



# SIEC ALERT

FEBRUARY 2002, #47

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SIEC ALERT is a topical review of current literature relevant to suicide prevention.

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## Childhood Abuse and Suicidal Behaviours

Research on the long-term effects of childhood abuse on adult mental health and suicidality points to some disturbing psychosocial results. A history of abuse in adult women has been shown to increase the risk of developing psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality (Briere & Runtz, 1986).

Studies have also implicated sexual abuse in the development of suicidal thoughts in children and adolescents. In a study of college women between the ages of 18-24, Gutierrez and colleagues (2000) concluded that abuse plays a role in how these women think about life and death. Specifically, less repulsion by death and more repulsion by life were reported by women who had significant abuse histories. These women also claimed higher levels of current suicidal ideation.

In a review of studies on the effects of childhood abuse on later suicidal behaviours, Santa Mina and Gallop (1998) report strong evidence for a link between childhood sexual and physical abuse and adult self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviours. Their study further points out that the link between trauma and self-harm or suicide is strongest when the abuse has been of long duration, the perpetrator has been known to the victim, and force and penetration have occurred.

### Abuse & Neglect : Effects on Adolescent Depression and Suicidality\*

- adolescents & young adults with a history of childhood maltreatment were 3 times more likely to become depressed or suicidal compared with individuals who had not been abused.

- risk of repeated suicide attempts was 8 times greater for youths with a sexual abuse history

\* For information on this study, see verso for : Brown, J., et al. (1999). *Childhood abuse and neglect: Specificity of effects on adolescent and young adult depression and suicidality.*

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## Child Maltreatment: Incidence & Definitions:

A nationwide study\* of the incidence of reported child maltreatment in Canada (2001) found that in one year there were 7,672 investigations of child abuse and neglect. Forty-five percent of these investigations were substantiated, and 22% remained suspected. It is estimated that 1.4 million children in the United States suffers from some form of child maltreatment.

**Physical Abuse** is the deliberate application of force to any part of a child's body, which results or may result in a non-accidental injury. This may involve hitting a child a single time or it may involve an ongoing pattern of incidents.

**Child Sexual Abuse** occurs when an adult or youth uses a child for sexual purposes. Sexual abuse includes fondling, intercourse, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

**Child Neglect** occurs when a child's parents or caregivers do not provide the requisite attention to his or her emotional, psychological, or physical development. Unlike abuse, which is usually incident specific, neglect often involves chronic situations that are not as easily identified.

**Emotional Maltreatment** involves acts or omissions by parents or caregivers that cause or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. It can include verbal threats, socially isolating a child, intimidation, exploitation, terrorizing, or routinely making unreasonable demands on a child.

\* source: *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (Ottawa: Health Canada, 2001) <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

## SIEC SOURCES & RESOURCES

Photocopies are available from SIEC for documents on this list.

Please contact SIEC for pricing information.

SIEC # 1999-0697

Briere, J. & Runtz, M. (1986). Suicidal thoughts and behaviours in former sexual abuse victims. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 18(4): 413-423.

SIEC # 1999-0802

Brown, G. R. & Anderson, B. (1991). Psychiatric morbidity in adult inpatients with childhood histories of sexual and physical abuse. American Journal of Psychiatry, 148(1): 55-61.

SIEC # 1999-0716

Brown, J., Cohen, P., Johnson, J. G., & Smailes, E. (1999). Childhood abuse and neglect: Specificity of effects on adolescent and young adult depression and suicidality. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 38(12): 1490-1496.

SIEC # 1994-0970

Gould, D.A., et al. (1994). Self-reported childhood abuse in an adult population in a primary care setting. Archives of Family Medicine, 3(3): 252-256.

SIEC # 1999-0724

Grilo, C.M., et al. (1999). Correlates of suicide risk in adolescent inpatients who report a history of childhood abuse. Comprehensive Psychiatry, 40(6): 422-428.

SIEC # 2001-0258

Gutierrez, P. M., Thakkar, R. R., & Kuczen, C. (2000). Exploration of the relationship between physical and/or sexual abuse, attitudes about life and death, and suicidal ideation in young women. Death Studies, 24: 675-688.

SIEC # 2001-0631

Kaplan, S. J. et al. (1999). Adolescent physical abuse and risk for suicidal behaviors. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14(9): 976-988.

SIEC # 1993-0684

Malinosky-Rummell, R. & Hansen, D. J. (1993). Long-term consequences of childhood physical abuse. Psychological Bulletin, 114(1): 68-79.

SIEC # 2001-1313

McCauley, J. et al. (1997). Clinical characteristics of women with a history of childhood abuse: Unhealed wounds. Journal of the American Medical Association, 277(17): 1362-1368.

SIEC # 1998-1147

Santa Mina, E. E. & Gallop, M. (1996). Childhood sexual and physical abuse and adult self-harm and suicidal behaviour: A literature review. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 43: 793-800.

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