

Intervention and Support for Victims of Sexual Violence and Their Families¹

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Abstract

With sexual violence emerging as an increasingly serious social issue, demand for related policies is on the rise. Policies and support services have accordingly been developed or expanded in various sectors, but support services for victims and their families are still severely insufficient. Hence, this study focused primarily on intervention and support for families of victims of sexual violence. In-depth interviews were carried out in order to gauge the needs and desires of victims of child and intrafamilial sexual abuse and their families. In addition, the problems and current status of intervention and support systems for families of sexual abuse victims were evaluated. Based on the research findings, effective methods to support and intervene with victims of child and intrafamilial sexual abuse and their families were suggested.

Key words: Child sexual abuse, intrafamilial sexual abuse, families of sexual violence victims

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Introduction

With sexual violence emerging as an increasingly serious social issue, demand for related policies is on the rise. Policies and support services have accordingly been developed or expanded in various sectors, but support services for victims and their families are still insufficient.

When an incident of sexual violence occurs, the victim's family members can also be exposed to both direct and indirect consequences. They may experience confusion, shock, and guilt at having failed to protect the victim, and these feelings can lead to the assigning of blame within the family, deterioration of family relations, and problems with family economic activities.

In cases of intrafamilial sexual violence, there is greater risk for the victim's siblings to potentially be exposed to sexual abuse, and the reporting of intrafamilial sexual violence often leads to the breakdown of the family. In the absence of adequate support measures and services for families of victims, violations may go unreported even when family members become aware of their occurrence, or the family may be reluctant to seek the needed outside support.

At the same time, families provide essential support to sexual abuse victims and play a crucial role in their recovery, protection and support. It is especially true that in cases of intrafamilial abuse, the non-offending mother of the victim and the victim's siblings are vital to the recovery, protection and support of the victim. Support for victims families must therefore be considered an integral part of systematic support for victims of sexual violence. For victim support services to be truly effective, there is an urgent need to integrate support for families into the current services.

While support for sexual abuse has previously focused on the victims of abuse, as awareness of the need for family intervention and support has grown, policies have been increasingly becoming more inclusive of victims' families. Support for victims' families is mentioned within relevant laws such as the Law for the Prevention of Sexual Violence, and policies for the expansion of familial support have been established.

Despite recent recognition of the importance of intervention and support for victims' families and the corresponding policy trends, however, research that would provide useful baseline data for policy evaluations and development is still lacking. This research is a response to this demand, and consequently focuses on determining the needs of victims' families for systematic support and on analyzing the relevant support systems currently in place in order to explore how present services and their practices could be improved to make more effective intervention and support services available to victims' families. This research seeks to identify intervention and support measures for families of sexual abuse victims, who are often secondary victims of the abuse, and thereby improve the system of response to sexual abuse victimization. By contributing to the expansion of the scope of research on victims, we hope to arrive at practical suggestions and policy proposals for increasing the effectiveness of victim and family support services.

Support for families of victims is important for the recovery and protection of all victims, regardless of their age, but even more so in cases of child sexual abuse or where sexual violence occurs within a family (i.e. by and against a family member). This research therefore focuses on intervention and support for victims of child sexual abuse and of intrafamilial sexual abuse and their family members. The scope of intervention and support for child victims and their families can be extensive, but for the purposes of this study, and in appreciation of the characteristics, needs and desires particular to child victims of child and intrafamilial sexual abuse, we have focused on support for family response and readiness, family counseling and treatment, assessment of and support for familial risk factors, support for victim and family protection and self-reliance, restriction or termination of parental rights and child protection within the public systems, and sex offender treatment and intervention.

Research methods

In-depth interviews with victims and their families

In-depth interviews were carried out to gauge the difficulties, needs and desires of victims of child and intrafamilial sexual abuse and their families. Two methods were applied in the interviews, survey and analysis of results. The first phase involved a reanalysis of twenty-six out of thirty-seven in-depth interviews of child/adolescent victims and their guardians already conducted by Lee Mijeong, Lee Inseon & Kim Kihyun (2013), but with the victims' families as our main focus this time. The main categories for analysis were as follows: families initial response upon becoming aware of an occurrence of intrafamilial sexual abuse, underlying problems within the family, any family trauma or other risk factors, family members' desire for outside support and the needs particular to the family, the availability of protection for the victim and non-offending parent from the offender upon separation from the family, the availability of support services for financial self-reliance and vocational rehabilitation upon separation and offender intervention.

In the second stage of the in-depth interviews and analysis, fourteen families of sexual abuse victims were surveyed regarding the difficulties they experienced and about their opinions on possible improvements to the current victim support system and services. The parents and guardians involved in the survey were referred through three national Integrative Support Centers for Sexual Assault Victims, and the survey was carried out during the month of September. In terms of their relation to the victim, ten of those surveyed were mothers, three were fathers, and one was a grandmother. In terms of age groups, one was in his or her twenties, six were in their forties, six in their fifties, and one in his or her sixties.

Interviews with support workers and experts in the field

In addition to interviews with child/adolescent victims and their parents, victim support and

intervention workers and related experts were interviewed, both in groups and individually, in an effort to ascertain the limits of and issues with the current system and better understand the improvements to be made in the future to the existing support and intervention systems for families of victims. A total of twenty-one support and intervention workers and relevant experts were interviewed: five from the Integrative Support Center for Sexual Assault Victims, three from counseling centers for sexual violence, three from protection centers for victims of sexual violence, one from a child protection agency, two from the Ministry of Justice offender correction program, three legal aid attorneys representing victims of sexual or child abuse, two members of the Healthy Family Support Center, one from the Victims of Crimes Support Center and one expert on police investigations. Written opinions were gathered over the five months from May to September 2014.

Experiences and needs of victims and their families

Case analysis of victims of sexual abuse and their families

Family first response and family conflict arising from awareness of victimization : In the case of intrafamilial sexual abuse, the responses and reactions by non-offending parent or guardian were complicated, and overall there were few instances of supporting and protecting the abused child. Compared to cases of intrafamilial sexual violence, extrafamilial sexual abuse cases showed both a relatively low rate of removal of child victims and more frequent examples of family members protecting and supporting the victims. However, there were also cases of families pressuring child victims into silence, or of failing to provide adequate support and assistance to the child.

Family counseling and treatment : Adolescent victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse who remained at home showed a strong desire for family counseling. Family members expressed concern about the limits placed on the available counseling period and the quality of counseling on offer, were doubtful that confidentiality would be assured or feared being stigmatized, and wished for a larger selection of available counseling agencies.

Family members of extrafamilial sexual abuse victims also expressed a considerable desire for counseling and treatment. Siblings of the victims in particular demonstrated physical symptoms resembling those of the victim, while some of the parents or guardians who had experienced prior traumas or issues in the past demonstrated deterioration exacerbated by the sexual abuse incident and required counseling and treatment.

Vulnerabilities and familial risk factors : Poverty, depression, psychological disorders, lethargy, and various addictions were among the preexisting vulnerabilities experienced by some of the families prior to the abuse, while other families reported a more comfortable standard of living with highly educated parents earning middle incomes. The greater the number of underlying vulnerabilities within the family, the more it appeared that the family as well as the child victim found it difficult to adapt to life after experiencing or becoming

aware of the abuse.

Many families where intrafamilial sexual abuse had occurred tended to have other underlying problems as well. Risk factors for sexual abuse included problems that would be difficult to solve over the short term, such as low income, parental mental health, domestic violence, domestic conflict, and various addictions.

Except in extreme cases of extrafamilial sexual abuse, victims of extrafamilial abuse were generally quicker to return to daily life compared to the victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse. The age of the victims meant that readjusting to school life was one of the most important issues in their lives and a potential problem area. Teachers' lack of understanding regarding the psychological and emotional repercussions of sexual abuse resulted in victims and their families being at times put at a disadvantage or receiving unfair treatment, and children sometimes were not provided adequate support or protection.

Protection of the victim and non-offending parent from the offender : Where intrafamilial sexual abuse had occurred, the abused child and other family members expressed more than anything a desire for safety, and this need was closely related to the issue of housing for the victim and family. Rather than offenders, it was in fact child victims who were more commonly removed from their homes. When placed in victims' shelters, these children faced additional problems such as the disruption, if not outright discontinuation, of their studies. The most noticeable problem was that since many victims' shelters are not designed to cater to families, a number of these underage children were required to live alone in shelters separated from non-offending family members.

Even in cases of extrafamilial sexual abuse, the strongest desire and need expressed by victims' families was for safety. Interviewees were visibly fearful of retaliation by the offender. There were numerous instances in which during both civil and criminal trials the addresses of child victims and their families were divulged and became available to the offender through exposure or mishandling of court documents and other paperwork.

Financial self-reliance and vocational rehabilitation : Protective measures for underage victims were insufficient overall, and support for eventual independence was also lacking. Support measures allowing young victims to obtain various certificates and licenses must be implemented, along with long-term preparatory measures to not simply obtain housing on leaving the shelter, but to ensure future self-reliance.

Offender treatment and intervention : Apart from legal interventions, there were almost no cases of offender intervention as far as intrafamilial sex offenders were concerned. Most of the victims and their families strongly feared the release of offenders from prison and future potential retaliation.

Survey analysis of parents and guardians of child victims

Desire and need for family counseling and treatment : In general, the child victims of the parents and guardians surveyed were in counseling and/or treatment, which the parents and

guardians had a high level of satisfaction. On the other hand, while there were cases where counseling and/or treatment and intervention had been deemed necessary for the parents or guardians, it was rare for parents or other family members to have actually received such counseling or treatment. The main reasons for not receiving counseling or treatment were economic barriers and difficulties in obtaining time off from work to attend sessions.

Vulnerabilities and familial risk factors : There were several instances of family relations and conflicts worsening in the wake of the sexual abuse, and cases of an ill parent's condition deteriorating. The majority of families had received no support or assistance from outside agencies to address their difficulties, and reported that they had no knowledge of or access to any information about where they could seek this type of assistance. In cases where the child suffered a disability, anxiety and fears about a recurrence at times negatively impacted family relations and economic activities.

Support for family self-reliance : Relocation after sexual abuse in order to protect the victim and other family members from the perpetrator or due to secondary victimization by the local community was common, and many of the parents and guardians surveyed reported experiencing financial difficulties in this regard. Victims and their families expressed a strong desire to receive support for family self-reliance and for financial support that would enable them to recover and adapt to a new environment, but the majority of parents and guardians participating in the survey in fact never received any form of financial support. Parents expressed a strong desire for a safe place of residence.

Protection of victim and non-offending parent from the offender : Most parents and guardians surveyed were fearful of the abuser and of possible physical harm from the perpetrator, and wished for stronger measures and safeguards for the mitigation of potential threats. Concerns about a recurrence of abuse were strong and occurred immediately after the initial occurrence. Following official reporting, threats from offenders and their families were often felt strongly, as was psychological pressure to reach a settlement.

Evaluation of the Current Intervention and Support System

Current intervention and support system for families of victims

Support for family response and readiness : The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of Korea and the One-Stop Support Center for Victims of Violence against Women and Children provide support through the distribution of a set of response manuals, one for parents and one for support workers, outlining guidelines for response in cases of sexual violence. These guidelines include preventive education, response procedures in the event of child sexual abuse, measures for the protection and support of child victims, and a pertinent code of conduct.

Family counseling and treatment : As yet there are no agencies offering regular and systematized family treatment programs. Services are provided in a passive and fragmentary manner, and only when requested by the parents of the victim (One-Stop Support Center, 2010).

Assessment of and support for familial risk factors : Currently, there is no standardized tool for risk assessment that determines familial risk factors other than the occurrence of sexual abuse. However, the One-Stop Support Center does provide a Manual and Workbook for Interviewing Parents of Victims of Child Sexual Abuse (One-Stop Support Center, 2011), which provides counselors with a standard for gathering information on families. Individuals and families impacted by sexual violence are categorized as at-risk families and are eligible to receive support from the local Health Family Support Center if they are determined to have experienced psychological trauma.

Support for victims, family protection and self-reliance : The Protection of Children and Youth from Sexual Violence Act safeguards young victims through clauses prohibiting the pressuring of victims into settlement agreements, prohibiting the disclosure of confidential information, and outlining protective measures for offenders. The Special Act on Punishment of Crimes of Sexual Violence also prohibits the disclosure of information pertaining to related service and social workers involved in the investigation and trial of sexual crimes. The Special Act on Punishment of Crimes of Child Abuse in particular aims to protect victims by removing offenders by means of temporary emergency measures and other temporary measures when repeated offending is deemed a possibility. As for support for self-reliance, housing and residential support assigns priority to victims of sexual abuse in placement in shelters and national rental housing. It also provides victims residing in shelters with living expenses, school fees and child support.

Restriction or termination of parental rights, child protection within the public system : The Special Act on Punishment of Crimes of Child Abuse, the Child Welfare Law and civil law together provide a legal basis for the termination of parental rights, but at present a separate assessment tool to determine termination of parental rights does not exist. The Special Act on Child Abuse includes provisions for protective orders, emergency measures and temporary emergency measures for victims of child abuse, the separation of a child from the offending parent for protection, the placement of the child in a foster home or care facility, and the restriction or termination of parental rights.

Offender treatment and intervention : The Special Act on Punishment of Crimes of Sexual Violence and the Protection of Children and Youth from Sexual Violence Act contain provisions mandating that sex offenders attend treatment and education programs. On this legal basis, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and the Ministry of Justice provide sex offender correctional and treatment programs. The Ministry of Justice programs differ in duration depending on the offender involved (nature and degree of offence, recidivism rate, and risk of reoffending), while the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family provides 40-hour educational programs.

Limitations of the current support system and future tasks

Support for family response and readiness : The lack of a systematic manual for the support

of family responses and readiness was mentioned as the first problem. Such a manual should be made available and distributed through expert agencies such as the Integrative Support Center for Sexual Assault Victims, Korea Sexual Violence Relief Center, and other equivalent organizations working to directly provide support to victims. The second issue was the restrictions placed on support and educational measures for family response and readiness education due to parents' lack of interest or refusal to participate. In cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, the tendency to conceal the abuse and to resist intervention was said to be especially strong, making it difficult for agencies and support workers to approach families and parents despite the urgent need to inform and educate them.

Family counseling and treatment : The lack of a family-centered mindset within support agencies such as the Integrative Support Center for Sexual Assault Victims or the Korea Sexual Violence Relief Center as well in their approach to counseling and treatment, was deemed a concern. Another issue was the lack of a standardized program among support agencies and the paucity of expert human resources capable of family interventions. A family treatment program has been developed by the One-Stop Support Center, but the number of agencies making use of this or any other standardized program is essentially nil. Since a standardized program does not in practical terms exist, oftentimes programs are carried out according to the individual counselor or counselors' capabilities and family intervention varies from center to center. Particularly in counseling centers for sexual violence, apart from the initial counseling provided to the family of the victim, professional and standardized family counseling and treatment programs are simply not available. The third point made was the need for close cooperation and a division of efforts between agencies offering support services for victims of child sexual abuse, for example, the Integrative Support Center for Sexual Assault Victims and the Korea Sexual Violence Relief Center, and child protection agencies. In mid- and short-term crisis assistance and support for victims and their families, in particular, further measures for cooperation and division of labor between the Integrative Support Center for Sexual Assault Victims and various counseling centers need to be explored.

Assessment of and support for familial risk factors : The current approach to support in which victim support agencies make basic assessments of familial risk factors and then attempt to offer services through liaising with external agencies was deemed insufficient. Secondly, although liaison between victim support agencies was judged to be quite effective, connections to local communities and community resources were viewed to be quite weak in supporting familial risk factors.

Support for victim and family protection and self-reliance : Restraining orders are one example of legally safeguarding victims and their families from abusers, but overall, systematic support and implementation of support for victim and family protection were judged to be inadequate. For instance, restraining and confidentiality orders were not always obeyed, and protective orders prohibiting convicted offenders from approaching victims upon their release were ineffective. Although victims and their siblings are guaranteed safe (i.e. secret) school transfers by law, it was pointed out that in reality many children find it

difficult to transfer since at vocational and professional high schools the principal holds discretionary power over the granting of transfers.

Restriction or termination of parental rights, child protection within the public system : In terms of restricting or terminating parental rights, legal grounds for intervention were strengthened with the enactment in January 2014 of the Special Act on Child Abuse, which has been in effect since September of that year. It is still premature to fully evaluate the actual effectiveness of this new law, but doubts are already being expressed about it since there is no systematic standard for determining when and whether to restrict or terminate parental rights, and the judiciary and related agencies are quite conservative in executing any such decisions. In cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, non-offending parents who failed to protect a child from the offender should be judged to have been neglectful according to the conception of child abuse, yet it was pointed out that in the field this is more often not viewed as neglect and cause for intervention. Also, if the non-offending parent shows no inclination to separate from the offending parent and no desire to see the offender punished, and consequently prevents the child from testifying, the problem remains that there are no alternative grounds to intervene in the absence of the testimony of the child. For restriction or termination of parental rights to actually be effective, a public system guaranteeing the protection and safety of the child once a child is removed from the home environment must be present, but as yet no such measures, or indeed alternative measures, exist to safeguard the child.

Offender treatment and intervention : Existing offender education programs do not take into consideration the particulars of the offender, i.e. whether the offense was intrafamilial or extrafamilial, and whether the offense was committed against a minor or an adult. This was described as a limitation to effective offender education and intervention. Offender programs are a joint effort between the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and the Ministry of Justice, but it appears that relevant information and documents were not being shared between the two agencies.

A dearth of qualified workers capable of operating sex offender education programs was also identified, as was the need to nurture professional service workers suited to the task. Offender support for reintegration into society is crucial if recidivism is to be prevented. Still, offender education is currently short-term and takes places either in prison or over a period immediately after release. The need for a long-term, sustained program of support and monitoring once the offender had returned to the community was pointed out.

Conclusions and Policy Suggestions

This research arose out of an appreciation of the necessity of a family-centered approach to the support of and intervention with victims of child and intrafamilial sexual abuse, and consequently aimed to identify effective methods of family support and intervention. Based on our research findings, we present the following practical policy proposals,

Manual development and education and training for support workers : Preparing families to respond appropriately to incidents of sexual violence according to the specific characteristics of the child and family is an important function of victim support agencies. Presently, basic guidelines for family response and readiness are available, but no systematic comprehensive manual exists outlining the roles of family members and appropriate responses taking into consideration the specifics of the incident and of the family. Since it is difficult for field agencies to independently compile a systematic manual, we suggest that a hub organization such as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family or the One-Stop Support Center should develop a standard manual to be shared with related agencies. In addition, education and training for support workers on the use of such a manual would allow family interventions to proceed according to the standard guidelines it laid out.

Development and distribution of educational materials for reluctant parents and increasing accessibility to education and training : If parents are disinclined and/or unwilling to participate in initial interventions and further counseling and treatment despite the necessity of such interventions, there is no legal basis allowing forced intervention, thus considerably limiting support agency access. To redress this, the development and distribution of standardized educational materials that could be made available to families at any time without the parents having to go through support agencies could be worth considering. The materials must be accessible, clear, and informative so that all parents, regardless of age, gender, or level of education, can understand the contents. Separate materials for the siblings of an abused child should also be created.

Development of a risk assessment tool and strengthening the role of first response support agencies : In families where sexual abuse (especially intrafamilial sexual abuse) has occurred, it is likely that other risk factors will also be present. For families to recover, and to prevent repeated incidents, support for families drawing upon community resources is vital, as is the strengthening of the family function. As the primary contact point for victims and their families, support organizations for victims of sexual abuse need to assess the basic familial risk factors and liaise with the appropriate local agencies to provide required support with maximum efficacy. This will require the development of a standard risk assessment tool that must first be shared with victim support service agencies.

Establishing an interagency system of collaboration and liaison at the local level : Victim support agencies should assess familial risk factors and then provide support to victims by working with local agencies. Considering the personnel and resources available to support service organizations for victims of sexual abuse, support and assistance that address familial risk factors would be best provided by local agencies as described above. Support at this level may include assistance with housing and financial needs, employment and education, domestic work, alcohol dependence, mental health, and domestic violence; all these issues will need to be addressed comprehensively in developing the aforementioned risk assessment tool.

Strengthening protective measures for victims and their families : Restraining orders are

one example of the legal protection measures available to victims and their families, but the fact remains that victims and non-offending family members experience high levels of anxiety and fear regarding their safety. Especially in sexual abuse cases, measures need to be taken so that restraining orders may be obtained even without a direct or expressed threat from the offender so that they need not come into direct contact with the offender, the offender's family, or witnesses for the offender. As an additional protective measure against possible retaliation and threats from the offender upon release from prison, victims and their families should be notified of the offender's release prior to the fact, and must be allowed to apply for a protective restraining order if they so desire.

Measures to remove the offender in cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse : The offender rather than the victim should be removed from the family in cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse. Presently, even when legal reasons such as the arrest or imprisonment of the offender compel the removal of the offender, the process itself can be drawn out. Consideration for the victim's safety must be given priority when an incident is reported and the offender be immediately removed. This means temporary shelters or residential facilities for removed offenders need to be made available.

Strengthened effectiveness of restriction and termination of parental rights : The Special Act on Child Abuse has not been in effect for the time required to allow an evaluation of its effectiveness, but the conservative outlook of judicial officers and related agencies in respect to child removal, restriction of parental rights, and termination of parental rights, as well as the justice department's arbitrary rulings without regard for specific standards all raise doubts as to its effectiveness. We propose that judicial officers awareness be improved so that children's safety is given priority, and that a systematic review of the child's home environment and standardized risk assessment be the basis of any determination or ruling concerning child removal.

Restriction of the parental rights of parents who fail to provide adequate protection : From time to time, instances become apparent of non-offending parents reaching an agreement with an offender or returning home with his or her child, even when the offender is still present. In cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, if the non-offending parent (usually the mother) knowingly conceals or tolerates the occurrence of sexual abuse or fails to adequately protect a child, measures to restrict or terminate parental rights must be taken in order to secure the safety of the child. This will require active intervention on the part of judicial officers, child protection agencies, and victim support service agencies, along with their acknowledgement that non-protection is tantamount to neglect. We propose that the Special Act on Child Abuse be amended to include a definition of non-protective parents as neglectful and therefore eligible for the restriction of their parental rights. An intervention manual setting out the specific criteria for decisions to restrict the parental rights of neglectful parents should be made available.

Providing diverse forms of residential facilities for the purpose of child protection : The state and society in general must be responsible for raising and protecting children who have been removed from their homes following intrafamilial sexual abuse until they come of age.

Support measures need to be strengthened accordingly. Diverse forms of residential facilities tailored to the characteristics and needs of each child must be made available; surrogate care by a non-offending relative as well as foster homes should be encouraged so that the child can grow up in a home-like environment; and group homes rather than large-scale care facilities ought to be expanded. Various shelters appropriate to children and befitting the needs and characteristics of each child should also be made available, from short- and mid- to long-term shelters to shelters for victims of interfamilial sexual abuse and family-friendly shelters.

Developing intervention programs according to offender characteristics and developing the expertise of program instructors : In order for offender treatment and intervention to be effective, diverse programs need to be developed to better fit the needs of the offender. For instance, programs may be categorized along these lines: intrafamilial/extrafamilial sexual abuse; child/adolescent sexual abuse; rate of recidivism; and risk of reoffending. Continuous evaluations of such programs will be needed for effective programming and development. We propose that highly-qualified instructors be selected to lead the programs. Over the long term, a labor pool of expert instructors should be established through instructor training.

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