are not the same.

Sexual abuse is a trauma that happens to many people, but not often discussed. Sexual abuse affects a person of all ages, races, religions, and sexual orientation which is why it is so important this topic receives attention. Sexual abuse sometimes turns into a person's secret shame. However, this secret shame eventually manifest into pain, anger, and hurt. This pain and hurt look different on each individual that experience this trauma. There is an article as entitled "Wonder Why" it discussed hypersexual teenagers. The article discussed how some teenager; the ones we labeled in high school as "easy" are hypersexual because they have been sexually abused. How many people are guilty of labeling these young ladies, never stopping to think about why they were doing what they were doing? That article was life-changing. The question has to be asked why and start looking at behaviors to start helping. Not enough people are asking the question "why" and that's one of the reasons this paper is so important.

After reading the articles the conclusion is healing looks different for different people. Each person can say what they believe is the best way to heal from this trauma but its ups to that person. What might work for a woman who has been raped by a stranger might not work for a person who was molested by their uncle. They both have experienced trauma, but the trauma looks different on them. They have to find ways to cope with the sexual abuse which might be counseling, building up their faith or nothing at all. No one person can tell someone how to cope.

Conclusion

The goal of coping techniques is to ease the trauma. These techniques help survivors process and deal with the sexual abuse. When reviewing all the literature, the most hurtful was that of self-blame. Studies state that when survivors blame their own behavior (e.g., not being careful enough) or to their character in general (e.g., being a reckless person). Survivors should never blame themselves or feel as if they did anything to provoke the abuse. Survivors may feel that their action may have caused the abuse, but they should never feel that way.

There has been a lot of studies done, and a lot of literature out there about coping techniques for sexual abuse. The common theme among the literature is that no one technique works for everyone. Also, it appears that some typical non-effective techniques can be helpful at times. The literature demonstrated that people can go through different coping techniques at different times.

Sexual abuse affects people and many different ways. It not only affects the victim but their family and friends also. When a person hurts, their loved ones hurt also. Family and friends are there to help the victim get through the rough times. However, it's up to the individual to utilize the coping technique that works best for them.

The conclusion is that sexual abuse is still not a popular topic; however it's a topic that needs to be discussed. There are survivors from all walks of like and sadly, there is a new survivor every few minutes. There needs to be more literature on survivors that are not heterosexual women, so more resources and supports can be developed for them. Once the shame of abuse is lifted, maybe more people are willing to discuss this topic.

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