

General findings and vulnerability groups from the fourth Swedish epidemiological study "Young sex and Internet after MeToo#"

Introduction to Symposium (Carl Göran Svedin, chair)

The research group has in different constellations been active in the four surveys (2004, 2009, 2014 and 2020/21) which have resulted in a number of reports and scientific articles over the years. The overarching theme in the four surveys has been young people sexuality and sexual abuse, and we have chosen to maintain central questions in the various surveys to make it possible to compare the development over time, almost 20 years. We have also supplemented each survey with new and in-depth questions such as in this symposium: questions about disabled children vulnerability to abuse in various forms.

The symposium contains three different abstracts that highlight young people's experiences of sexual abuse, young people's consumption of pornography, and the vulnerability to emotional abuse, bullying, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Among children and adolescents with disabilities.

Abstract 1: Child sexual abuse – it concerns one in four (Åsa Landberg)

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global problem and also a child rights issue: according to Articles 19 and 39 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. Abused children also have the right to recovery and social reintegration. Disclosure of CSA is key for abused children to access help and to protection. It is therefore important to explore the prevalence of CSA through anonymous surveys.

Methods

Data were collected online in classrooms and during home studies from a representative sample of third-year students in Swedish high schools in 2020–2021, 3286 students completed the questionnaire concerning sociodemographic background, experiences of abuse, and risk behaviours.

Results

One in four of the participants had experienced CSA at least once during their life, the last time the study was conducted it was on in five, the increase mostly concerns girls. The study also showed that many abused girls and most abused boys had not yet told anyone about the abuse, leaving them unable to access protection or rehabilitation. Participants who had disclosed sexual abuse had most often turned to a peer, more rarely to an adult, and seldom to a professional or volunteer. Most participants stated that they did not need any

professional support and among the minority who had sought help, half were satisfied and a third dissatisfied.

Conclusions

The overall societal responses after CSA, especially severe CSA, need to be improved. Peers as well as parents and other adults may need support in how they should respond to disclosures of CSA, ensuring that the first responses after disclosure are positive. Recommendations for professionals is to always ask children and young people they meet with experiences of CSA what kind of help and support they need, and to adapt their responses and services to individual needs.

Abstract 2: Adolescents' use of pornography: Prevalence, characteristics, and attitudes (Linda Jonsson)

Introduction

With the overall reach of internet and smartphones adolescents can easily access all forms of pornography and sexual explicit material. Studies have found that most adolescents watch pornography, that boys watch more often than girls and that those who watch frequently (every day) have more psychological and psychiatric problems. Frequent users also use drugs more often, more sexual desire, more frequently have sold sex and that high consumers have a more traditional stereotypical gender beliefs.

Methods

Data were collected online in classrooms and during home studies from a representative sample of third-year students (m= 18 years) in Swedish high schools in 2020–2021, 3286 students completed the questionnaire. Questions were asked on how much and what type of pornography the adolescents used. There were also questions related to, health and attitudes.

Results

The study showed, comparing to previous similar Swedish studies, that fewer boys and more girls watch more repeatedly. However, the group of high consumers have grown, with 76 % of the boys watching every week or more often and 22 % of the boys watching daily. The results also showed that boys generally were more positive than girls to pornography and that 22 % (no gender differences) have tried what they had seen. Many boys found pornography entertaining and inspiring but for 15 % of the boys, pornography was problematic in the sense that they found it hard to stop watching.

Conclusions

The current study showed a more polarised picture of adolescents 'pornography use, with a bigger group of youth who doesn't watch pornography but also a group (especially boys) who watch every week or daily. The study also showed that for some pornography is a

source of information to sex and that one on five have tried what they have watch in pornographic material.

Abstract 3: Violence against children with disabilities, what do we know? (Carl Göran Svedin)

Background

Violence in various forms against children with disabilities has been found to be a fairly unexplored area. In this presentation, we want to highlight the particular vulnerability of these children.

Methods

A nationally representative sample of 3,268 students in the third year of high school (18 years of age) answered an anonymously questionnaire which gives a picture of their experiences of sexual abuse and other forms of violence throughout their upbringing. The material was collected between December 2019 and March 2021.

Results

The study shows that disability almost doubled the likelihood of having been bullied, psychologically abused, physically abused or of being subjected to sexual abuse. It more than doubled the risk of having been subjected to sexual exploitation. Adolescents with neuropsychiatric or psychiatric conditions were particularly vulnerable. Adolescents with multiple disabilities were more often exposed to psychologic abuse, bullying, physical abuse, and sexual abuse compared to adolescents without disabilities or with only one disability. The adolescents with some form of disability were more often exposed to two or more types of violence and abuse - multiple exposure. Adolescents with some form of disability had significantly worse mental health than other young people. The more disabilities, the worse the mental health. Young people who had been exposed to some form of violence generally had worse mental health than those who had not. The students who also had a disability felt even worse. In this regard, one can speak of a double risk for mental illness where the traumatic events are added to the functional impairment.

Conclusions

Children and young people with disabilities have the same rights as all other children, but the scant Swedish research available in the area indicates that this group's special vulnerability to violence and abuse has not yet received enough attention.