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## Trends in children's disclosure of abuse in Israel: A national study

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To identify characteristics of suspected child abuse victims that are associated with disclosure and nondisclosure during formal investigations.

**Methodology:** The database included all suspected cases of physical and sexual abuse investigated in the state of Israel between 1998 and 2002. All investigative interviews were conducted using a single standardized protocol, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Investigative Interview Protocol.

**Findings:** Overall, 65% of the 26,446 children made allegations when interviewed, but rates of disclosure were greater in the case of sexual (71%) than physical (61%) abuse. Children of all ages were less likely to disclose/allege abuse when a parent was the suspected perpetrator. Rates of disclosure/allegation increased as children grew older, with 50% of the 3- to 6-year-olds, 67% of the 7- to 10-year-olds, and 74% of the 11- to 14-year-olds disclosing abuse when questioned.

**Conclusions:** Although most interviews of suspected victims yielded allegations, such rates of disclosure varied systematically depending on the nature of the alleged offences, the relationship between alleged victims and suspected perpetrators, and the age of the suspected victims. The findings obtained in this large and unselected data set confirm patterns previously reported in smaller and quite selective samples, most of them obtained in the United States.

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*Keywords:* Investigative interview protocols; Abuse allegations; Disclosure/nondisclosure

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There is a broad consensus that many victims of child abuse disclose their experiences of victimization belatedly, if at all. Because some incidents may never be disclosed or uncovered, it is impossible to determine how many incidents actually occur, but it is still valuable to determine how often investigations triggered by suspicion of abuse yield disclosures by the alleged victims. In this paper, we examine nationwide information regarding the rates of disclosure and nondisclosure in Israel in a 5-year period during which all child abuse investigations were conducted using a single standardized investigative interview protocol. The analyses were expected to yield generalizable insights into the characteristics of cases and children that are associated with the disclosure or nondisclosure of abuse. As in other studies, of course, the validity of the disclosures was unknown; our focus was on whether or not children alleged that they had been abused when formally interviewed, and thus the terms allegation and disclosure are used interchangeably.

A recent review of research on the disclosure and nondisclosure of child sexual abuse, mostly involving studies conducted in the United States (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005) reported that, on average, 64% of suspected victims disclosed abuse when specifically asked by professionals, but the rates reported in individual studies ranged from 24 to 96%. Interestingly, much of the variation was systematic. First, rates of disclosure (the proportion of interviewees who make allegations) vary depending on the context in which the suspicions are explored. Even when researchers focus only on suspected victims, the lowest rates of disclosure are found in clinical settings. For example, only a quarter of the referred children in two well-known studies made disclosures in the course of therapy (Gonzalez, Waterman, Kelly, McCord, & Oliveri, 1993; Sorensen & Snow, 1991) and even these rates have been viewed skeptically because the interview techniques were reportedly highly suggestive and thus likely to elicit false allegations (London et al., 2005; Poole & Lindsay, 1998). Disclosure rates in mental health evaluations range from 43 to 65% (De Voe & Faller, 1999; Dubowitz, Black, & Harrington, 1992; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Gries, Goh, & Cavanaugh, 1996; Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Stroud, Martens, & Barker, 2000) and in forensic or interdisciplinary assessment interviews from 45 to 74% (Bybee & Mowbray, 1993; Cantlon, Payne, & Erbaugh, 1996; DiPietro, Runyan, & Fredrickson, 1997; Gordon & Jaudes, 1996; Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Wood, Orsak, Murphy, & Cross, 1996).

Second, higher disclosure rates are found in studies sampling better validated cases in which there is the strongest reason to believe that the interviewed children have actually been abused (Bradley & Wood, 1996; De Voe & Faller, 1999; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994), leading London et al. (2005) to speculate that lower disclosure rates were reported by other researchers because many of the alleged victims they studied had not, in fact, been abused. Consistent with this view, researchers have consistently reported higher rates of disclosure for substantiated cases than for their complete samples (De Voe & Faller, 1999; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994). In these studies, rates of disclosure ranged from 47 to 62% for nonsubstantiated cases and from 76 to 96% for substantiated cases.

Third, retrospective studies suggest that children are much less likely to disclose abuse than do studies focused on children. In six of the 10 retrospective studies reviewed by London et al. (2005), only a third of the adults who reported being abused as children said that they had reported this information earlier in their lives.

Fourth, preschoolers are much less likely than older children to disclose suspected abuse when questioned (Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Pipe, Stewart, Sternberg, Lamb, & Esplin, 2003; Smith et al., 2000; Wood et al., 1996). These trends are difficult to interpret because there are multiple possible explanations: abuse could be less common but suspicions equally common among preschoolers and older children; adults may harbor more unwarranted suspicions that preschoolers, as opposed to older children,

are being abused; and preschoolers may lack the cognitive, communicative and emotional abilities to understand and describe abuse experiences comprehensibly.

Fifth, prior disclosure of abuse is a strong predictor of disclosure during formal interviews (De Voe & Faller, 1999; Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994). When they have previously disclosed to someone, children tend to disclose abuse 74–93% of the time whereas only 25–40% disclose abuse when they have not reported it earlier, but have been referred for evaluation because behavioral and emotional problems make parents or professionals suspect abuse in the absence of disclosure.

Sixth, there is some evidence that gender is related to disclosure as well, with boys more reluctant than girls to disclose (Ghetti & Goodman, 2001; Gries et al., 1996; Levesque, 1994). The gender differences in disclosure rate are not consistent, however.

Clear understanding of the reasons why children do or do not disclose abuse when interviewed is seriously impeded by a lack of information about the way children are interviewed (London et al., 2005; Pipe et al., 2003). In particular, there is substantial reason to believe that the way children are interviewed—especially the use of directive and coercive practices, repeated questioning, or reliance on anatomically detailed dolls—may affect what they say, but most studies of disclosure and nondisclosure rates do not provide sufficient information about investigative practices. Critics have argued (Poole & Lindsay, 1998) that interviewing procedures in some of the widely cited studies (Sorensen & Snow, 1991) were seriously flawed, furthermore, leaving ambiguity about whether or not the disclosures were valid. One strength of the present study is its reliance on a comprehensive national data set comprising investigations using a single standardized investigative interview protocol.

In the last decade, researchers have learned a great deal about the factors and conditions which influence the accuracy and reliability of children's reports of abuse (see Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, & Esplin, 1999; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Esplin, 2004; Poole & Lamb, 1998, for reviews). This progress has facilitated attempts to develop investigative protocols which guide interviewers to employ 'best practice' when interviewing alleged victims. One of those protocols, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) investigative interview protocol (Orbach et al., 2000), was partially developed and field-tested in Israel, and its use has been mandatory nationwide for investigations of child sexual abuse since 1995, and for investigations of physical child abuse since 1998. The results reported below involve all child abuse investigations conducted in Israel between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2002 during which time all youth investigators used the same protocol in every investigation. No other study has involved such a large and unselected sample in which all suspected victims were interviewed in a standardized manner.

The NICHD protocol guides interviewers in detail through all phases of the investigative interview. In the introductory phase, the interviewer introduces him/herself, clarifies the child's task, and explains the ground rules and expectations. The rapport-building phase that follows comprises two sections. The first is designed to create a relaxed, supportive environment for children and to establish rapport between the child and the interviewer. In the second, children are prompted to describe at least one neutral experienced event in detail so that the child understands his/her role as a crucial informant and can become familiar with the open-ended investigative strategies and techniques used to explore the alleged abuse.

The "Getting the allegation" phase providing a transition between the presubstantive and substantive parts of the interview involves a series of prompts, progressing if necessary from open to focused, designed to identify the target event/s to be investigated. The free recall phase follows as soon as the child mentions an incident that might be considered abusive. This phase begins with the main invitation ("Tell me everything that happened, from the beginning to the end, as best you can remember"). Follow up

open-ended prompts and paired invitations are then used to elicit details about the alleged incident/s from free recall memory. Only after the open-ended questioning has been exhausted do interviewers move to focused questions. Suggestive utterances, which communicate what response is expected, are avoided throughout the interview.

## Methods

The data set included all investigations involving 3- to 14-year-old alleged victims of sexual and physical abuse interviewed in Israel in the 5-year period from 1998 to 2002. A total of 26,446 children were involved, and because the children were not identified in the archive, it was not possible to determine which children might have been interviewed more than once. All the children were interviewed using the 1998 version of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development protocol described by Orbach et al. (2000). A total of 140 experienced and trained youth investigators conducted all the investigative interviews. All interviewers had attended intensive training sessions in which they were introduced to the NICHD protocol and practiced using it. In addition, all attended regular meetings in which their recent interviews were reviewed by expert interviewers and peers; research has shown that such supervision plays a crucial role in maintaining the high quality of investigative interviewing. Because the research involved archival data without any identifying information, the NICHD IRB ruled that it did not require review.

In Israel, youth investigators are required to conduct electronically recorded interviews of suspected victims within 72 hours of the report. They then communicate their conclusions to the police who are responsible for other aspects of criminal investigation and, when relevant, to the child protection agency responsible for intervention when the child and family may need intervention or protection.

## Results

Table 1 shows the breakdown by age of the 26,408 alleged child abuse victims who were between 3 and 14 years of age for whom information about age and type of abuse had been recorded. (Note that information was missing on the type of abuse for 23 cases and on age for 12 cases.) The Table shows that physical abuse (15,420) was suspected more often than sexual abuse (10,988). Most suspicions of sexual abuse involved 7- to 14-year-old children, whereas most suspected victims of physical abuse were 7–10 years of age. In all age groups, around two-thirds of the suspected sexual abuse victims were female, whereas boys made up a consistent 55–60% of the suspected victims of physical abuse.

As shown in Table 2, just under two-thirds (17,180, 65%) of the children interviewed made an allegation during the investigative interview whereas a little over a third (9,240, 35%) did not. Children were significantly less likely to make allegations when physical (9,359, 60.7%) rather than sexual (7,812, 71.1%) abuse was suspected ( $p < .0001$ ).

Rates of disclosure varied significantly depending on the child's gender. In general, boys (62.9%) were slightly less likely than girls (66.8%) to make a disclosure when interviewed ( $p < .0001$ ), but a closer examination of the data (see Table 2) revealed that the difference was only significant when sexual abuse was suspected ( $p < .003$ ).

Table 1  
Distribution of cases by type of abuse suspected, gender, and age

Type of abuse	Age 3–6	Age 7–10	Age 11–14	Total
<b>Sexual</b>				
Male				
Number of cases	683	1466	1267	3416
Percentage within gender	20.0	42.9	37.1	100.0
Percentage within age	30.9	34.1	28.3	31.1
Percentage of total	6.2	13.3	11.5	31.1
Female				
Count	1526	2837	3209	7572
Percentage within gender	20.2	37.5	42.4	100.0
Percentage within age	69.1	65.9	71.7	68.9
Percentage of total	13.9	25.8	29.2	68.9
Total				
Count	2209	4303	4476	10988
Percentage within gender	20.1	39.2	40.7	100.0
Percentage within age	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage of total	20.1	39.2	40.7	100.0
<b>Physical</b>				
Male				
Count	2086	4152	2630	8868
Percentage within gender	23.5	46.8	29.7	100.0
Percentage within age	56.9	58.8	56.1	57.5
Percentage of total	13.5	26.9	17.1	57.5
Female				
Count	1577	2913	2062	6552
Percentage within gender	24.1	44.5	31.5	100.0
Percentage within age	43.1	41.2	43.9	42.5
Percentage of total	10.2	18.9	13.4	42.5
Total				
Count	3663	7065	4692	15420
Percentage within gender	23.8	45.8	30.4	100.0
Percentage within age ( )	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage of total	23.8	45.8	30.4	100.0

In 23 cases, type of abuse was not specified, and in 12 cases, the child's age was not recorded. These cases were thus not included in this table.

Even more impressive than the gender differences were the differences by age ( $p < .0001$ ; see Table 2). As shown in the Table, fewer than half (47.5%) of the 3- to 6-year-olds interviewed made an allegation, compared with two thirds (66.7%) of the 7- to 10-year-olds, and nearly three quarters (74.1%) of the 11- to 14-year-olds. Age differences were evident with respect to both physical ( $p < .0001$ ) and sexual ( $p < .0001$ ) abuse suspicions, although log linear analyses ( $p < .001$ ) confirmed that children in the two older (but not the youngest) age-groups were less likely to make allegations when physical rather than sexual abuse was suspected ( $p < .0001$  for 7- to 10-year olds and  $p < .0001$  for 11- to 14-year-olds). Log linear analyses confirmed that there was no overall (all ages considered) gender by type of abuse difference

Table 2  
Allegation rates by age, gender, and type of suspected abuse

Type of abuse	Age 3–6	Age 7–10	Age 11–14	Total
Sexual				
Male	321 47.0%	1064 72.6%	979 77.3%	2364 69.2%
Female	728 47.7%	2031 71.6%	2689 83.8%	5448 71.9%
Total	1049 47.5%	3095 71.9%	3668 81.9%	7812 71.1%
Physical				
Male	998 47.8%	2634 63.4%	1734 65.9%	5366 60.5%
Female	741 47.0%	1859 63.8%	1393 67.6%	3993 60.9%
Total	1739 47.5%	4493 63.6%	3127 66.6%	9359 60.7%
Total				
Male	1319 47.6%	3698 65.8%	2713 69.6%	7730 62.9%
Female	1469 47.3%	3890 67.7%	4082 77.4%	9441 66.8%
Total	2788 47.5%	7588 66.7%	6795 74.1%	17171 65.0%

although, in the oldest group, girls suspected of sexual victimization (83.8%) were more likely to make allegations than boys (77.3%) were ( $p < .0001$ ).

The likelihood that interviewed children would make allegations also varied dramatically depending on the relationship between the children and the suspects. In our sample, most suspects (17,270, 65.4%) were parents (including step-parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents), and children were much more likely to make allegations when the suspect was not a parent or parent figure. Small cell sizes prompt caution generalizing from these results, but the data also show greatest unwillingness among the youngest children to make allegations against parents or parent figures ( $p < .0001$ ). Caution is also warranted because it was inherently difficult to identify the suspect when the child failed to make an allegation. The data shown in Table 3 reflect the investigators' attempts to identify the likely suspect using all available information, including their impression of the child. When the youth investigators suspected that children had been abused by their parents but the children made no allegations, the cases were referred to the child protection agency, which only has jurisdiction when within-family abuse is suspected. When the children did not identify suspects, as a result, we used referral to the child protection agency as the criterion when defining suspects as either parents or nonparents.

The unwillingness to make accusations about parents or parent figures as opposed to other suspected perpetrators was especially marked when the alleged offenses were sexual in nature (see Table 3;  $p < .0001$  for sexual and  $p < .036$  for physical abuse), although in both cases the willingness to make allegations

Table 3  
Allegation rates by age, gender, type of suspected abuse, and relationship to suspect

Nonparent suspects				Parent suspects			
Age 3–6	Age 7–10	Age 11–14	Total	Age 3–6	Age 7–10	Age 11–14	Total
<b>Sexual</b>							
Male							
284	1005	954	2243	37	59	25	121
74.3%	90.0%	89.5%	87.4%	12.3%	16.9%	12.4%	14.2%
Female							
607	1860	2492	4959	121	171	197	489
75.6%	90.0%	94.7%	90.1%	16.7%	22.2%	34.1%	23.6%
Total							
891	2865	3446	7202	158	230	222	610
75.2%	90.0%	93.2%	89.3%	15.4%	20.6%	28.5%	20.9%
<b>Physical</b>							
Male							
79	184	143	406	919	2450	1591	4960
54.5%	68.1%	64.1%	63.6%	47.3%	63.1%	66.1%	60.3%
Female							
61	133	81	275	680	1726	1312	3718
59.8%	63.9%	61.8%	62.4%	46.1%	63.8%	67.9%	60.8%
Total							
140	317	224	681	1599	4176	2903	8678
56.7%	66.3%	63.3%	63.1%	46.8%	63.4%	66.9%	60.5%
<b>Total</b>							
Male							
363	1189	1097	2649	956	2509	1616	5081
68.9%	85.7%	85.1%	82.7%	42.6%	59.3%	62.0%	56.0%
Female							
668	1993	2573	5234	801	1897	1509	4207
73.8%	87.6%	93.2%	88.1%	36.4%	54.6%	60.1%	51.4%
Total							
1031	3182	3670	7883	1757	4406	3125	9288
72.0%	86.9%	90.6%	86.2%	39.6%	57.2%	61.1%	53.8%

increased with age ( $ps < .0001$  for sexual and physical abuse). In each age group, boys were less likely than girls to make allegations when sexual abuse by parents or parent figures was suspected, whereas there were no gender differences where physical abuse was concerned. Rates of sexual abuse disclosure by sons were 12.3, 16.9, and 12.4% for the 3- to 6-, 7- to 10-, and 11- to 14-year old age groups, respectively, compared with 16.7, 22.2, and 34.1%, respectively, for daughters ( $ps < .017$ ,  $.009$ , and  $.0001$ , respectively). It seems that gender differences in disclosure rates were largely accounted for by this unwillingness on the part of sons (especially adolescent sons) to make allegations of sexual abuse by their parents or parent figures. Again, however, caution is warranted when interpreting these data because suspects could often not be identified when children did not make allegations.

Table 4  
Distribution of nonallegation cases when abuse was strongly suspected

Type of abuse	Relationship to suspect		Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Sexual	Parent	Number of cases	33	108	141
		Percentage within relationship to suspect	23.4%	76.6%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender	78.6%	87.8%	85.5%
		Percentage of total	20.0%	65.5%	85.5%
	Nonparent	Number of cases	9	15	24
		Percentage within relationship to suspect	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender	21.4%	12.2%	14.5%
		Percentage of total	5.5%	9.1%	14.5%
	Total	Number of cases	42	123	165
		Percentage within relationship to suspect	25.5%	74.5%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Percentage of total	25.5%	74.5%	100.0%
Physical	Parent	Number of cases	111	65	176
		Percentage within relationship to suspect	63.1%	36.9%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender	100.0%	95.6%	98.3%
		Percentage of total	62.0%	36.3%	98.3%
	Nonparent	Number of cases		3	3
		Percentage within relationship to suspect		100.0%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender		4.4%	1.7%
		Percentage of total		1.7%	1.7%
	Total	Number of cases	111	68	179
		Percentage within relationship to suspect	62.0%	38.0%	100.0%
		Percentage within gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Percentage of total	62.0%	38.0%	100.0%



On 373 occasions (out of the 9240 instances in which children did not make allegations when interviewed), the investigators were convinced that the child had been abused, either because the child had made a credible prior disclosure to a disinterested person or because abuse had been reported by a witness. All of these children were referred for medical examinations (which were usually inconclusive), and the majority (344) were referred for further psychosocial counseling or therapy. Closer examination of these 344 cases (see Table 4) revealed that parents or parent-figures were suspected in most (85.5% or 141) of the 165 cases in which sexual abuse was suspected and almost all (98.3% or 176) of the 179 cases in which physical abuse was suspected. As Table 4 shows, girls were more likely to be involved when sexual abuse was suspected, whereas boys were more likely to be involved when physical abuse was suspected ( $p < .0001$ ). Similar differences were evident within each age group ( $ps < .0001$  for the 3- to 6-, 7- to 10-, and 11- to 14-year-olds, respectively).

## Discussion

The results reported in this paper provide invaluable information about the frequency with which suspected child abuse victims either disclose or fail to disclose abuse and about the characteristics of suspected victims who are more or less likely to make disclosure when interviewed. The statistics we report are especially valuable because they include all reported cases in an entire country (Israel) over a 5-year period and thus provide more generalizable and representative data than any other report to date. Although they pertain to Israel, whereas most research on disclosure rates has been conducted in the United States, the results nevertheless add greatly to the collective understanding of child abuse and its investigation, as we explain more fully below.

As in all such studies, of course, one must remember that the group of children who do not make allegations comprises three distinct sub groups of unknown size: (1) a group of children who were abused but do not want to report it because they are afraid, embarrassed, protective, or disinterested; (2) a group of children who were abused but do not recognize the incident as abusive/inappropriate, do not understand what the interviewer wants to talk about, or cannot make themselves understood; and (3) a group of children who were not actually abused and truthfully say so to the interviewers. Mandatory reporting statutes in both Israel and the USA may prompt professionals to make reports when their levels of suspicion are low, and this would perhaps inflate the numbers of children in the third category.

According to the statistics reported here, about two thirds of interviews with young suspected victims of abuse yielded allegations of abuse. Once suspicions were reported to the authorities, in other words, alleged victims were quite likely to provide reports that substantiated those suspicions. Especially impressive is the 71% rate at which suspected victims of sexual abuse made allegations. Compared to previous studies involving cases in which the allegations had not been substantiated, this rate is in the higher end of the range (percentile = 94) with just one study reporting a slightly higher disclosure rate (74%, Gordon & Jaudes, 1996). By contrast, about a third of the reports of all forms of maltreatment, including neglect, involving 0–18-year-olds investigated by Child Protective Services in the United States are “substantiated” or “indicated,” leaving about 60% unsubstantiated (Children’s Bureau, 2003).

In many of the cases included in previous research on disclosure or allegation rates, the forensic interviews were not as carefully structured as those we studied. Indeed, the relatively high disclosure rate obtained in the current study may thus reflect, at least in part, the nationwide reliance on a single empirically validated investigative tool, the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. The protocol includes a

systematic effort to establish rapport with children and prepare them for their role as witnesses, thereby enhancing their willingness and capacity to be informative. Compared with interviews not guided by the protocol, protocol guided interviews yield information that is, more likely to be accurate (Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001) and facilitates judgments regarding credibility or validity. As a result, it is also possible that nationwide use of this protocol enhanced the willingness of children included in this study to disclose abuse. The high disclosure rate reported here is consistent with findings from another recent study conducted in the USA. Examining data compiled by a single agency, Pipe et al. (2003) reported that 81% of the suspected victims of physical and sexual abuse interviewed using the NICHD protocol actually disclosed abuse during the interview.

Rates of disclosure varied systematically depending on a number of factors. Overall, children were less likely to make allegations when physical rather than sexual abuse was suspected, although there were, as discussed below, certain subgroups of children who were very unlikely to report sexual abuse when it was suspected. In the case of both physical and sexual abuse, children were extremely unwilling to accuse their parents or parent figures. Because parents or parent figures were the suspected perpetrators in about one quarter of all alleged sexual abuse incidents, compared with almost all (93%) of the physical abuse incidents, the desire to avoid making allegations against parents or parent figures may well explain why children are less likely to make allegations when physical abuse is suspected. Gender differences in disclosure rates were also affected by the alleged perpetrators' identity. Although there was no gender difference in the disclosure of physical abuse, boys were more reluctant than girls to make allegations of sexual abuse, as reported by other researchers (Ghetti, Alexander, & Goodman, 2002; Gries et al., 1996).

Other researchers have reported that rates of disclosure vary depending on the age of the children interviewed, with preschoolers less likely to make allegations than older children (Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Wood et al., 1996). We were able to confirm this trend in the large national data set available to us, and showed that the relationship between age and disclosure rate continues into adolescence. Regardless of the type of abuse suspected or the relationship with suspected perpetrators, adolescents and preadolescents were more likely to disclose abuse than school-aged children, who were in turn, more likely to make allegations than preschoolers were. These data do not support London et al. (2005) hypothesis that there might be a U-shaped association between age and disclosure rate, with adolescents increasingly aware of the consequences of disclosure and thus more willing to withhold information.

A surprisingly large proportion of young (3- to 6-year-old) children did not allege abuse when questioned. Although it is possible that some of these interviews were triggered by unwarranted suspicions, the age differences were so large that both cognitive and motivational factors may also be involved. In particular, it may be that the youngest children are disproportionately likely to misunderstand the purpose and focus of the investigative interview or the abuse itself, thereby failing to report experiences of abuse that they remember and would be willing to discuss if they recognized the investigators' interest. The fact that very young children more readily make allegations against familiar nonfamily members and strangers than against parents or step-parents, however, suggests that many of the nonallegations were indeed motivated, perhaps by threats or fears about possible repercussions. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that older children avoid making allegations of sexual abuse against parents or parent figures at similarly high levels: It seems unlikely, though possible, that only one-fifth of the suspected sexual abuse by parents or parent figures actually occurred, as suggested by the disclosure rates reported in Table 3. Such patterns suggest that special investigative techniques may be necessary to encourage disclosure of abuse by parents or parent figures when children are either young and/or the alleged offenses are sexual

in nature. These techniques might need to address cognitive factors that prevent younger children from understanding the focus of the interview, and motivational factors that make children of all ages reluctant to make incriminating disclosures about their parents or parent figures.

Although the study was strengthened by the large sample size and the fact that all interviews were conducted in a standardized fashion, interpretation of the results is still limited by the fact that the validity of the children's allegations and nonallegations could not be determined. As a result, we do not know how likely real victims are to report their abuse, or how often false allegations are made. In addition, our analyses only involved cases that had come to the attention of official agencies, so we have no idea how many or how few cases of abuse take place without ever triggering any kind of official investigation.

These limitations notwithstanding, the results reported here are especially valuable because they include all reported cases in an entire country (Israel) over a 5-year period and thus provide more representative data than any other report to date. In particular, our study provided invaluable information about the frequency with which suspected child abuse victims disclose abuse when interviewed and about the characteristics of suspected victims who are more or less likely to make disclosure when interviewed. Specifically, we found that nearly two thirds of suspected victims made allegations when questioned and that children were more likely to make allegations when sexual rather than physical abuse was suspected, perhaps in part because physical abuse was more likely than sexual abuse to involve the parents as suspected perpetrators, and children of all ages were specially unlikely to name parent perpetrators. We also found a clear association between age and the likelihood that allegations would be made, with preschoolers most unlikely to make allegations when interviewed. Further research is clearly needed to determine why these developmental differences exist, and thus whether different interviewing strategies might be necessary when suspicions about young children arise.

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## Résumé

French-language abstract not available at time of publication.

## Resumen

Spanish-language abstract not available at time of publication.