

RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: EXPLORING THE CASE  
FILES OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 6 ADMITTED TO  
A CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER  
FOR EVALUATION

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Research suggests that roughly 25% of women and 10% of men within the United States were sexually abused at some point during childhood. With such high rates of victimization affecting society, the current study explores a population of children under the age of 6 who were suspected of being sexually victimized and thus admitted to a children's advocacy center (CAC) for evaluation. This investigation contributes to the literature concerning child sexual abuse (CSA) by exploring the characteristics of these alleged victims, the characteristics of their suspected offenders, the alleged victim's familial demographics characteristics, and by looking at the data pertaining to the incarceration rates of the suspected offenders identified within the sample.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE PROBLEM OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

### Introduction

Research suggests that within the United States, roughly 25% of women and 10% of men were sexually abused at some point during their childhood (Finkelhor, 1994; Freyd et al., 2005; Joa & Edelson, 2004). Identifying the true extent of these figures has been a daunting task for researchers as it is suspected that only 30% to 40% of the victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) ever report or disclose their abusive episode(s) (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Lippert, Cross, Jones, & Walsh, 2009; Shackel, 2008; Smith, Letourneau, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Best, 2000). Indeed, this disproportionate group of unidentified victims has become a major concern for many professionals who deal with children's welfare issues, especially when taking into consideration the multitude of consequences that have been associated with this type of victimization (Briere & Elliott, 1994; Freyd et al., 2005; Hanson, Resnick, Saunders, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1999; Putman, 2003; 2009). Nevertheless, acknowledging the problems associated with CSA, society has made substantial advancements over the last few decades in the way it has come to address victims suffering from this type of abuse.

With this in mind, the current chapter identifies and discusses one of the more notable institutions created to respond to sexually victimized children, the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). A review involving the factors which influenced the establishment, development, and continued relevancy of the CAC is highlighted to provide a thorough understanding of the advancements made by society in recent years concerning how it addresses the problem of CSA. The focus of the discussion then moves towards identifying one of the larger issues often



associated with CSA, disclosure. This chapter then relates how CACs have come to help with the issues of disclosure through the use of forensic interviews. After acknowledging how forensic interviews have become a vital instrument for CACs, this chapter identifies the purpose of the current study and states the research questions driving this exploration. This chapter concludes with a summary of the major points of discussion and by reiterating the importance of the research to be conducted.

### History and Development of the CAC

Child sexual abuse has been a part of society since the beginning of civilization (Casey & Nuris, 2006; Decker & Naugle, 2009; Hornor, 2008; Horton & Cruise, 1997). Although this is the case, it was not until as recent as 40 years ago that society began making significant improvements in the way it addresses the issue of CSA, the victims suffering from its effects, and the criminal justice assets directed towards the investigation, prosecution, and punishment of CSA offenders. The recent efforts to combat the problem of CSA did not come about due to their own merit, however, but they are largely accredited to the advancements and achievements made during the women's and victims' rights movements of the early 1970s (Casey & Nuris, 2006).

The progressive developments which transpired as a result of the 1970s victims' movement open the discussion for many of the social injustices which had been largely ignored up until that point in time. Accordingly, the issue of CSA became a hot topic, and calls for addressing the various problems faced by these voiceless victims eventually resulted in an influx of research accompanied by the development of services specifically geared towards assisting abused children.

Based on the initial findings of this early child victimization research, the federal government sought to attend to the problem by producing one of the most significant pieces of legislation regarding child maltreatment, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 (CAPTA, 2003; Wiley, 2009). This central piece of legislation proved to be a fundamental starting point for the movement to combat CSA, and it continues to play a prominent role by having been amended various times over the years to continually provide federal funding to states aimed at helping with the prevention, prosecution, investigation, and treatment of abused children (CAPTA, 2003; Wiley, 2009). The monies distributed by this act have fostered the establishment of a variety of programs and agencies which deal specifically with the issue of child maltreatment (Wiley, 2009). Additionally, as a result of the funding made accessible through this legislation, one of the more regarded institutions which helps deal with the compounding issues of child victimization was established, the Children's Advocacy Center (Hornor, 2008).

In 1985, the first CAC opened in Huntsville, Alabama to address the many problems faced by children suffering from abuse and maltreatment. This initial CAC was established to minimize the revictimization of children at the hands of the justice system by providing a neutral agency which advocates for the needs of child victims (Hornor, 2008; Joa & Edelson, 2004; Wolfeich & Loggins, 2007). Since the opening of the first CAC, a number of other facilities have also been established. These facilities have all come to seek the similar goals of offering useful services which focus on protecting children by decreasing the amount of trauma experienced by these child victims while at the same time improving the effectiveness of the investigative process (Wiley, 2009; Wolfeich & Loggins, 2007). CACs have become a remarkably useful tool in the support of CSA victims and their non-offender caregiver(s) in their

journey through the system (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). The incredible growth and utility of these agencies is highlighted by the fact that there are now well over 650 active advocacy centers across the country (Edelson & Joa, 2010).

CACs have come to be comprised of a variety of agencies and professionals which generally includes social service representatives, law enforcement personnel, medical evaluators, mental health providers, victim advocates, and individuals from a prosecutor's office (Wiley, 2009; Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). Prior to the establishment of these centralized facilities, victims who needed to access or contact these agencies were forced to do so individually which could be burdensome to the child victim as well as their family. CACs recognized this problem and addressed the issue by offering a location where agencies can come together so as to prevent families from lingering in the various bureaucratic systems while helping them access treatment options (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). As a result, CACs have essentially become a "one stop shop" for child victims and their families (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007, p. 334), and the concentration of services in these locations helps to minimize the various stresses placed upon victims while facilitating their future welfare.

One of the more profound roles of the CAC is recognized by the fact that the individuals working at these centers have the capacity to facilitate a child's disclosure in cases of suspected abuse. The topic of disclosure as it relates to CSA is of significant importance and has been widely addressed throughout the research (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Hanson et al., 1999; Lippert et al., 2009; Shackel, 2008; Smith et al., 2000). In their acknowledgement of the wide-ranging problems associated with disclosure, CACs have become extremely mindful of a child's statement(s), since any remarks made during this process have the potential to influence future legal or justice proceedings (Brown & Lamb, 2009; Herman, 2009; Malloy & Quas, 2009).

Nevertheless, only a limited number of incidents involving CSA are ever disclosed, and even fewer victims of abuse will receive the beneficial assistance offered from a CAC. Even so, an extensive amount of research has been dedicated towards the various factors associated with the disclosure process, much of which has been related to the various contextual factors connected to the victimization itself.

### Disclosure

Disclosure is often viewed as the first step in the reporting sequence to the authorities (Hanson et al., 1999). Without this crucial step, it would be almost impossible to help an unknown victim affected by abuse or to pursue a case of CSA involving an unknown incident and/or perpetrator. Disclosure is therefore arguably the most important step in cases of CSA, since without it, there is likely to be no future criminal proceedings against the offender and no medical or psychological care provided for the child victim. To magnify the importance of this process, it is first essential to understand what constitutes disclosure and the differences between this act and that of reporting.

Hanson et al. (1999) provide an insightful view of disclosure and suggest that professionals need to be clear when distinguishing the differences between the act of disclosure and the act of reporting since they are two entirely different actions. This distinction is made evident by situations which involve children who do not have the proper means to report their victimization to any legal authority, and are relegated to disclosing their abuse to a parent or primary caretaker (Hanson et al., 1999). When this type of incident arises, the responsibility of officially reporting the incident then becomes the caretaker's duty (Hanson et al., 1999). This type of situation can prove to be particularly troublesome when taking into account the fact that

some of these victimizations are never be reported to authorities due to a lack of action from the caretaker. Since caretakers are likely to have an ongoing relationship with an identified perpetrator (Finkelhor, 1994), this type of inaction may not be as uncommon as many would like to believe.

Although a caretaker's relationship to a suspected perpetrator may cause conflict in their ability to notify the authorities, other factors potentially hindering this obligation may include: (a) the caretaker diminishing the severity of the incident; (b) the caretaker disbelieving the allegations made by the child; or (c) the caretaker simply ignoring the child's cry for help and making excuses for the offender (Hanson et al., 1999). Undoubtedly these types of situations are likely to leave the child in a situation which is further detrimental to their overall welfare. In addition to these points of interest, other factors associated with the initial disclosure have also been found to be relevant to the future reporting of this victimization as well.

Research has shown that the initial reaction displayed by a person who the child confides in can affect the way the child tells their story in the future (Smith et al., 2000). If a child discloses an incident to someone they trust and sees no positive outcome through their actions, the child may come to believe that their disclosure was meaningless (Hanson et al., 1999). As a result, the child victim may become psychologically damaged leaving them detached and causing them to give up. If this happens, the child is likely to not receive the necessary care or treatment they need and may even be subjected to further abusive episodes (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). It is of utmost importance, then, that an individual receiver of disclosure listens to a child's story and reports the incident to trained professionals who are capable of further handling the situation. Caregivers need to take a child's disclosure extremely seriously, since the actions

they take afterwards are likely to affect a child's future development as well as influence future criminal proceedings.

Notably, there are a variety of discernible differences between the acts of disclosure and that of reporting in regards to CSA. When looking at the disclosure process independently, a variety of facets associated with this process have been highlighted throughout the literature which generally include: (a) discussions about the delays in disclosing abusive incidents (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009; Shackel, 2008; Smith et al., 2000); (b) developmental factors associated with these child victims (e.g. cognitive and speech limitations) (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003); (c) the fears of negative consequences experienced by victims (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009); (d) retractions of allegations or incomplete/inconsistent disclosures (Shackel, 2008); and (e) victim's perceptions of responsibility (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003).

All of the aforementioned elements are central to the topic of disclosure. Interestingly enough, one subject of discussion emphasized by Shackel (2008) is that many people throughout society, including professionals working in the field of child welfare, are wrongly informed about the empirical evidence regarding these particular areas of disclosure. As a result, it has been demonstrated that many professionals in the field are supportive of the myths surrounding CSA (Shackel, 2008). This research is of incredible significance when taking into consideration the fact that many jurors, lawyers, and judges are oblivious to the common behavior patterns of sexually abused children (Shackel, 2008). This being the case, there is the potential for a number of difficulties regarding the legal proceedings resulting from cases of suspected CSA.

One of the more notable misconceptions about disclosure, which has been discounted through empirical research, suggests that children who are victimized by sexual abuse will

always report the incident right after it happened. It is often believed that if a victim fails to do so, the disclosure is a fabrication (Shackel, 2008). Studies have proven these ideas to be incorrect by showing that victims of CSA often neglect to immediately disclose their assault (Hanson et al., 1999; Lippert et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2000), and that individuals affected by CSA often fail to disclose their incident sometimes well into adulthood (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009; Shackel, 2008; Smith et al., 2000; Williams, 1994). Lippert et al. (2009) found that as many as 43% of the victims of CSA failed to disclose until months after their last victimization, and that less than one-third of their sample (29%) included victims who told someone about their abuse within hours of the actual event.

In an earlier study, Smith et al. (2000) found that children who disclose their victimization quickly after an incident were “atypical” of CSA victims. Roughly one in four victims disclosed their situation after one month, while almost half of all victims had not disclosed their abuse for up to and over 5 years. These findings are consistent with the meta-analysis of London, Bruck, Ceci, and Shuman (2005) who reviewed 11 studies which identified rates of childhood disclosures of CSA. In this evaluation, the authors found that much of the data concerning the likelihood of disclosure reveals that two thirds of adults claiming to have been sexually abused as a child did not disclose their victimization during childhood (London et al., 2005). Moreover, London and colleagues (2005) found that many of the adults in these retrospective surveys reported that their first disclosure was made during the study’s survey itself.

Another widely held misconception involving disclosure has been that an incomplete or inconsistent disclosure, along with a retraction of allegations, means that a child is lying or that the incident never occurred (Shackel, 2008). Many children affected by CSA tend to be

confused by their victimization and are likely to be hesitant about discussing the events which took place. A variety of authors suggest that the disclosure process is ongoing and gradual therefore it may not involve a one-time tell all sequence (London et al., 2005). In disclosing situations, children are often likely to disclose only portions of an incident just to see what kind of reaction they get through revealing the episode. Based upon the receiver's reactions, a child's story may change to include more (or perhaps less) details constituting what could be construed as an inconsistent or incomplete disclosure. When this happens in an interview, the child's statements are potentially damaging to future legal proceedings since the child's testimony or statements may be viewed as unreliable.

Aside from pointing out the various misguided perceptions that many people have regarding disclosure, researchers have also attempted to determine which characteristics are consistent in cases of CSA where children do disclose. Generally, this research has focused on characteristics such as the age of the victim, the child's sex, the severity of the abuse, and the relationship between the offender and victim (e.g. intrafamilial abuse versus extrafamilial abuse) (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009; London et al., 2005).

When examining the age of the victim and how this characteristic relates to disclosure, a variety of studies have identified younger children (usually comprising of children under 6 or 8 years of age) as being less likely to disclose (London et al., 2005). This may be related to the fact that younger children are not be able to articulate or even acknowledge their abuse because of cognitive limitations associated with their age (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009). Some of the more notable cognitive barriers relating to younger children which have been recognized include a younger child's lack of knowledge regarding societal "sexual taboos" (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003), and/or the fact that a younger child may not have the same



linguistic skills as an older child leaving them incapable of effectively communicating their abusive experience (London et al., 2005).

These prior findings are important to note; however, conflicting reports relating to the aforementioned variable have suggested that there is no significant relationship between the age of the victim and their likelihood of disclosure (London et al., 2005; Lippert et al., 2009).

Younger children are believed to be limited by their developmental status as it relates to their ability to disclose (Lippert et al., 2009). Even though these issues may inhibit their ability to purposely disclose, studies have found evidence to suggest that younger victims may be prone to disclosing incidents of abuse by accident (London et al., 2005; Paine & Hansen, 2002).

Accidental disclosures made by younger children seem to occur via spontaneous statements about their abuse which often occurs in situations where the abusive incident is not always related to the topic of conversation (London et al., 2005). With this in mind, caretakers who are aware of a child's norms may be able to identify strange behaviors which suddenly appear within their child; thus granting them the ability to acknowledge the signs hinting towards the fact that the child was assaulted and is subconsciously expressing their abusive experience.

Aside from the age of the victim, the sex of the child and the severity of the abuse have also come to the forefront as factors which may influence the disclosure process. As a general rule, studies have shown that girls are significantly more likely than boys to make a full disclosure (Lippert et al., 2009). The reason girls have demonstrated higher rates of disclosure has been attributed to how society "socializes" boys and the potential fears male victims may have about receiving undesirable consequences (i.e. being branded a victim, being labeled a homosexual) as a result of their disclosure (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). This being the case, there is reason to believe that girls do not face the same pressures or stigmas as boys do about

revealing their victimization and thus may be more inclined to do so, particularly when victimization is at the hands of someone of the same gender.

When exploring the severity of abuse, victims who suffer from severe abuse (as opposed to less severe abuse or no actual/attempted vaginal or anal penetration) have been known to demonstrate higher rates of disclosure (Lippert et al., 2009). Severity is believed to contribute to a child's disclosure because the event itself may be more recognizable by the child as an incident of abuse (Lippert et al., 2009). Also, when a severe episode of CSA takes place, it may be easier for others to recognize the abuse not only from the child's subsequent actions, but also from any physical consequences that may result.

A number of the aforementioned variables have been shown to produce conflict within the literature making it difficult to produce definite insight into the factors most associated with disclosure (London et al., 2005). The one aspect which has remained consistent amongst victims of CSA, however, is the fact that a large portion of these children are reluctant to talk about or mention their abusive incident. This is seemingly a large reason for the disproportionate percentage of victims who never disclose their abuse leaving them unable to be identified appropriately. Nonetheless, for those victims who do make the decision to disclose, history has shown that these victims are likely to experience a number of hardships as a result of their disclosure, and they are likely to face a variety of roadblocks as a result of their report.

With this in mind, CACs have situated themselves with the hopes of assisting abused children in their disclosure process by providing an environment which is conducive to a child's needs while employing specially trained child forensic interviewers who are skilled at obtaining appropriate statements (Connell, 2009; Lippert et al., 2009). With the high stakes involved in these abusive situations, valid interviews are essential to minimizing errors in a child's

statement. By implementing the forensic investigation, professionals are afforded the capacity to facilitate the future needs of abused children as they meander through the recovery process and as they navigate through the burdensome criminal justice system (Brown & Lamb, 2009; Malloy & Quas, 2009). Through the forensic interview, professionals can understand the totality of the victimization which transpired, and are able to direct an adequate response towards the recovering victim's needs.

### Purpose of the Current Study

With the seriousness of the issues affecting children victimized by sexual abuse, the present study attempts to further the research regarding this victimization by exploring a sample of children who are suspected of being sexually abused and thus referred to a Children's Advocacy Center for evaluation. The present study, which involves the Denton County CAC, explores the intake case files of every potential child victim admitted to this particular location in 2008. This particular exploration is unique from other studies because it singles out and specifically analyzes a particular age group of children which is often neglected in this area of focus, children under the age of 6.

The information and findings established through this study should contribute to the knowledge and understanding of CSA by identifying the various characteristics associated with alleged victims who fall into this age group who were subsequently admitted to a CAC for evaluation. The characteristics of the alleged perpetrators involved in these incidents have also been retrieved from these files. This information is beneficial for identifying the types of suspected offenders documented within these files. Also, the current sample provides details for some of the demographic characteristics associated with the families admitting children to this

CAC, and will also identify the types of cases referred to the Denton County Children's Advocacy Center for evaluation. The results established in this study should be beneficial to future researchers, child protective agencies, law enforcement personnel, and concerned parents who are worried about their child being victimized by CSA as they will expand their knowledge base of the overall issues surrounding the victims, offenders, and families which may or may not be associated with CSA.

### Research Questions

Five research questions have been developed to drive this exploratory evaluation of suspected victims admitted to the Denton County CAC. These questions are operationalized and analyzed through the use of descriptive statistical analyses so as to identify any discernable characteristics of the cases under study. The research questions driving the current study are as follows:

- 1) What demographic characteristics are prevalent amongst children between the ages of 3 and 5 who were admitted to the CAC of Denton County for evaluation?
- 2) Are the alleged perpetrators in these cases identified?
  - a. If so, what are the relationship characteristics between the admitted children and their alleged offender(s) in these cases?
  - b. If so, what are the characteristics of the suspected offender(s)?
- 3) What are the demographic characteristics of the families of the admitted children in these cases?
- 4) How often does the Denton County CAC evaluate cases which were referred from legal authorities outside of its jurisdiction?

- a. What is the reasoning associated with the referral of children evaluated at this CAC?
- 5) Do cases within this age group of alleged victims result in the incarceration of the alleged perpetrators involved in these situations?
  - a. If so, what types of sentences do those who are incarcerated generally receive?

A thorough examination of the aforementioned questions will provide a better understanding of the types of victims and cases presented to the Denton County Children's Advocacy Center. Findings produced through this exploration of intake files will also be beneficial and contribute towards the literature base regarding child sexual abuse especially with regard to children suspected of being abused who are under the age of 6, as marginal amounts of research regarding this population currently exists.

### Conclusion

Undoubtedly there is a large portion of victims suffering from CSA throughout this country. Since their development in 1985, CACs have come to play a prominent role in addressing the various issues often found to be associated with victims of this type of abuse. In addressing one of the more notable facets associated with CSA, CACs have attempted to help identify as many victims as possible by catering to the needs of children and influencing the disclosure of victimization. Through the use of forensic interviews, it is believed that CACs have the capacity to mitigate a number of the deleterious effects often associated with CSA and can also enhance the disclosure process itself.

Acknowledging the issue of CSA, the present study explores a sample of children suspected of being sexually abused and thus admitted to the Children's Advocacy Center of Denton County. The overall goals of this particular study are to highlight many of the issues surrounding sexually abused children, identify the contributions of CACs, and acknowledge the characteristics prevalent among cases of children admitted to a CAC who are under the age of 6. The following chapter reviews the previous literature directed towards the realm of CSA, the numerous risk factors associated with this abuse, and some of the problems found to be associated with the prosecution of this abuse.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review of the relevant information found to be associated with child sexual abuse (CSA). More concisely, this chapter begins by offering a definition for CSA. A discussion pertaining to the perceived prevalence of this victimization is then presented. Next, a number of the risk factors commonly found to be associated with this type of abuse are addressed. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the issues surrounding the prosecution of this abuse and by reiterating the major findings of the chapter.

#### Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse covers a wide range of abusive behaviors which tend to vary in intensity and duration (Briere & Elliott, 1994). The actions commonly identified under this form of abuse include: intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral-genital contact, fondling, exhibitionism, and subjecting a child to prostitution or pornography (Putnam, 2003). Identifiably there is a wide range of activities which could be construed as CSA. As a result of these differences, legal definitions regarding this abuse tend to vary across jurisdictions (Wiley, 2009).

Within these various definitions of CSA, however, one of the more central concepts which remain prevalent is the issue of consent (Wiley, 2009). Legally, children do not have the capacity to grant consent to any type of sexual activity; thereby making any claims or suggestions that the child consented to the activities in question irrelevant, since by definition they are incapable of doing so (Wiley, 2009). Establishing a legal definition of CSA for the

purposes of criminal justice agents may be a clear cut task. Yet, identifying the true extent of this type of victimization appears to be a difficult job for researchers and child welfare professionals alike.

### Prevalence

Researchers have consistently found that CSA is not an uncommon experience and that its true extent is difficult to gauge because many children never report or disclose their assaults (Hanson et al., 1999). With only a marginal number of offenses ever being identified or reported, data collected from official sources is often considered insufficient for investigative purposes forcing scholars to rely on adults' retrospective reports in their attempts to understand CSA's true pervasiveness (DiLillo et al., 2006; Finkelhor, 1994).

A large number of independent studies utilizing retrospective analyses have been conducted over the last few decades in the attempt to grasp a more precise picture regarding the scope of CSA. The vast amount of research which has appeared during this time has resulted in a number of discernable inconsistencies and left scholars without any definitive or cumulative agreement regarding the true extent of CSA (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Finkelhor, 1994; 2009; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009). With the large margin of variance between reporting rates found amongst independent studies, efforts to mitigate the discrepancies have come in the form of meta-analyses which examine a multitude of studies to achieve more reliable figures.

One of the more groundbreaking and widely cited studies regarding CSA was provided by Finkelhor's (1994) meta-analysis of 19 adult retrospective surveys. Finkelhor demonstrated how reporting rates of CSA amongst individual studies ranged anywhere from 2% to 62% for



women and from 3% to 16% for men. The wide margin of difference between these studies was attributed to the various definitions of CSA utilized by the individual researchers and the numerous methodological weaknesses within the studies themselves (Finkelhor, 1994). Addressing these concerns, Finkelhor came to his own conclusion suggesting that a more realistic figure of at least 20% of women and 5% to 10% of men throughout these surveys were in fact sexually abused when they were a child. The results established in Finkelhor's early study continue to be influential today and have inspired a number of scholars to follow suit in attempting to access the true prevalence of CSA (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Pereda et al., 2009).

In a more recent analysis of 22 retrospective studies involving CSA, Bolen and Scannapieco (1999) identified many of the same methodological concerns as Finkelhor. These authors found that the line of questioning utilized throughout the various surveys appears to be greatly responsible for the large disparity between CSA reporting rates. The retrospective studies evaluated in this analysis also produced a wide margin of reporting rates which ranged from 2% to over 60% of the adults surveyed claiming to have been sexually victimized as children (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999). These percentages were similar to Finkelhor's findings, however, the authors in this analysis came to a different conclusion than their predecessor by suggesting that anywhere from 30% to 40% of women and around 13% of men were sexually abused as children (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999).

The aforementioned meta-analyses exist as a resource for identifying the true prevalence of CSA. The information established in these studies affords evidence to support the current assertion that in the United States, roughly 25% of women and 10% of men were sexually abused at some point in their childhood. These percentages continue to be indicative of meta-

analytic findings (Pereda et al., 2009), and appear to be reflective of the true extent of CSA's prevalence.

While these figures are significant, recent research has appeared suggesting that these figures and percentages may not be applicable towards the current population of children because there is new evidence to suggest that rates of CSA have been in the decline over the past fifteen years (Finkelhor, 2009). Nevertheless, even with this newly found data, CSA is still acknowledged as a widespread social issue affecting a significant number of children every year (Pereda et al., 2009).

### Risk Factors

Researchers have been diligent in their efforts to identify the various risk factors associated with children being sexually victimized (Finkelhor, 2009; Freyd et al., 2005; Putnam, 2003). Factors commonly attributed to this type of victimization include: (a) girls being around three times more likely than boys to be sexually abused (Putnam, 2003); (b) the presence of a stepfather in the home doubles the risk of CSA for girls (Putnam, 2003); (c) the risk of being abused rises with the age of both boys and girls, but peaks for boys when they reach puberty (Finkelhor, 2009; Putnam, 2003); (d) most incidents are committed by a family member or someone who is close to the child (Freyd et al., 2005); (e) men commit the majority of these offenses (Finkelhor, 2009); (f) race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have little or no bearing on these risk factors (Putnam, 2003); and (g) there are two peak times for offenders, once during adolescence when delinquent behavior is on the rise, and again when access to children becomes common in the thirties (Finkelhor, 2009). Notably, there are a number of identifiable risk factors associated with CSA; still, a few of these factors require a more detailed examination.

From the prior list of risk factors, two points of interest necessitate further discussion. First of all, children are more likely to be abused by someone who they know and with whom they have an established relationship. This is contradictory to the old adage that some unknown stranger or child molester is out in society committing the majority of these offenses (Finkelhor, 1994; 2009). Parents and caretakers need to be aware of this and should be vigilant in their efforts to protect their children from not only strangers, but also from acquaintances and family members. Secondly, girls are significantly more likely to be abused than boys, and also, females' chances of being sexually abused tend to increase with age (Finkelhor, 1994; 2009). Reports have shown that children under the age of 7 comprise approximately one-third of the known incidents of CSA (Putnam, 2003), while as many as half of these abuses include children who are in the age range of 12 to 17 (Finkelhor, 2009).

The previously mentioned figures provide evidence to suggest that older children are more prone to being victimized by CSA. Nevertheless, conflicting data has been found making these assertions difficult to support, since there is evidence showing that a number of younger victims who were at one time medically diagnosed as being sexually abused have been found to preserve no recollection whatsoever of their abusive episode when asked about the experience in adulthood (Williams, 1994). As a result, the emotional blockade causing some victims to forget their traumatic episode as a child is likely to hinder researchers in their ability to fully understand the total figures associated with younger children's sexual abuses simply because the victims themselves forget about the incident. This issue highlights the fact that there are indeed areas revolving around the problem of CSA where it is difficult to find adequate statistics. Although there inevitably exists a multitude of gray areas and unknowns associated with this type of abuse,

one area of interest which stands out that can fully be determined in its statistical practicality falls under the topic of CSA prosecution.

### Prosecuting CSA

The prosecution of CSA involves a number of interesting variables which influence the overall effectiveness of such action. In most cases of CSA, once the police have concluded their investigation and an evidentiary statement has been provided by the alleged victim, the case is then forwarded to a prosecutor's office. Prosecutors are afforded a great deal of discretion with what they decide to do with a given case after it is handed over to them (McLaren, Henson, & Stone, 2009; Stroud, Martens, & Barker, 2000; Wiley, 2009). Generally speaking, prosecutors have the authority to determine whether or not to file charges, what charges should be filed, and whether or not a plea bargain should be offered (McLaren et al., 2009; Wiley, 2009). In formulating this decision, prosecutors will often evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence, the effectiveness of any anticipated testimony, the credibility of the victim(s) and witnesses, and any corroborating evidence which may influence the case (Cross, Walsh, Simone, & Jones, 2003; McLaren et al., 2009). These factors are believed to weigh heavily in a prosecutor's decision to move forward and prosecute a case, reduce charges, dismiss the charges, or simply ignore a case altogether (McLaren et al., 2009; Wiley, 2009). In incidents consisting of CSA, the final decision of how to handle the case may be swayed by any one of the subsequent factors, and research has demonstrated that a number of characteristics within a case can influence the overall likelihood that a prosecution will ensue (Cross et al., 2003; Joa & Edelson, 2004; Stroud et al., 2000; Walsh, Jones, Cross, & Lippert, 2010; Wiley, 2009).

One of the more profound studies concerning sexually abused children and prosecution rates was conducted by Joa and Edelson (2004) who found data to support the assertion that cases which are referred for criminal prosecution tend to be significantly associated with a child victim's age, sex, and severity of the abuse. The evidence presented in this study is consistent with other research which demonstrates that cases involving girls who are older and who have been subjected to severe abuse exhibit higher rates of prosecution (Joa & Edelson, 2004; Stroud et al., 2000; Wiley, 2009). Since this association has been established, the age of an alleged victim has become a central factor in the research on prosecution of CSA which has seen some substantial developments over the years.

Questions in the research have frequently addressed why cases of CSA consisting of preschool aged or "younger victims" are less likely to be referred for prosecution than cases involving older victims (Joa & Edelson, 2004; Wiley, 2009). Evidence suggests that this is likely related to the limited development of a child, and that younger children may be more vulnerable to supplying a statement which could be considered contaminated as a result of the investigative process (Joa & Edelson, 2004; Herman, 2009; Stroud et al., 2000). Despite all the recent advancements and achievements made from the forensic interview, there may still remain a belief amongst the legal community that the statements given by younger children are tainted in some way and therefore have little value to a prosecution (Walsh et al., 2010).

Another factor associated with younger victims comes in the form of their ability to face the accused in a trial situation (Joa & Edelson, 2004; Stroud et al., 2000). Certain cases will allow for CSA to be prosecuted without requiring the child to testify in court. However, in most cases, the accused is afforded the right to face their accuser which can potentially be devastating to the prosecution because a young child may be incapable or even unwilling to testify (Wiley,

2009). Since a prosecutor may feel as though a younger child's ability to testify will perhaps result in a loss, the prosecutor may neglect to file charges which could lead to the lack of prosecution for younger victims. While the age of the victim has the potential to influence the direction of the prosecution of CSA, other areas of research on the prosecution of CSA have focused specifically on what percentages of CSA cases never advance beyond the investigation stage.

Stroud et al. (2000) note that statistics suggest that anywhere from 22% to 47% of CSA cases get rejected through the screening process by prosecutors and no criminal charges are ever pursued. Their findings also fell in to this range with 44% of the children in their evaluation having their criminal charges dropped (Stroud et al., 2000). The authors noted that a variety of factors may contribute to the absence of charges being filed including: (a) a lack of corroborating evidence; (b) the child changed their story; (c) the family was against the prosecution; (d) the child was considered too young; (e) the relationship between the offender and victim; (f) the perpetrator's prior criminal history; and (g) the number of alleged incidents (Stroud et al., 2000). All of these factors seemingly remain consistent in their association with the likelihood of prosecution.

In a meta-analysis conducted by Cross et al. (2003), the researchers reviewed 13 studies for which prosecution rates and the charging of CSA were evaluated. These researchers found data supportive of Stroud et al. (2000) and discovered that the overall charging rates for prosecutors in cases of CSA averaged around 66% of the cases (Cross et al., 2003). One of the major assertions made by Cross and colleagues in this study was that prosecutors in cases of CSA have to rely heavily on a child victim's testimony since other types of evidence in these cases can be sparse (Cross et al., 2003). This notion reverts back to the relevance of the CAC

and their utilization of forensic interviews which helps advance the causes of child victims by having access to optimal statements therefore minimizing challenges towards the validity of their reports (Brown & Lamb, 2009; Malloy & Quas, 2009).

With one of the primary goals of CACs being the protection of children and facilitation of their movement through the criminal justice system, evidence has suggested that CACs have the potential to inflate the rates of charging by prosecutors when compared to similar jurisdictions where no advocacy is provided (Joa & Edelson, 2004; Walsh et. al., 2010). Joa and Edelson (2004) found that 76% of the cases evaluated by a CAC resulted in charges being filed as opposed to 39% of the cases where no advocacy was provided. This research highlights a number of the potential benefits associated with advocacy which includes the findings that more cases will be referred for prosecution when a child is seen by a CAC, more guilty pleas result from cases that are filed through an advocacy center, and more cases are filed for younger victims (4 to 6 years old) who are seen by these centers (Joa & Edelson, 2004). The study provided by Joa and Edelson (2004) greatly contributes to the relevancy of CACs by providing data to suggest that these centers operate in a way which has the capacity to greatly enhance the ability of victims in their quest for justice.

### Conclusion

The widespread problem of CSA has been conveyed by a number of professionals and scholars who seek to divert more attention towards this area of victimization. The review conducted in this chapter provides information relating to the high rates of CSA observed throughout the country, the many risk factors commonly associated with this type of abuse, and the literature regarding the prosecution of this victimization.

The following chapter introduces the methodology utilized in the present study which explores the intake case files of children admitted to the Denton County CAC. Details are provided for the population under study, and the variables that are used to examine this group of suspected victims are listed. A plan of analysis is introduced, and some of the more notable limitations pertaining to the present study are addressed.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the methodology utilized in the current study, and to present a plan of analysis for the data collected from the Denton County Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). The methods used to collect this data, in particular having direct access to the individual intake case files, allowed for a more narrowed focus regarding the current study. Prior to discussing the methodology, it is first necessary to reiterate the research questions currently under evaluation:

- 1) What demographic characteristics are prevalent amongst children between the ages of 3 and 5 who were admitted to the CAC of Denton County for evaluation?
- 2) Are the alleged perpetrators in these cases identified?
  - a. If so, what are the relationship characteristics between the admitted children and their alleged offender(s) in these cases?
  - b. If so, what are the characteristics of the suspected offender(s)?
- 3) What are the demographic characteristics of the families of the admitted children in these cases?
- 4) How often does the Denton County CAC evaluate cases which were referred from legal authorities outside of its jurisdiction?
  - a. What is the reasoning associated with the referral of children evaluated at this CAC?
- 5) Do cases within this age group of alleged victims result in the incarceration of the alleged perpetrators involved in these situations?

- a. If so, what types of sentences do those who are incarcerated generally receive?

This chapter also contains a discussion of the variables which were created for analysis and details how they were operationalized in order to answer the aforementioned research questions. A plan of analysis follows the explanation of variables that were used. This chapter concludes by identifying and addressing some of the major limitations within the present study.

### Population and Data Collection

Prior to beginning the data collection for the current study, approval was sought and granted by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix). After receiving IRB approval, two independent sources were established for data collection. The first and foremost source of information was provided by the Children's Advocacy Center of Denton County.

Once contact had been established with the program director at this facility, concerns about how the legal system processes and handles cases involving allegedly abused children under the age of 6 at the time of their victimization became central to our discussion. With a desire to address the issues highlighted in our conversation, the decision was made to direct the focus of the current study so as to involve only the case files of children who were the ages of 3, 4, or 5 at their time of admittance to the CAC.

After establishing the age range of children in this study, access was permitted for the exploration of the intake files for every child within this range who was admitted to the Denton County CAC in 2008. Roughly 40 hours were spent physically at this CAC analyzing case files which resulted in a total sample numbering 132 cases ( $N = 132$ ). The data collected during this

phase of evaluation provides the majority of the information utilized in the current exploratory study. Even so, a second source proved necessary to provide answers for the final research question, since data pertaining to suspected offender incarcerations was not always available within the case files.

For the sole purpose of answering the sixth research question, data was acquired from the Denton County Records Office website ([www.justice.dentoncounty.com](http://www.justice.dentoncounty.com)). The use of this particular website was recommended by the individual contact established at the Denton County CAC, who stated that this website is capable of providing the necessary information pertaining to the details of any adult arrest/conviction within Denton County's jurisdiction. Therefore, by individually entering every potential offender's name identified on the CAC's intake files from this sample into the website, data pertaining to any jail/prison time received by these suspects was made accessible.

### Variables

Through the data collection process, a number of relevant variables were noted for purposes of quantitative analysis. Table 1 presents these variables and their coding structure. The first four variables pertain directly to the characteristics of the alleged child victim and were analyzed to answer the first research question. The first variable, Age, is metrically coded by the child's age at the time of their admittance to the CAC. The range for this variable is age 3 to age 5. The variable VicSex represents the alleged victim's gender and is dichotomous, with girls coded as 0 and boys coded as 1. Two variables were created to measure the race of the alleged victim. The first variable, VicRaceCat, includes five categories representing each racial group

represented in the case files. For the second variable, VicWhite, race was coded in a binary fashion with White being the reference category.

There are four variables utilized to answer the second research question. First, the variable OffIden measures whether there was an identified suspect listed on the intake report. This variable is dichotomous, with 0 representing that there was not an identified offender for the case and 1 representing that there was an identified offender. The second offender-related variable, OffAge, measures whether the alleged offender was a juvenile or an adult. Two other variables measure the relationship between the alleged victim and the perpetrator. The first variable, OffRelVic, is categorical and identifies the type of relationship (father, mother, sibling, stepparent, grandparent, friend of the family, mother's boyfriend, other family [i.e., cousin, uncle, great uncle, etc.], unknown, two or more people, and other friend). The second variable, OffFamRel, is a dichotomous variable measuring whether the perpetrator was in the family or extrafamilial.

Three variables were created to measure demographic characteristics of the families of the alleged victims admitted to the CAC. The variable VicIncome measures the family's income and is categorical. The four categories within this variable include 1 = less than \$18,000; 2 = \$18,001 to \$35,000; 3 = \$35,001 to \$50,000; and 4 = \$50,000 or more. The variable VicSib is metric and measures the number of victim's siblings identified on the intake report. Finally, the relationship of the individual(s) accompanying the child to the CAC at the time of their evaluations is represented by the variable of AccCAC. This is a categorical variable and is coded as follows: 1 = father; 2 = mother; 3 = grandparent; 4 = stepparent; 5 = aunt/uncle; 6 = CPS worker; or 7 = other.

The last four variables addressed in this study include RefAbuse, InvJuris,

Incarc, and SentLngh. RefAbuse has been coded to reflect the boxes checked on the CAC intake evaluation forms representing physical abuse, sexual abuse, both, or unknown. The variable InvJuris is used to determine whether or not the law enforcement agency investigating the case is in Denton County or a different jurisdiction. Incarc measures whether the alleged perpetrator was convicted and incarcerated for the offense. This variable is dichotomous and is coded as 0 = Not Incarcerated and 1 = Incarcerated. Lastly, SentLngh is metrically coded and measures the lengths of sentences received by those incarcerated.

Table 1

*Variables and Coding Structure*

Variable	Definition	Coding
Age	Age of the suspected victim	Metric, continuous
VicSex	Gender of the suspected victim	0=Female 1=Male
VicRaceCat	Race of the suspected victim	1=White 2=Black 3=Hispanic 4=Asian 5=Other
VicWhite	Race of suspected victim	0=Non-white 1=White
OffIden	Is there an identified alleged offender?	0=No 1=Yes
OffRelVic	The relationship between the suspected victim and the alleged offender.	1=Father 2=Mother 3=Sibling 4=Stepparent 5=Grandparent 6=Friend of the family 7=Mother's boyfriend 8=Other family (i.e., cousins, uncles, great uncles, etc.) 9=Unknown 10=Two or more people 11=Other friend

*(table continues)*

Table 1 (*continued*).

Variable	Definition	Coding
OffFamRel	Is the alleged offender a relative or not?	0=Family 1=Extrafamilial 9=Unknown
OffAge	Is the alleged offender a juvenile or adult?	0=Juvenile 1=Adult 9=Unknown
VicIncome	What is the yearly income level of the for the suspected victim's family?	1=< \$18,000 2=\$18,001 to \$35,000 3=\$35,001 to \$50,000 4=> \$50,001 9=Unknown
VicSib	How many siblings does the suspected victim have?	Metric, continuous
AccCAC	What is the relationship of the individual accompanying the suspected victim to the CAC?	1=Father 2=Mother 3=Grandparent 4=Stepparent 5=Aunt/Uncle 6=CPS worker 7=Other 9=Unknown
RefAbuse	Which box was checked on the intake sheet regarding the reason for the child's referral?	1=Physical Abuse 2=Sexual Abuse 3=Both 9=Unknown
InvJuris	Is the investigating agency or referring legal authority located within Denton County's jurisdiction?	0=No 1=Yes 9=Unknown
Incarc	Was the alleged offender incarcerated following the child's interview at the CAC?	0=Unknown 1=Yes
SentLngh	What was the length of the sentence received?	Metric, continuous

### Plan of Analysis

Analysis for the current study consists primarily of descriptive statistics. The use of frequency distributions constitutes the majority of this data analysis, findings for which are

presented in the following chapter. Descriptive analysis in this form is instrumental in providing answers for each of the stated research questions by demonstrating the frequency of identifiable demographic characteristics of the alleged victims in this sample, their families, and the alleged perpetrators. Bivariate analyses in the form of cross tabulations are employed to distinguish the various characteristics of the alleged victims identified in the present sample amongst gender lines.

### Limitations

This exploratory study is of importance in that it is one of the first to examine allegedly victimized children admitted to the CAC of Denton County under the age of 6. While there are many benefits to be had through the findings determined in this analysis, this study is not without its limitations. One of the more prominent limitations of the present study is related to the last research question and the second source of data. Since the Denton County CAC offers services to any alleged child victim who is admitted, there is the possibility that victims from jurisdictions outside this particular county (and even from outside this state) will be evaluated by this particular location. Since this is the case, there are limitations constricting the present study's ability to identify just how many listed suspects receive terms of incarceration due to the numerous referring legal jurisdictions. As a result, from the total sample of 132 cases ( $N = 132$ ) presented in this study, 27 were found to be referred from jurisdictions outside of Denton County, while another 16 had no identifiable jurisdiction documented.

Additionally, more adjustments had to be made regarding the incarceration rates of suspected offenders since the second source of data only provides incarceration data pertaining to adult perpetrators. When compounded with the fact that not every case included a identified

suspect to be entered in to the website, and also the exclusion of 9 cases due to the fact that they were referred for physical abuse only, a final subsample of 42 suspected offenders ( $n = 42$ ) was established. Although 90 cases did not fit the criteria for providing enough information to answer the final research question, the subsample ( $n = 42$ ) established still constitutes a relevant source for answering the last research question.

A second limitation of the present study relates to the potential for inconsistencies in the initial intake files at the CAC. The intake forms supplied by the CAC were likely to have been filled out by any number of individuals, which may or may not have resulted in inaccuracies in these forms. Human error may be attributed to any variety of environmental or individual factors influencing the inclusion of wrong/unrepresentative information. Nevertheless, the information documented in these files appeared to be for the most part consistent upon investigation, and the data compiled from these evaluations was done in an objective manner so as to maximize the overall content and validity of the information retrieved.

A final limitation of the present study relates to the generalizability of the findings. The findings established here are only representative of the population from which they came, alleged child victims under the age of 6 who were admitted to a CAC during the year 2008. It is unknown whether the cases are representative of the larger population of child victims, particularly those victims who were never identified and go unreported. It is probable that only a fraction of the sexually abused children within this study's jurisdiction were identified and admitted to the CAC for evaluation (London et al., 2005). It can be assumed that the true figures of sexually abused children are much greater than what is presented in this research, and as a result, the study at hand is only reflective of the population being explored.



## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the process of data collection, the variables utilized for analysis, the plan of analysis, and the limitations of the present study which explores the intake case files of children admitted to a CAC for suspected abuse. The following chapter details the findings achieved through the analyses conducted; the results are presented according to the questions driving the present research.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

The current chapter presents the analyses of data which was obtained through the exploration of case files of children ages 3, 4, and 5 years old who were admitted to the Denton County Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) in 2008. The analytic strategy of this exploratory study consists of descriptive statistics and frequency distributions to provide answers for the research questions. Bivariate analyses in the form of cross tabulations were employed to note the various characteristics of the alleged victims in this sample and how these characteristics vary by gender. The results detailed throughout this chapter shed some light on the identifiable characteristics of those alleged victims who were admitted to the Denton County CAC, the characteristics of their suspected offenders, the demographic characteristics of the familial environment which these admitted children come from, and where and what types of referrals are evaluated at this particular CAC.

After presenting the findings which pertain to the first four research questions, this chapter directs its focus towards a subsample of offenders ( $n = 42$ ) identified in the Denton County cases to provide answers for the final research question. This question addresses those cases which were admitted for suspicion of child sexual abuse that subsequently resulted in the incarceration of their alleged offender. The types of sentences received by those who were incarcerated are also analyzed.

#### Research Question 1

The first research question examines the demographic characteristics prevalent amongst

the alleged child victims in the sample cases. A total of 132 suspected victims ages 3, 4, or 5 years were admitted to this particular CAC in 2008, constituting the entirety of the current sample. From these admitted children, 35 (26.5%) were children that were 3 years old at the time of their admittance (19 female and 16 male); 45 (34.1%) were 4 years old (25 female and 20 male); and 52 (39.4%) of the 132 children were 5 years old at their time of admittance (36 female and 16 male). Table 2 presents these figures while also showing that there are a total of 80 (60.6%) girls and 52 (39.4%) boys in the present sample.

Table 2

*Alleged Victim's Age by Gender (N = 132)*

Age	Male	Female	Total Victims	Total Percentage
3	16	19	35	26.5%
4	20	25	45	34.1%
5	16	36	52	39.4%
Total	52	80	132	100%
Total Percentage	39.4%	60.6%		

Table 3 presents the race of those alleged child victims in the current sample. The majority of children, 81 (61.4%), who were admitted for evaluation were identified as being white, while the remaining 51 (38.6%) were noted as being non-white. These figures have been cross tabulated by gender to show that 31 (59.6%) of the suspected male victims were white, and 21 (40.4%) of the boys in this sample were classified as non-white. As for females, 50 (62.5%) were documented as being white, and the remaining 30 (37.5%) suspected female victims were classified as non-white.

Table 3

*Alleged Victim's Race by Gender (N = 132)*

Victim Race	Male	Female	Total	Total Percentage
White	31	50	81	61.4%
Non-white	21	30	51	38.6%

Table 4 provides a more in depth examination of race using five categories. These five categories have also been cross tabulated by gender to show that: 81 (61.4%) of admitted children were identified as White (31 male and 50 female); 17 (12.9%) children were identified as being Black (5 male and 12 female); 29 (22.0%) were described as Hispanic (13 male and 16 female); one (.8%) child was Asian; and 4 (3.0%) were categorized as Other (3 male and 1 female).

Table 4

*Alleged Victim's Race Category by Gender (N = 132)*

Victim Race	Male	Female	Total	Total Percentage
White	31	50	81	61.4%
Black	5	12	17	12.9%
Hispanic	13	16	29	22.0%
Asian	0	1	1	0.8%
Other	3	1	4	3.0%
Total	52	80	132	100%

### Research Question 2

In answering the first part of the second research question, the variable OffIden was established to measure whether the full name of the alleged offender was provided on the intake

report. Table 5 presents these results showing that out of the 132 cases evaluated, 93 (70.5%) files contained information about an alleged offender who was identified by their full first and last name. The remaining 39 (29.5%) cases did not provide enough information to adequately identify an alleged offender by their legally given name.

Table 5

*Offender Identity Known (N = 132)*

Offender Identity Known	Frequency	Percentage
No	39	29.5%
Yes	93	70.5%

Notably, not every case provided the legal name of the alleged offender. Nevertheless, 6 (5%) of those cases where this information was lacking still provided enough detail to determine the victim/offender relationship in the case. Table 6 presents the frequency of each type of relationship reported. It was found that 62 (47%) of the alleged offenders identified in this study were documented as having a direct familial relationship to the admitted child, while 37 (28%) were noted as having an extrafamilial relationship with no direct blood relationship to the admitted child. This information was unknown for 33 (25%) of the cases.

Table 6

*Victim Relationship to Offender (N = 132)*

Offender Relationship to Victim	Frequency	Percentage
Family	62	47%
Extrafamilial	37	28%
Unknown	33	25%

Table 7 presents a more detailed examination of the type of relationships existing between the alleged victims and suspected offenders in the sample. The child's father is documented as the offender in 26 (19.7%) cases whereas the mother is noted as the possible offender in only one (0.8%) case. A sibling is the suspected offender in 9 (6.8%) of the cases. A stepparent was noted 8 (6.1%) times, and a grandparent, was noted only once (0.8%). The suspected offender was a friend of the family in 11 (8.3%) cases. The largest group identified in this category was an *other* family member (e.g. cousins, uncles, great uncles, etc.) who comprise of 28 (21.2%) cases. Three cases (2.3%) documented the offender as being two or more individuals, and two cases (1.5%) suspected other family friends (i.e. a school bus driver, and a day care provider). Finally, as was mentioned above, in 33 (25.0%) of the cases, the victim-offender relationship was unknown.

Table 7

*Victim Relationship to Offender by Type (N = 132)*

Offender Relationship to Victim	Frequency	Percentage
Father	26	19.7%
Mother	1	0.8%
Sibling	9	6.8%
Stepparent	8	6.1%
Grandparent	1	0.8%
Friend of the family	11	8.3%
Mother's boyfriend	10	7.6%
Other family	28	21.2%
Two or more people suspected	3	2.3%
Other family friend	2	1.5%
Unknown	33	25.0%
Total	132	100%

Table 8 presents the findings related to the alleged offender's age, specifically whether they were an adult or juvenile at the time of the offense. Of the suspected offenders who were known, 31 (23.5%) were said to be juveniles at the time of the incident, while 68 (51.5%) of the cases identified the offenders as being adults.

Table 8

*Age of Alleged Offender (N = 132)*

Offender Age	Frequency	Percentage
Juvenile	31	23.5%
Adult	68	51.5%
Unknown	33	25.0%

### Research Question 3

The third research question addresses the demographic characteristics of the admitted children's families. Table 9 presents the findings related to family income. For over half of the cases (56.8%), the annual household income was documented which left a total of 57 (43.2%) cases unknown. In this sample, less than 10% of the cases noted an annual household income of less than \$18,000. Close to 10% of these files noted income levels in the range of \$18,001 to \$35,000 a year. For the majority of the cases reporting annual income levels, these households claimed to earn more than \$35,000 a year. More specifically, 18 (13.6%) cases reported earning anywhere from 35,001 to \$50,000 annually, and 34 (25.8%) files reported making more than \$50,000 a year.

Table 9

*Suspected Victim's Family Annual Income Level (N = 132)*

Annual Income of Victims Family	Frequency	Percentage
< \$18,000	10	7.6%
\$18,001 to \$35,000	13	9.8%
35,001 to \$50,000	18	13.6%
> \$50,001	34	25.8%
Unknown	57	43.2%

The next characteristic of interest related to the demographics of the families of the alleged victims in the current sample is the number of siblings related to the child in these reports. A large number of the cases, 55 (41.7%), did not provide enough information to determine the number of siblings. Still, this amount may be misleading as there is reason to believe that a large portion of these unknown cases were simply suspected child victims who do not have any brothers or sisters.

Table 10 presents the number of siblings listed amongst the cases in this sample.

Table 10

*Number of Siblings (N = 132)*

Number of Victim Siblings	Frequency	Percentage
0	1	0.8%
1	46	34.8%
2	22	16.7%
3	4	3.0%
4	4	3.0%
Unknown	55	41.7%

Results show that there was one alleged victim documented as having no siblings at all. Those



files containing one sibling constituted 34.8% of the sample. Two siblings were listed in 22 (16.7%) of the cases. And finally, there were 4 cases (3.0%) in which three siblings were listed, and 4 (3.0%) cases in which 4 siblings were noted as well.

The final familial demographic documented within the intake reports analyzed pertains to the person(s) accompanying the suspected child victim to the CAC. Table 11 presents the frequency of people accompanying the child to the CAC where it was found that the mother was most often represented (50 cases or 37.9%) in this particular category. The father accompanied the child in only 7 (5.3%) of the cases, while both the mother and father were noted 27 (20.5%) times. A grandparent admitted a child in 10 (7.6%) cases, and a stepparent once (0.8%). In 5 (3.8%) of the cases, a CPS worker accompanied the child, and persons other than those previously listed constituted 18 (13.6%) files in this sample. Finally, an unknown individual admitted the child in 14 (10.6%) of the cases completing this category.

Table 11

*Relationship of Person(s) Admitting the Child to the CAC (N = 132)*

Accompanying Adult	Frequency	Percentage
Father	7	5.3%
Mother	50	37.9%
Grandparent	10	7.6%
Stepparent	1	0.8%
CPS worker	5	3.8%
Both Mother and Father	27	20.5%
Other	18	13.6%
Unknown	14	10.6%

#### Research Question 4

Since CACs have made it part of their mission to address any child suspected of being victimized, smaller jurisdictions or areas without CACs may find it necessary to utilize the

services provided by a CAC in a different jurisdiction to help with their investigation. The fourth research question addresses how many children referred to the Denton County CAC come from areas outside the County's legal jurisdiction so as to gain a more concise picture of the frequency that outside agencies refer children to this particular CAC.

In 2008, the CAC of Denton County documented intake files for a total of 132 child victims ages 3, 4, and 5 years old. Table 12 shows how many of these cases were from Denton County and how many were from outside this particular county. Of these cases, 90 (68.2%) were referred from agencies or localities within Denton County's legal jurisdiction. Of the remaining 42 cases, 26 (19.7%) were referred from legal authorities outside of Denton County, and 16 (12.1%) of the files did not provide enough information to determine what jurisdiction referred the child or where the alleged incident took place.

Table 12

*Investigating Jurisdiction (N = 132)*

Investigating Jurisdiction	Frequency	Percentage
Outside Denton County	26	19.7%
Inside Denton County	90	68.2%
Unknown	16	12.1%

The intake files provided by the CAC which were examined for the current study distinguished between the types of abuse for which the alleged victim admitted in this sample was referred for. Table 13 presents the frequency and types of abuse admitted in the current sample. The majority, 69 (52.3%), were cases that were referred solely for the purpose of possible sexual abuse. Nine (6.8%) victims were evaluated for physical abuse, while eight cases (6.1%) were admitted for the potential of both physical and/or sexual abuse. A total of 37

(28.0%) of the cases did not provide the proper information to determine the reason for the referral of the cases in this study.

Table 13

*Type of Abuse for which the Child was Referred (N = 132)*

Type of Abuse	Frequency	Percentage
Physical Abuse	9	6.8%
Sexual Abuse	69	52.3%
Both Physical and Sexual	8	6.1%
Unknown	37	28.0%
Total	132	100%

#### Research Question 5

The final research question assesses whether or not the alleged offender(s) in this sample was incarcerated for the offense(s) in question. As discussed in the previous chapter, a different methodology had to be incorporated in order to access the data available for addressing this question. After adjusting for cases which were referred from within Denton County's jurisdiction, containing only identified adult suspects, and excluding those cases referred for physical abuse only, a total of 42 cases ( $n = 42$ ) met the criteria necessary to be included in the analysis of this particular question. Table 14 presents the findings relating to this question of which 11 cases (26.2%) were found to have resulted in the incarceration of the offender. In the remaining 31 (73.8%) cases of this subsample, the offender was found to not be incarcerated at the time of data collection.

From the aforementioned figures, it is important to note that 2 of the cases classified as receiving a period of incarceration present special circumstances. First, one case was cleared by exception because the suspect apparently committed suicide after an arrest had been made

regarding the incident and a grand jury had indicted the suspect on a variety of felony charges.

In the second case, a grand jury indicted a suspect on multiple charges of indecency with a child but the suspect had since fled to Mexico to avoid trial regarding the matter.

Table 14

*Incarceration of Offender (n = 42)*

Incarceration of Offender	Frequency	Percent
No	31	73.8%
Yes	11*	26.2%

\* 2 cases counted in this category involve special circumstances; (1) one suspect committed suicide after being indicted; and (2) one suspect fled to Mexico after being indicted by a grand jury.

Of the 11 cases in this subsample found to have resulted in the incarceration of their offender, it was possible to determine the sentence length received by these individuals. After subtracting the 2 special cases of incarcerated offenders, a determination of the remaining 9 sentenced offenders was made possible. All 9 of the individuals incarcerated in this subsample received a sentence of confinement to be administered by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) at a state operated prison facility. Table 15 details the sentence length these individuals are serving. Of this subgroup, the average sentence these offenders received was 14.11 years, where the minimum sentence was 7 years, and the maximum was 30 years. The median and mode were both 10 years each, with a standard deviation of 7.87 years.

Table 15

*Sentence Length of Incarcerated Offenders (n = 9)*

Sentence Length	Descriptive Statistics
Mean	14.11
Median	10
Mode	10
Minimum Sentence	7
Maximum Sentence	30
Standard Deviation	7.87

## Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the statistical analyses performed using the variables which were designed to provide answers for the stated research questions. The descriptive aspects of the data detailed throughout this chapter are useful in that they address the characteristics of those cases regarding children ages 3, 4, and 5 years which were admitted to the Denton County CAC for evaluation of suspected abuse. The analysis of these case files and the data described throughout this chapter also provide insight into some of the characteristics associated with the alleged offenders in these cases along with some of the demographic characteristics of the families admitting the children the CAC. An analysis of the subsample of identified adult offenders discussed in this chapter is beneficial in order to understand how often a sentence of incarceration was the outcome of a given case.

The following chapter discusses the practical implications of these findings and makes suggestions for the direction of future research regarding this subject matter. Chapter 5 concludes by reiterating the overall importance of the CAC's mission and by conveying the need for further advancement in the realm of child victimization.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses some of the more notable findings revealed by the current study which explored the intake case files of children ages 3, 4, and 5 years old who were evaluated by the Denton County Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) in 2008. A few of the more practical implications related to these findings are addressed, and recommendations are made for future research regarding child sexual abuse (CSA). This chapter concludes by acknowledging the overall importance of the CAC's mission, and by reiterating the importance of addressing child sexual abuse.

#### Principal Findings

A number of important findings were discovered through the current exploration which evaluated a sample of potentially victimized children. When looking specifically at the characteristics found to be associated with the children in the current sample, two important points of interest stand out. First, the data analyzed in this study revealed that as the age of the children identified in this sample increased, so did their respective percentages of admittance to the CAC. More specifically, 26.5% of the children in this sample were 3 years old, 34.1% were 4, and 39.4% were 5 years old at the time of their intake at the CAC. This finding is significant because it supports the CSA literature which suggests that the risk of being victimized as a child increases with age (Finkelhor, 2009; Putnam, 2003). These numbers appear to be reflective of this concept. Still, these percentages have the potential to also be representative of the fact that younger children are limited in their developmental capabilities possibly constraining them from

disclosing their victimization or even acknowledging the fact they were abused (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Lippert et al., 2009). Even so, it is probably more reasonable to suggest that these percentages are likely the result of higher rates of victimization which are generally associated with a child's age.

The second important finding associated with the characteristics of the children in this sample is that more girls were admitted for evaluation than boys. From the data analyzed, 60.6% of the children included in this study were female, while the remaining 39.4% were male. This data is consistent with the majority of literature pertaining to CSA which has consistently found that girls are victimized at higher rates than boys (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Finkelhor, 1994; 2009; Putnam, 2003). This finding could also be indicative of a secondary cause which is that girls are more likely to disclose their victimization than boys (Lippert et al., 2009). However, since this study is dealing with such a young sample of victims, these figures are more likely to be associated with the previous finding that higher rates of victimization exist amongst girls than boys in the general population.

When shifting the focus to the data pertaining to the characteristics of the alleged perpetrators in this study, a number of important figures become apparent. It was found that roughly 7 out of 10 cases admitted for evaluation (70.5%) included incidents where a suspect was identified in the alleged abuse. From these suspects, 47% were noted as having a direct familial relationship to the admitted child. Amongst this group of identified perpetrators, it was determined that an *other* type of family member was the most commonly identified person(s) in these cases (21.2%), followed by the father (19.7%), and then by a family friend (8.3%). This finding is important to acknowledge because it is supportive of the CSA literature which

suggests that most incidents of child sexual abuse are committed by family members or by individuals who have a close or established relationship with the child (Freyd et al., 2005).

Addressing the demographic characteristics of the families in this sample, the finding of greatest interest pertains to the number of siblings documented in these case files. Although 41.7% of this sample was found to have an unknown number of siblings, which is potentially the result of these children not having any siblings at all, the number of admitted children in this study declines substantially with each additional sibling noted on the intake report. More specifically, 34.8% of the cases in this sample documented 1 sibling, 16.7% noted 2, and 3% of the files documented 3 or 4 siblings each. Since there is little research addressing potential associations between CSA victims and the number of siblings they have, this finding draws some interest and may be indicative of an overlooked risk factor for abuse.

In exploring the types of cases administered for evaluation at the Denton County CAC, it was discovered that 68.2% of the cases in this study were referred from agencies within Denton County's legal jurisdiction. It was also found that 19.7% of the cases in this sample were referred from legal jurisdictions outside of Denton County. These figures are important because they highlight the fact that a number of different legal authorities are responsible for the admittance of children to this respective CAC. This finding leaves room open for the suggestion that more barriers are presented to the child victims who are referred to this particular CAC from localities situated in areas far from Denton County simply because many of these victims and their families are burdened by their physical location and by the fact that they sometimes have to travel hundreds of miles to access this resource.

The last major finding of this study requiring further discussion relates to the incarceration rates of the alleged offenders in these cases. After making the appropriate



adjustments for cases which fall within Denton County's legal jurisdiction and contain only identified adult offenders, a subsample ( $n = 42$ ) of the total sample ( $N = 132$ ) was established. Of this subgroup, 26.2% of the cases were found to have resulted in the incarceration of their stated offender. It was also determined that these offenders received an average sentence of 14.11 years.

At first glance the number of offenders receiving sentences of incarceration may appear marginal when placed alongside the CSA research which evaluates prosecution rates (Cross et al., 2003; Joa & Edelson, 2004; Walsh et. al., 2010). However, these figures are likely to be suggestive of the child victimization literature which has found that cases of CSA consisting of preschool age or younger victims are less likely to be referred for prosecution than those cases involving older victims (Joa & Edelson, 2004). With the children in the current sample being so young, it is likely that the various issues pertaining to diminished rates of prosecution of younger victims are reflected in the incarceration rates discovered within this sample.

### Practical Implications

One of the more important implications resulting from the current study is derived from the characteristics of the offenders identified and the fact that the majority of these individuals were likely to have an established relationship with the child. This particular finding highlights the issue which has been extensively noted throughout the CSA literature citing that the majority of these incidents typically involve perpetrators who are either closely related to the child or at least have some type of pre-established relationship with the victim (Finkelhor, 1994; 2009). Parents and primary caretakers of children should be better educated on this issue since they are the ones who are likely to have the greatest capacity for preventing such victimizations.

Adequate and continual measures need to be sought to perpetually highlight this fact so as to extinguish the ever prevalent myth that some random stranger or child predator is running around committing the majority of these offenses.

The other major implication derived from this study relates to the finding that almost 1 in 5 cases admitted for evaluation to this particular CAC were referred from legal authorities outside of Denton County's legal jurisdiction. Although the Denton County CAC is more than willing to address any and all cases of potential child victimization that it receives, the locations of many of these outside jurisdictions referring cases are sometimes physically located in areas hours away from this particular facility. In response to this problem, the establishment of more CACs (or similar types of programs) that are situated closer or are more readily accessible to the needs of families in rural areas should be taken into consideration. Undoubtedly child sexual abuse is not relegated to large cities or urbanized areas. Therefore, the establishment of more facilities to accommodate the needs of rural or secluded locations needs to be explored.

### Recommendations for Future Research

A number of recommendations for future researchers interested in CSA arise as a result of the current study. First, the current study focused on a specific sample of children who were ages 3, 4, and 5 that were predominantly suspected of being sexually victimized. This particular study is unique because it focuses directly on a small age range of children instead of amassing a large sample of potential victims and lumping them together in an arbitrary age category (e.g. children under 7, between 8 and 12, over 13, etc.) as previous research has done. The purpose of directly addressing these specified ages of children was to garner more attention to this often difficult to assess age-range of victims. With the underlying notion that children constituting

these lower ages present particularly unique challenges due largely to these victims' developmental capacities, more research should follow this study and directly address children of these lower age-ranges so as to grasp a better understanding of the issues affecting these victims. Further contributions to the literature which specifically focus on children under the age of 6 undoubtedly have the potential to alleviate many of the gaps and concerns pertaining towards these child victims.

The next recommendation derived from this study relates to the finding suggestive of the notion that children with fewer or no siblings are potentially victimized more frequently than those documented as having more brothers and/or sisters. This may or may not prove to be a significant risk factor associated with CSA in future studies. However, the fact that this particular aspect may eventually be a factor associated with higher risk for CSA should definitely be pursued.

The final recommendation resulting from the present study is directed towards the data collection using the intake case files at the CAC under study. During the data collection, a few hurdles were confronted in regards to ascertaining the prosecutorial information applicable to some of the case files in this sample as this information was not included in a number of the case files. A part of the problem relates to the fact that a large number of the cases evaluated at this CAC are referred from agencies outside of Denton County's jurisdiction (sometimes even from outside this particular state's jurisdiction). The multitude of legal authorities admitting children to this particular site definitely presents some obstacles in the ability of this CAC to collect data. Efforts to mitigate this issue, nevertheless, appear necessary and would prove beneficial for future researchers evaluating the intake files at this particular site.

## Conclusion

This exploratory study evaluated a sample of children admitted to the Denton County CAC for evaluation of suspected abuse in 2008. A number of productive findings were gathered through this investigation which should be beneficial and contribute to the body of literature regarding sexually victimized children. As stated previously in this thesis, research suggests that roughly 25% of the women and 10% of the men in this country were sexually abused at some point during their childhood (Finkelhor, 1994; Freyd et al., 2005; Joa & Edelson, 2004). The incidence of this type of victimization is without a doubt a substantial problem affecting a large portion of society. Efforts to address this issue have led towards the establishment and development of the Children's Advocacy Center which acknowledges the extensive problem of CSA, as well as other types of abuse, and attempts to facilitate the needs of any and all children victimized by abuse. Through a better awareness of the social injustices facing these voiceless victims, along with optimal programming addressing the needs of these children (such as that provided by the CAC) and their families, society has made great strides in responding to the issue of child sexual abuse. Even so, much more is needed to be done to help diminish the rates of child victimization and thereby reducing the total amount of suffering to which many children are subjected.

APPENDIX  
IRB APPROVAL

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OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
June 9, 2010 Research Services

Ashley Blackburn  
Department of Criminal Justice  
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 10262

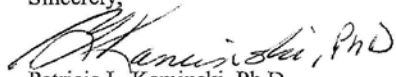
Dear Dr. Blackburn:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Examining the Successful Prosecution of child Sexual Abuse Cases." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, June 9, 2010 to June 8, 2011.**

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Administrator, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK:sb

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