

Nerudová, Liliana

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Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. G, Řada sociálněvědná. 1991, vol. 40, iss. G34, pp. [63]-69

ISBN 80-210-0551-3

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/111271>

Access Date: 28. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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LILIANA NERUDOVA

INCESTUOUS CHILD ABUSE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Due to its "marginal" character, child sexual abuse in Czechoslovakia has hardly been paid attention both by the general public and professionals. In the early eighties it came into prominence thanks to alarming conclusions and the studies performed in West European countries. Four types of child abuse are distinguished by social paediatry and child psychology:

1. Physical maltreatment and abuse — the most common and easiest to detect offense.
2. Child neglect. This type of child abuse is not as evident. It means refusing the child his/her essential necessities (nurture and clothing).
3. The third type includes psychological child abuse comprising psychical constraint and extortion by an adult in order to attain the adult's goals and ambitions.
4. The fourth type of child abuse, concealed by a barrier of silence, is incestuous child abuse or abuse by non-immediate family members who have contact with the child.

Sexual child abuse within the family is one of the social problems the least visible to society. Some experts believe it to be particularly perilous, because its devastating psychical consequences can exist for a long time after the psychical trauma has faded away. Experts have shown in a number of studies that sexually abused children tend to become abusive parents causing thus much harm to all those affected by this vicious circle. The largest number of reported cases of child abuse is known in Germany, followed by England and the United States.

In England, the drastic growth in the number of children diagnosed by paediatricians as sexually abused has led to the extensive investigations by Buttler-Sloss (1988). The study has shown sexual abuse to be common among children of any age, most frequently affecting both girls and boys aged 9 to 10 within all social classes of society. Child abuse also occurs within the family, frequently with the stepfather in the role of the offender. The paper by Gordon and Creighton (1988) investigating the

types of abusers has reached the conclusion that the most at risk of being sexually abused are children of single mothers who lived with a boyfriend during a short period of time. Children living with a stepfather in a common household are somewhat less at risk, because having married the children's mother appears to lead the stepfather to a greater commitment to the father role. These studies also bear evidence that sexual abuse is by far not only the problem of pubescent children — 71% of the children were first abused before they reached 11 years of age (NSH 1991).

In Czechoslovakia, the number of detected cases of child abuse is small, however, experts suppose that similarly as in western Europe, about 1 to 10% of the child population have experienced sexual abuse. Zvěřina (1991) even believes that up to one-fourth of the girls and up to one-fifth of the boys experienced sexual abuse during their childhood and adolescence. However, these facts have hardly ever been reported and investigated. About some four-fifths of the cases are thought to have remained unpunished. In Czechoslovakia, sexual child and teenager abuse is prosecuted in conformance with §§ 142, 143 and 145 of the Penal Code. For the sexual abuse of a child younger than 15 the offender can be sentenced to prison for a period from 2 to 8 years.

Incestuous relations have been the object of scientific investigations since the thirties of this century. The studies dealing with incestuous families emphasized the abuser's personality and also the criminogenic factors of such relations. The surveys were based upon empirical material obtained by medical, forensic and psychiatric investigations. The conclusions reached by the classical studies on incest and the attempts to explain this phenomenon were divided by Maisch (1968) into two basic groups:

— Biologically oriented attempts to give theoretical explanations of incest behaviour. They emphasized anomalous biological characteristics, the offender's diseases and his proclivity to incest behaviour characterized by lacking intelligence, hypersexuality, etc.

— A group of theories oriented towards factors related to social environment including inadequate housing conditions, poverty, alcohol and its motivating effect, social consequences of living without a wife, etc.

Certain problems may be brought about by the notions used in incest behaviour investigations. Terms such as victim and offender have commonly been used even if they are somewhat misleading due to their moralizing connotation. The surveys we are reviewing use them on principle in a neutral sense.

Incest means sexual intercourse between blood relatives, while pseudoincest is the sexual abuse of the child by a father-substitute. Paternal incests are among the most frequent, whereas siblings' incests are less common and maternal incest is considered to occur exceptionally.

One of the most extensive surveys dealing with paternal incest is that by Riemer and Weinberger (in Gromová 1985). They have found this type of incest to prevail in families subjected to destructive changes, the offenders being natal fathers aged about 40. At that age the incest risk

is increased because the daughter is growing up and becoming attractive to the father. Usually the first-born daughter is his first incest partner, but cases of "incest relays" have also been known. The duration of this relation can range from a single incident to repeated acts over a long period of time bringing about a positive emotional bond. Some authors relate incest experience to the subsequent deviant socialization of the daughter. Later in life deviant socialization may show up as prostitution or prevent the girl to form an ordinary partnership. Other authors, however, point to a group of girls abused by natal fathers who do not display traumatic consequences but undergo normal socialization. The potential consequences to girls subject to incest can be divided into four groups:

1. Promiscuous sexual relations when adult
2. Neurotic behaviour when adult
3. Frigidity when adult
4. No pathological changes when adult.

Most frequently long-lasting incestuous lead to subsequent promiscuous sexual relations, but they can as well result in the normal behaviour of the girl with the absence of pathological changes. In many cases it may be the daughter who initiates long-lasting incestuous relations. The incest consequence depend upon the daughter's response to this relation. Some psychiatrists (Lempp 1967) regard the daughter's emotional bond to the natal father as psychically innocuous, even though, later in life, problems with mate selection may arise.

It is well-known that disclosed incestuous families come from the lowest social classes with a low standard of living. However, this disclosure can be due to the discrimination of certain classes and by the fact that there are more cases of delinquency within them than are in other classes. Concealed incests in families of higher social standing present a far more serious problem.

The maternal incest ist the least frequent (or the most hidden) type of abuse. Two cases were described in the literature; a psychotic disease of the son was diagnosed in both of them. The small number of detected cases does not allow the risk factors leading to this relation to be generalized. We can but point to some supporting factors such as toleration of the act by the mother, the son's incapability to find a sexual partner outside the family, loss of self-control due to intoxication or a psychical disease.

In siblings' incests between young children commonly infantile actions are concerned, later-on they frequently copy the adults' sexual life. Some authors regard siblings' incests as a common stage of sexual development, mostly of short duration. In the studies dealing with siblings' incests, frequently rape and aggressive enforcement of intercourse by the brother, positive erotic and sexual bonding between siblings, the incest relays father-son and older brother-younger brother were described.

An interesting conclusion was reached by Lustig (1966). He suggests that incest may protect and maintain the disturbed family structure by making the daughter occupy the mother's place, i. e. play the principal

female role. This puts an end to sexual intolerance or to the father's sexual tension caused by his wife's emotional distance. The father is not able to find a sexual partner outside the family and thus the mother unconsciously pushes the daughter to an affair with her father. For fear of a potential family breakdown all family members keep silent, participating thus in a pathological autoremedial process in order to maintain the family.

The author of another study (Wiederholt 1980) bases his theory on the fact that the father can frequently succumb to inviting signals from his daughter and to conscious or unconscious approval by the mother. The author distinguishes two types of incestuous families:

- The dependent, sexually frustrated husband first takes recourse to alcohol and, later-one, lest the family should break down, starts an incest with his daughter. In this instance his wife has to take over the protective mother role as regards her husband. In this case the father maintains mere sexual relations with his daughter with no bond of love.
- The second type of the father-daughter incest presupposes a strong love bond between them. There the father is mainly motivated by his desire for independence and his awareness of his wife's unattractive looks. He replaces his wife with his daughter who, by her manners and phenotype, resembles her mother when the latter began her liaison with her present husband. The ageing father wishes to enjoy once more the past romantic love affair.

In Czechoslovakia, incest problems were investigated a. o. by Mellan, Pondělníčková, Hubálek, Topiař and Satková. Hubálek (1984), who described 50 reported cases of father-daughter incest, found the offenders to be middle-aged men of rather low education level. They had been socialized under highly adverse social conditions; the whole group was characterized by heavily drinking and criminal records. The average age of the daughters abused was 13 and in 50% of the cases the relation was a long-lasting one. Hubálek pointed to the considerable latency of incestuous behaviour; most of the cases were disclosed many years later when the second-born daughter was sexually abused.

The study by Maisch (1968) is the most frequently quoted paper devoted to incestuous behaviour. It comprises 78 incest cases heard by German law-courts in the sixties. The author gives the characteristics of the offenders, victims and the motives of the incest. Twenty years later, a similar goal was pursued by Tučková (1989). As to the number of cases investigated, her paper is the most extensive Czech survey describing 145 cases of sexual abuse examined by the police and prosecuted in conformance with §§ 142, 143 and 145 of the Czechoslovak Penal Code.

The two — independent of each other — studies by Maisch and Tučková pay prime attention to the offender. They state that incests are committed by middle-aged men, whereas sexual acts of violence more likely by younger men. The abusers are almost always males; female offenders amounted to 3% in the Czech survey and no abuses by females were found in the German study. The majority of the Czech perpetra-

tors were found to be of average intellect, every fourth male revealed slightly subaverage intellect and mental backwardness was stated for 15% of the offenders. The results of the German survey did not correspond to the fixed stereotype of a mentally retarded, primitive offender showing increased sexual desire. Typical of the abusers in Germany and Czechoslovakia are average intelligence and average (more or less regular) family caregiving, though a certain degree of the offenders' alcoholism was found by both surveys.

Incest cannot be related to deviant individuals, but more likely to inconspicuous people lacking psychotic symptoms. U. S. investigations have even found that incestuous fathers and homosexuals showed the highest intelligence within the group of sexually abusive persons. According to the German and Czech investigations, the offenders are characterized by increased aggressivity, proclivity towards drinking and, some of them by inadequate working habits. A considerable percentage of the offenders were with criminal records. The Czech survey also noted the personal views of the abusers: 40% of them admitted the criminal liability and amoral nature of their offense, 28% of them admitted it partly and 33% of them fully denied their guilt.

Out of the 145 victims of the Czech sample 88% were girls and 12% were boys. Half of the cases were the classical father-daughter incest, a quarter of them the stepfather-stepdaughter pseudoincest and the remainder were abuse by relatives or siblings. 80% of the Czech and 70% of the German cases were characterized as long-lasting incestuous relations. Incest acts committed over a long period of time are a well-known fact reported by a number of authors.

The conclusions of the two surveys did not agree with the general view according to which incests are thought to occur in very low-prestige social classes. Three-quarters of the Czech incestuous families fell into the group displaying the average Czechoslovak standard of living; standard conditions of life were also found for the majority of the families investigated by the German survey.

In Czechoslovakia, the most frequently abused children were those aged from 6 to 12 and a high percentage were also in the group aged 12 to 15. The mean age of the German child was 12,5 and two-thirds of the abused German girls were from 10 to 16 years in age. Similar results were also found by surveys made in Sweden and in the U. S. A.

A significant difference between the Czech and the German groups consisted in the type of sexual abuse. In Germany, the most frequent type of abuse was sexual intercourse, non-genital forms were rare. 70% of the incests were coition; oral penetration was difficult to assess being a taboo both to the victim and the offender, since it was regarded as perverse by German society in the sixties. In the Czech sample sexual intercourse was evidenced in a quarter of the cases; according to verbal testimony the sexual abuse was confined to other ways of sexual activity.

In Germany or Czechoslovakia the social reality shows no conformance with the stereotype image of the dull girl abused by her father. Nearly all of the abused German girls attended primary school, only 3% of the

German and 15% of the Czech abused girls attended special schools for the educationally subnormal. Almost 70% of the Czech girls were, by their intellect, within the average range of the Czech population, mostly rated by their teachers as average pupils showing no significant educational sways. Two-thirds of the German girls passed through the primary school without repeating a year, one third of them showed a performance so low that they had to repeat a class at least once. Psychometric tests rated three-thirds of the German girls as inconspicuous, not attracting attention by their conduct. Independently of each other the two surveys reached the conclusion that the "victims" could not be characterized by low intelligence and low success rates at school; the majority of them were inconspicuous girls of average intelligence.

Most frequently the incests were motivated by disturbed emotional bonds between the spouses and insufficient sexual partnership. The immediate influence of the wife was of importance in those cases when she tolerated the relation in silence becoming thus an active accomplice. When examining the Czech sample it came to light that about a third of the mothers had suspected the incest or had ignored it for some reasons. In case the whole affair was kept as a family secret, the father's offense became evident only after it had been reported by the abused girl. Only one-fifth of the incest were reported by the mother after her daughter had confided the matter to her. Both the German and Czech girls supported the incest acts for fear of the father's aggressivity and the breakdown of the family.

The German paper by Maisch distinguishes two types of the girls' behaviour:

1. Passivity — the girls only suffered the abuse being mainly influenced by motives such as fright of the father, a sense of shame, emotional dependence and ignorance of their rights.
2. Encouraging provocative conduct — here a major role is attributed to motives such as sexual desire, material advantages, the Oedipus complex, fear of loosing the father, secrecy because the father was a good provider for the whole family. As stated by Maisch, one-third of the girls did not oppose their incestuous abuse. Similar motives were revealed by analyzing the Czech sample: one-third of the girls did not tell or refused to tell the motives of their consent. The emotional bond with the father, sexual desire or rivalry with respect to the mother may have played significant roles in these cases. The other two-thirds of the German and Czech girls submitted to the father's will for fear of violence or because the incestual abuse left them unconcerned on the whole.

Within the European culture, incest is regarded as a deviant phenomenon that demands increased medical and social care. The two surveys have revealed, however, that the main incest risk is not health injury — in the Czech environment hospitalisation was necessary only for 7% of the cases, three-fourths of the girls continued to stay with their families, a minor number left the home for reasons connected with vocational training. Of substantial significance is the fact that the families in question are given up as socially lost for their neighbours.

In terms of anthropology, the incest taboo forms part of the cultural history of mankind. The moderateness and confusion characteristic of the punitive measures reflect the doubts inherent in the official attitudes and cultural relationships, because incests have been detected not only in the case of pathological individuals but also for people of socially inconspicuous behaviour. The investigations have shown that incests occur more likely in disharmonious families. For this reason, frequently the incest is not the cause but the symptom of unstable family relationships. Thus the best prevention should be a complete harmonious family and informing the children about the risk of being sexually abused.

An incest is "deviant" because it breaks the incest taboo of society. Rarely can it be considered to be a perverse act; it can cover a range from an indifferent relation to emotional partnership and, in the latter case, it can go on without conflicts and psychotic consequences. More serious than the incest proper are the consequences for the family concerned should this secret become public: the whole family will be disgraced and discriminated by their social environment.

SUMMARY

The contribution deals with one of the most concealed forms of sexual abuse — incestuous relations within the family. It summarizes the most important conclusions reached by European social research on incest problems, basing on the comparison of two extensive surveys (a German and a Czech papers). The common type of an incestuous family, the offender and the victim were found somewhat to differ from the traditional views maintained by the general public. Disclosed incests mostly lead to the social stigmatization of all members of the families concerned.

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