

# **School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: The evidence on effectiveness**

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# **School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: The evidence on effectiveness**

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## **Abstract**

This narrative review explored the efficacy of school-based child sexual abuse prevention programmes between 1990 and 2002. There were 22 efficacy studies which met clear inclusion criteria. Results covered both methodological design and the range of outcome measures. Methodology was analysed through four dimensions (target population, prevention programme implementation, evaluation methodology and cost-effectiveness). Outcomes for children covered nine categories (knowledge, skills, emotion, perception of risk, touch discrimination, reported response to actual threat/abuse, disclosure, negative effects and maintenance of gains). The studies had many methodological limitations. Prevention programmes had a measure of effectiveness in increasing children's awareness of child sexual abuse as well as self-protective skills. There was no evidence to demonstrate that programmes protected children from intra-familial sexual abuse. For a small number of children prevention programmes produced minimal negative emotional effects. Recommendations for future research and policy and practice were provided.

## **Policy and practice implications**

- Evaluation built into abuse prevention programmes through providing teachers materials to assess children's prior and post programme knowledge
- Training for teachers which takes into account their attitudes and gives them the opportunity to explore their concerns about delivering programmes
- Teachers involved in the planning of programmes to enhance ownership
- Programmes delivered within a supportive school context
- Child protection agencies to be alerted to when a programme is being delivered to ensure planned response to disclosures
- Training for teachers in how to respond to disclosures
- Ensure children have information to make informed choices about disclosure
- Provide a range of contextualised scenarios, taking into account the power differential and the child's feelings
- Comprehensive programmes (parents, teachers and community involvement) over many sessions repeated annually, including booster sessions
- Sufficient repetition of concepts and additional input/discussion for difficult to learn concepts
- Age and stage programme materials
- Approaches which include modelling, an affective component and behavioural skills training
- Active parental involvement building on what parents already teach about self-protection

## **Key words**

child sexual abuse; abuse prevention; efficacy; personal safety skills; child protection; programme evaluation; victimisation

## **School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs:**

### **The evidence on effectiveness**

#### **Introduction**

Incidence and prevalence statistics over the last two decades indicated that child sexual abuse was a significant issue for society occurring across all socio-economic levels and in all ethnic groups (Dhooper and Schneider, 1995). Cicchetti and Toth (1995) highlighted the immediate and long-term consequences of abuse and the subsequent impact on the psychosocial development of children including depression, interpersonal difficulties, substance abuse, delinquency and re-victimisation.

In an attempt to address these consequences, Cowen (1983) outlined two levels of prevention. Primary prevention was seen as cost-effective because it aimed to teach children how to avoid or escape abusive situations compared to coping with the consequences of abuse. In contrast, secondary prevention sought the identification of ongoing or past abuse where children disclosed abuse during or after an abuse prevention programme. Within this context, schools became a key location for the delivery of primary and secondary prevention as they were centres for education, included the whole child population and were places where children were at risk (Finkelhor, 1984).

Prevention programmes taught children to verbally resist and tell publicly what had happened (Reppucci, Land and Haugaard 1998). Such strategies partly evolved from sex offender studies where offenders reported that they targeted children who they

perceived as more compliant and less likely to disclose (Budin and Johnson, 1989). Programmes were therefore designed which enabled children to be more assertive.

From the content of school-based abuse prevention programmes it appeared that most programmes assumed that perpetrators were strangers, whereas the weight of evidence suggested that most sexual abuse was committed by a known abuser (Finkelhor, 1994). Evidence also existed which suggested long term home intervention was a more effective strategy for preventing intra-familial sexual abuse than school-based abuse prevention programmes (Wolfe, 1993). In conclusion Trudell and Whatley (1988) argued that prevention programmes were an 'overly simplistic approach to an extremely complex social problem', where at worst the blame was inadvertently landed with the child for not having avoided the abuse or protected themselves. The authors contested that intervention should have focused on wider social networks and not just on the children.

The difficulty in conducting meaningful programme evaluation had been highlighted by a number of authors. The secrecy of abuse (Krivacska, 1990), the documenting of the absence of abusive incidents (Ko and Cosden, 2001) and the lack of exploration of children's reactions to programmes directly with the children themselves (Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995) were all seen as barriers to effective research

Although there were many unanswered questions about efficacy of abuse prevention programmes a growing number were delivered in American and British schools over the 1980's and 1990's, but with little evaluation. Many of the programmes focused on the elementary school years because of the high incidence of abuse for young children (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith, 1990). Conte and Berliner (1981) found that

60% of victims were less than 12 years old and the average age for intra-familial abuse was 10.8 years (Brassard, Tyler and Kehle, 1983).

### **Reviews of the literature**

Despite the diversity and limited scope of previous traditional narrative reviews from 1990 onwards (Miltenberger and Roberts, 1999; Bevill and Gast, 1998; Carroll, Miltenberger and O'Neil, 1992; MacMillan, MacMillan, Offord, Griffith and MacMillan, 1994; MacIntyre and Carr, 2000; Finkelhor and Strapko, 1992; Gough, 1993; Mayes, Currie, MacLeod, Gillies and Warden, 1992) evidence supported the conclusion that most children could benefit from prevention programmes through concepts learned, increased knowledge and acquired self-protection skills. MacIntyre and Carr, (2000) concluded multi-systemic programmes which focused on key adults in a child's life were more effective, learning was best through discussion, video-modelling and behavioural methods and children achieved more with longer programmes. However, no reviews were able to conclude that there had been an actual reduction in abuse.

Meta-analyses of efficacy studies of school-based abuse prevention programmes confirmed the main findings of the narrative reviews (Rispen, Aleman and Goudena, 1997; Berrick and Barth, 1992; Heidotting, Keiffer and Soled, 1995). The most recent meta-analysis (Davis and Gidycz, 2000) reviewed 27 studies and found a large effect size of 1.07. Significant effects were found for age, number of sessions, participant involvement, type of outcome measure and use of behavioural skills training. The highest effect sizes were for programmes of four sessions or more which utilised behavioural training.

The current study sought to build on previous reviews by providing the most comprehensive narrative review of child outcomes of efficacy of abuse prevention programmes to date. Over a 12-year period (1990 – 2002) 22 studies were found to fit the criteria for selection.

### *Definitions*

Definitions of child sexual abuse across efficacy studies were characterised by their omission. Out of 22 studies only two studies gave a definition of child sexual abuse. Pohl and Hazzards' (1990) definition from the *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* programme was in child-like language, i.e. "When someone gives you the 'no' feeling by touching or looking at your private parts or having you touch or look at the private parts of their body". Telljohann, Everett, and Prices' (1997) definition was brief and taken from the most common elements of child sexual abuse definitions used in America, i.e. "non consensual physical contact with a minor for the purpose of sexual gratification".

For this review the definition was taken from the Scottish Parliamentary Cross Party Working Group on Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (2002):

*Any child below the age of 16 years may be deemed to have been sexually abused when any person (s), by design or neglect, exploits the child, directly or indirectly, in any activity intended to lead to the sexual arousal or other forms of gratification of that person or any other person(s) including organised networks. The definition holds whether or not there has been genital contact*

*and whether or not the child is said to have initiated, or consented to the behaviour* (Scottish Office, 1998).

This definition had been adopted in the local context by the statutory agencies (Education, Social Work and Police) through the Area Interagency Child Protection Committee. This provided a degree of fit between the review and the local practice guidelines.

### ***Methodology for the literature search***

Computerised bibliographic searches of the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), and the Social Science Citation Index, utilised both general and advanced searches covering the period 1985 to 2002. The Internet Google search engine was useful for exploring international vocabulary and grey literature. Computerised searches were supplemented by a manual search of two highly pertinent journals, i.e. the International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect and the Child Abuse Review. Thirty nine key words were identified from papers and bibliographic searches, ERIC's thesaurus of search terms, WEB of Science key word lists, as well as publications and reference lists on the Internet.

### ***Inclusion criteria***

Efficacy studies were included where the focus and aims of programmes were the prevention of child sexual abuse; there was a formal structure to the evaluation with a specified assessment of outcome; the target population was sub-samples representative of the whole school population; and the paper was published in English. Studies were not included if studies were solely with pre-school children or children with disabilities. The 22 studies were characterised by their diversity, defined

by five dimensions, i.e. target population, programme implementation, evaluation methodology and outcomes for children (see Table 1). Geographically the picture was similar to the 1980's, where the bulk of studies occurred in the USA and Canada. European and antipodean studies were of a small number with only one study in the UK.

[See TABLE 1](#)

### **Participants**

In comparison to the research in the 1980's, where participants were often less than 100 and often drawn from one or two schools resulting in experimental/control contamination effects (Hazzard, Webb, Kleemeier, Angert and Pohl, 1991), sample sizes had increased. Around a third of studies had participant numbers of over 500. About a third of studies did not report on gender balance although nearly all studies had mixed sex participants. Studies included a broad range of participant age and stage (age five to adulthood) although most examined the efficacy of elementary school age programmes and were weighted towards the early years. No studies exclusively looked at secondary school age programmes although three studies explored the cumulative impact of repeated exposure (Casper, 1999; Ko and Cosden, 2001 and Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995). Socio-economic status was characterised by omission and inconsistent labelling and the location (urban/rural/suburban) of participants was weighted towards urban populations. Ethnicity was not always reported, with most participants Caucasian.



## **Programme implementation**

A wide range of programmes were evaluated (18 different programmes), with a lack of replicated studies i.e. only two programmes were evaluated in more than one study (Feeling Yes, Feeling No/Talking about Touching programmes). In contrast to research in the 1980's where a number of studies examined the effectiveness of different intervention strategies (Wurtele, 1987 - participant modelling; Garbarino, 1987 – Spiderman comic; Wurtele, 1986 – behavioural rehearsal; Dezseran and Myerson, 1985 - theatre; Poche, Yoder and Miltenberger, 1988 – TV and Byers, 1986 - films) few studies in the 1990's compared the merits of different intervention strategies. Blumberg, Chadwick, Fogarty, Speth and Chadwick (1991) and Briggs and Hawkins (1994) were the exceptions. The former compared a role-play experience with a multi-media presentation and Briggs and Hawkins compared video training with group training.

Learning from the lessons in the 1980's, programme intervention in the 1990's tended to involve some form of modelling, experiential learning and behavioural skills rehearsal. Over half the studies used role-play and/or video vignettes. All programmes included discussion. Some programmes used picture cards, posters, comic strips, prevention songs and worksheet exercises. Programme content varied across the studies and certain core themes recurred, i.e., helping children recognize child sexual abuse and other abuses; teaching children to say 'no' or avoid unwanted approaches; encouraging children to tell an adult; letting children know that they were not to blame; distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate touching and between good and bad secrets and strategies to reduce the likelihood of being abused. Despite the wide range in the number and length of sessions most programmes evaluated were

of one or two sessions which lasted forty-five minutes to an hour. A variety of presenters led the programmes (teachers, facilitators, school counsellors, mental health professionals and community workers). Most of the programmes were presented by teachers or teachers with trained facilitators. None of the studies examined 'presenter' as an interactional variable.

Johnson (1994) noted that outcomes should not be evaluated before an evaluation of programme integrity. Only two studies in the review evaluated this dimension. Herbert, Lavoie, Piche and Poitras (2001) audio-taped the workshops and Warden et al, (1997) used a follow up questionnaire with teachers and discovered a diversity of presentation. The type of evaluation also distinguished the different efficacy studies. The majority were of child-focused programmes. A small number were large surveys of children's experience, some were evaluations of multi-systemic programmes and over half the studies had a follow-up component. Only two studies reported failed programmes and these used a 'comparison of treatment' design (Briggs and Hawkins, 1994 and Blumberg et al, 1991) where at least one of the programmes delivered a significant difference.

There was a spread of different types of study design. In the 1990's less studies used a post-test only design compared to studies in the 1980's. The most rigorous studies were Tutty (1997) and Warden et al, (1997) which used a strong pre-test/post-test design and a random allocation of participants to an experimental condition and a waiting list control group. Other studies that used a strong pre-post test design with control group were: Blumberg et al., (1991); Hazzard et al, (1991); Tutty (1992); Dhooper and Schneider (1995) [non comparison control]; Taal and Edelaar (1997);

Telljohann et al, (1997); McIntyre and Carr (1999a) and Herbert et al, (2001). Studies without control groups made it impossible to judge whether participants had improved because of the pre-test or because of the programme.

A wide range of evaluation tools was used. Few measures were used over more than one study and few were assessed for their psychometric properties, the C.K.A.Q. was the exception. Many of the questionnaires were short, e.g. seven to 13 items, which raised doubts about the validity and reliability of evaluation of complex child protection concepts. Blumberg et al, (1991) found that the use of short measures with older children often resulted in a ceiling effect. Across the studies there was a lack of clarity in terms of attrition rates with these often not communicated at all. MacIntyre and Carr (1999a) provided an example of good practice as a benchmark for future research which included attrition rates at pre and post-test and follow-up. It was therefore unknown how those who didn't take part differed in their reactions to programmes compared to those who remained in the studies.

Cost-effectiveness addressed the question "Were abuse prevention programmes worth the money?" None of the studies reported on this dimension. Given the significance of budgets for local authorities this was an important area for the research to cover.

## **Outcomes**

A key issue from analysis of the efficacy studies was - what were the outcome evaluations measuring? Across the studies outcome measures included - personal safety knowledge, behavioural intentions, perceptions of risk, increased disclosures,

subjective experience, negative effects, touch discrimination, reported responses to actual threats and maintenance of knowledge and skills (see Table 2).

[See TABLE 2](#)

### ***Knowledge***

Despite the diversity of participants, study design, tools for measurement and type of intervention nearly all studies found a small but significant knowledge gain. Tutty (1992) raised the question of how to make sense of small average gains and suggested that not only knowledge but attitudes about people were being assessed. In a later study Tutty highlighted the need to measure the clinical significance of change for individual children (Tutty, 1997).

### ***Prior Knowledge***

Another reason for the small gains in knowledge was the extent to which children had prior knowledge of abuse prevention concepts. Tutty (1994) discovered that prior to experiencing programmes even the youngest children held core prevention concepts. High pre-test scores were found for the concepts 'say no to unwanted touch, that it is not your fault if touched in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable and that you should tell a trusted adult if this should occur'. Similar findings were reported by Telljohann et al, (1997), Hazzard et al, (1991), Blumberg et al, (1991) and Warden et al, (1997). Hazzard et al, (1991), suggested the possibility of a volunteer effect where schools that were motivated to adopt a prevention programme were also more likely to have created a school ethos in which safety measures were highlighted before the programme was delivered.

Although specific concepts had been identified through pre-testing across a range of studies there continued to be variability and uncertainty with regard to which concepts at what age were understood. Few factors which influenced children's levels of prior knowledge had been identified and no studies had sought to identify how children had learned their prior knowledge and where this knowledge had come from.

### ***Child Development and Conceptual Learning***

Only a small number of studies explored the efficacy of programmes for different age groups and none of the studies in the review examined different methods to teach different ages of children. Studies that had systematically compared children's responses from different age groups discovered that older children consistently learned more concepts and that younger children knew consistently fewer prevention concepts at pre-test (Oldfield, Hays and Megel, 1996 [grades one through six]; Tutty, 1992 [grades one, three and six]; Tutty, 1997 [kindergarten through to grade six]; and Hazzard et al, 1991 [third and fourth grade]. Tutty (1994) suggested that the ability to learn was likely to be linked to developmental differences.

### ***Self-protection Skills***

Most programmes were based on the assumption that knowledge changed children's behaviour and that the behaviour change resulted in reduced abuse and harm (Reppucci, Land, and Haugaard, 1998). Of the studies reviewed most used narrow pencil and paper tests to assess skill acquisition and further the psychometric properties of these tests were rarely known. Cormack, Johnson, Peters and Williams

(1998) commented that such assessment tools had been seriously 'criticised in the wider educational literature' for being a simplistic and invalid way to have assessed a complex issue.

In the 1980's, a study by Fryer, Kraiser and Miyoshi (1987a 1987b) applied an in-vivo simulation technique where a confederate posing as a stranger tried to get children to leave the school grounds. Fryer and others found a reduction from about 50% of their sample (kindergarten through to second grade) to 22% of the experimental group who left with the stranger post-test. The programme used role-play and the teaching of specific strategies for children. This study was criticised on ethical grounds for running the risk of desensitising children to abduction (Conte 1987).

Another methodology more realistic than questionnaires and which avoided the ethical dilemma of real life simulations and was that of vignettes. These were presented in different ways – a written narrative, videotape, audiotape, puppets and/or plays of dangerous situations. Children watched the vignettes and suggested their safety responses. Seven studies out of 22 used vignettes, four of which reported significant skill gains

Herbert et al, (2001) found that elementary school-aged children identified better 'appropriate behaviour' when confronted with situations depicted on video vignettes compared to waiting list controls. Hazzard et al, (1991) reported that mid elementary children discriminated safe from unsafe situations better on a video measure compared to the control group. The latter authors concluded that a programme that

involved 'an affective component as well as concrete rules and behavioural rehearsal' appeared to be effective. Blumberg et al, (1991) discovered that kindergarten through to grade three children improved in touch discrimination following a programme, which involved role-play and Hensley and Soled (1993) used the 'what if situations test' and identified positive results for skill gains for second grade children.

Another form of evaluation used was children's reported behaviour in real life situations. Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman (1995) telephone surveyed a large national sample of ten to 16 year olds representative of different cultures, classes, ethnicity and backgrounds to ascertain the reported behavioural outcomes as a result of experiencing abuse prevention programme(s). Young people who reported having experienced a programme were more likely to have reported using self protection strategies, perceived themselves as more effective and were more likely to have disclosed that abuse had occurred.

The authors concluded that comprehensive programmes with comprehensive parental instruction were the most effective. A less promising outcome was that once children had been threatened they were less likely to stop the abuse. Even more concerning was that young people reported that they suffered significantly more injuries when they fought back. Methodological limitations included that the evidence was based on retrospective reports of abuse experienced (some several years earlier). The survey tools were not psychometrically validated and families without a phone were excluded from the survey.

Whereas Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman (1995) examined children's responses to reported threats and assaults Gibson and Leitenberg (2000) explored whether children who experienced a prevention programme showed different rates of victimisation compared to those who received no programme. Gibson and Leitenberg assessed 16 to 28 year old female undergraduate students and discovered that girls who participated in a prevention programme disclosed sooner. They also found that girls who reported that they had not experienced a prevention programme were twice as likely to have been sexually abused.

Research limitations were similar to Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman (1995); i.e. the research design was retrospective where participants may have forgotten which could have lead to under reporting and perhaps some who were abused may have wanted to deny that they participated in a prevention programme. Results were not generalisable given the specificity of population, i.e. upper middle class white undergraduate women.

In conclusion children who had experienced prevention programmes appeared to attain on average higher scores on post-test questionnaires examining abuse prevention skills than children who had not experienced a programme. Questionnaires alone however provided no evidence for the transfer of skills into real life settings or indeed for the safety of children. Questionnaires instead measured the 'behavioural intentions' of children rather than children's actual moving to action.

There was however some indications that prevention programmes might have led to behaviour change through evidence from adults reporting retrospectively their use of



safety strategies. There was also an indication that taught self protective behaviours led to increased safety through reduced victimisation, however there was not the research to support such conclusions. There was a need in the research to identify a methodology that could both measure children's resultant safety behaviour in the real world as well as a measure of actual safety from harm for children as a result of children using their taught safety strategies.

### ***Subjective Experience and Emotional Gains***

Just over a third of the studies reported emotional gains for participants who experienced a prevention programme. These gains tended to be reported as percentages of either children's responses or the adult's observations of the child. The few formal tools used were an anxiety inventory, self-esteem inventory and a locus of control scale.

A range of positive emotional experiences were uncovered - children were more positive towards safe scenes (Hazzard et al, 1991), more self confident, assertive and talked more about likes and dislikes (Herbert et al, 2001), reported a greater sense of efficacy in using self protective skills (Finkelhor, Asdigian and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995), younger children were less socially anxious (Pohl and Hazzard, 1990; Taal and Edelaar, 1997), self esteem increased for the seven year olds (MacIntyre and Carr, 1999a) and younger children with higher levels of anxiety reported that they felt they had learned what to do if touched inappropriately (Casper, 1999). Taal and Edelaar (1997) found that young children liked appropriate touch more after the programme

which challenged parental concerns that programmes increased children's anxiety about appropriate touch.

In summary there appeared to be a range of positive emotional benefits for children. There was a need for psychometrically rigorous tools to have measured the differences. Further, studies tended to rely on adults reports of children's experiences rather than to ask the children directly and there was a slight bias towards checking for negative experiences rather than exploring a range of children's emotional reactions.

### ***Perception of Risk***

Reppucci (1987) clarified that many prevention programmes were based on untested assumptions such as children not being aware of the risks of sexual abuse and suggested that there was a need to know children's prior beliefs about risk before delivering programmes. A number of researchers attempted to clarify why the perception of risk was a difficult concept to learn. Morris (1970) postulated that children might struggle to understand the definition of risk itself – 'the possibility of suffering harm or loss'. Children's deterministic reasoning may not fit well with predicting uncertain and harmful events (Piaget and Inhelder, 1975) and Kraiser (1986) suggested children found it difficult to connect negative events to the people they knew.

Only a small number of studies looked at participant's perceptions of risk. The results were mixed and as such inconclusive. Different methodology and evaluation tools were used which made it difficult to make comparisons. Dziuba-Leatherman and

Finkelhor (1994), in a boys only study highlighted a possible danger of school-based prevention programmes which increased boys sense of controllability of sexual abuse as this appeared in their study to lead to a reduced perception of the risk of abuse. The authors proposed that perceived risk was partly based on cultural stereotypes about male sexuality.

Jacobs and Hashima (1995) discovered that children prior to the prevention programme had high levels of perception of risk and that following the programme children's risk perception of strangers increased further. However, children's risk perception of specific scenarios shown on videotape was described as quite low. There was an age effect where younger children (second grade) held lower risk perceptions both prior to and following the programme than older children (sixth grade). Of concern was that the factors children used to assess risk were not necessarily the real risk factors. Jacob's and others concluded that 'even if children understand the overall risks of abuse, without some appropriate information about risks in different situations and with different kinds of people they are not likely to be able to recognize when to use behaviours learned in prevention programmes'.

Finally, Warden et al, (1997) found that both children who experienced a prevention programme and those in the control group increased their wariness of four different situations (being bullied, approached by a stranger, inappropriate intimacy from a known adult and pressure not tell). The authors commented that this might have been due to the process of assessment.

### *Disclosure rates*

Finkelhor and Strapko (1992) described disclosure rates as the easiest to measure and the least ambiguous of the outcomes of programme evaluation. An increased rate of disclosed grooming and threats of abuse constituted primary prevention whereas disclosure of ongoing or previous abuse constituted secondary prevention. Disclosed abuse enabled protection measures to be taken, therapy to be provided and reduced the likelihood of long term consequences (Sauzier, 1989).

Finkelhor (1990) affirmed that most survivors never told of their abuse in childhood and that many who disclosed had been abused for some years beforehand (Gomes-Schwartz, Horowitz, Cardarelli and Sauzier, 1990). Summit (1983) explained such a response as the accommodation syndrome which was composed of five categories (secrecy, helplessness, entrapment and accommodation, delayed unconvincing disclosures and retraction). Hollinger (1987) clarified that young children did not understand what the adult was doing and Farrell (1988) identified the age of the victim, the seriousness of the abuse and the relationship to the perpetrator as issues which impacted on the nature of a child's disclosure.

Sgrio (1982) made the distinction between purposeful and accidental disclosures. Sorensen and Snow, (1991) in a retrospective examination of 630 children who had disclosed abuse found that most disclosed by accident (74%) and that accidental disclosures were more frequent in younger children.

Just over a third of the studies reported on disclosure rates. Many studies gave overall disclosure rates rather than separate figures for the experimental and control group or

reported that disclosures occurred but gave no figures (Dhooper and Schneider 1995). For those studies which gave the difference, children who experienced prevention programmes reported higher rates. Such disclosures were reported as being characterised by a lack of false allegations (Oldfield et al, 1996). Hazzard, Kleemeier and Webb (1990) found that the disclosure rate was different depending on whether the programme was presented by a teacher or an outside consultant.

Understanding the meaning of disclosure rates was less than clear. An increase in disclosures could be explained either that the programme had been effective in encouraging children to tell or that the abuse rates had risen. Alternatively, a reduced disclosure rates could mean abuse had gone down or that the programme had failed to create a climate that enabled children to tell?

Pelcovitz, Adler, Kaplan, Packman and Kreiger (1992) concluded disclosure rates following prevention programmes had not been sufficiently documented. Systematic reporting would have included the percentage of children who disclosed, how children disclosed and to whom, the timings of disclosures, the type of disclosures and the different rates for the experimental and control groups. In addition, since disclosures were often an outcome of prevention programmes it was important that school and the appropriate child protection services were aware of the beginning of such programmes in order to ensure an appropriate and planned response (Pohl and Hazzard, 1990).

In conclusion studies were inconsistent in their reporting of disclosure. Some did not report on disclosures at all. Where disclosures occurred and were reported the

numbers of disclosures were small. Despite the implementation of abuse prevention programmes there continued to be a significant discrepancy between incidence and prevalence figures. In summary, there was little evidence to suggest the knowledge and behavioural intention gains, identified through questionnaire assessment, transferred into significant behaviour change (i.e. telling behaviour) in the classroom setting or beyond school into the home and community settings.

### ***Maintenance***

Studies in the 1980's provided some evidence of skill retention at six weeks (Hazzard, Webb, and Kleemeier, 1988), at three months (Saslowsky and Wurtele, 1986) and at six months (Wurtele, Mars and Miller-Perrin, 1987; Kolko, Moser, Litz and Hughes, 1987; Kolko, Moser and Hughes, 1989 and Gallmeier, Kenning and Plemons, 1988). Researchers who conducted follow up studies and looked at individual items found more mixed results (Kolko et al, 1987).

Although some earlier research had found little effect (Gallmeier, 1988; Ray and Dietzel, 1984), the value of booster sessions for improved safety discrimination scores was highlighted by more recent researchers (Hazzard et al, 1991; Tutty, 1997) with Briggs and Hawkins (1994) concluding that the reinforcement of abuse prevention skills was core in terms of longer-term skill maintenance.

Just over half the studies covered maintenance of prevention programme effects ranging from six weeks to transfer to high school. Some studies showed knowledge gains were maintained at two, three and five months after the programme (Taal and Edelaar, 1997; Jacobs and Hashima, 1995, Warden et al, 1997; Oldfield et al, 1996

and McIntyre and Carr, 1999a). Warden et al., (1997) by contrast found that unrehearsed knowledge gains tended to be lost at two to three months and in the Herbert et al, (2001) study skills decayed at two months yet were still at higher levels than pre-test.

Some authors reported on the knowledge gains that were maintained at one year follow-up. Briggs and Hawkins (1994) at a one year follow-up found participants retained their knowledge and increased their safety strategies. The authors suggested this continued progress might have been due to teachers and parents continuing to reinforce concepts. Low-income families in socially disadvantaged environments made the least progress. Hazzard et al, (1991) discovered that knowledge gains and the ability to discriminate safe from unsafe situations were maintained and again increased slightly at one year follow-up. The authors suggested that maturation in cognitive and reasoning skills as well as parents and teachers continuing to talk about prevention might have contributed to increased gains.

Ko and Cosden (2001), looking at the maintenance of gains over a longer period of time, followed up pupils who had received prevention programmes in elementary school and identified that most high school students had retained core knowledge about abuse although skill level was found to be variable. High school students were found to have more understanding of more sophisticated issues such as the attribution of blame, that abusers could be people close to the victim, that both boys and girls could be victims as well as recognising the need to report abuse.

The issue of maintenance of knowledge and skills was important as the risk of abuse occurred throughout childhood. There were mixed results in the research in terms of follow-up with knowledge and skill gains being maintained for varying lengths of time across some studies compared to a small number of studies which failed to demonstrate maintenance. Few studies identified the specific concepts that were difficult for pupils to retain. In addition, children's application of skills in real life situations was not an issue addressed at follow-up.

### *Negative Effects*

A range of studies in the 1980's identified children's negative reactions to prevention programmes (Reppucci and Haugaard, 1989; Garbarino, 1987; Hazzard, Webb and Kleemeier, 1988 and Kraiser, Witte and Fryer, 1989). As a consequence some studies began to include measures to assess any negative effects of having participated in a prevention programme (Binder and McNeil, 1987; Garbarino, 1987 and Wurtele, Mars and Miller-Perrin, 1987).

From 1990 to 2002 over half the efficacy studies reported on negative effects for participants as a result of having experienced a prevention programme. Authors to date reported these effects as small in number, mostly mild in nature and of short duration. Herbert et al, (2001) noted that negative behaviour might be time-limited as part of an adaptation phase where children practised their skills in real life situations.

When the range of negative effects was listed from the studies in the review it became apparent that negative effects were not an insignificant issue. The meaning of this



finding was less clear. Seven themes were identified as negative outcomes from the abuse prevention efficacy studies in this review. These were

- anxiety and dependency (Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995; Herbert et al, 2001; Tutty, 1997);
- fear towards strangers (Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995; Hazzard et al, 1991; Pohl and Hazzard, 1990; Herbert et al, 2001; MacIntyre and Carr, 1999a);
- aggression (Herbert et al, 2001; McIntyre and Carr, 1999a)
- embarrassment to upset (Pohl and Hazzard, 1990; Hazzard et al, 1991; Tutty, 1997))
- wariness of touch (Casper, 1999; McIntyre and Carr, 1999a; Taal and Edelaar 1997)
- extent of injury (Finkelhor et al, 1995)
- risk perception (Dzuiba-Leatherman and Finkelhor, 1994)

Studies that examined negative effects tended to be based on parental or teacher observations rather than on asking the children themselves (Finkelhor and Strapko, 1992). In checking for negative effects some studies found no difference between the experimental and control conditions. Significantly these were the studies that used psychometric measures. This could be explained either in terms of the tools not being sensitive enough or that the negative reactions from children were put into perspective. Given only a very small number of studies assessed the possibility of any negative impact in a standardised and psychometrically tested way there was a need for more systematic research in this area.

In summary, a range of negative experiences were identified for a small number of children who had participated in an abuse prevention programme. There was no evidence to suggest that the anxiety experienced by some children was overwhelming. It was also unclear whether the reported anxiety was as a result of the programme, the evaluation measures or the methodological limitations of the studies. Some authors went on to suggest that a degree of anxiety was helpful as this may have helped some children to be more alert to the dangers. Most children however did not show increased levels of anxiety following participation in an abuse prevention programme.

### *Child Characteristics*

In addition to clarifying the characteristics of children in relation to negative effects of prevention programmes, Casper (1999) addressed the characteristics of children in relation to positive outcomes. Older children with lower anxiety and an internal locus of control were positively associated with higher scores following a prevention programme. Children who were younger and who felt more anxious however were more likely to report the abuse prevention programme enabled them to 'learn what to do if touched inappropriately'. Casper discovered that these characteristics predicted outcomes for children to an accuracy of 62.6%.

Other authors also sought to discern whether child factors impacted on the level of knowledge and skills gains but had little success (MacIntyre and Carr, 1999a; Hazzard et al, 1991; Briggs and Hawkins, 1994). The latter study however discovered that children defined as middle class made more progress in knowledge and skills compared to children with low economic status, even though the latter started with less knowledge. Children from middle class homes with active parental involvement

and teachers who were willing to incorporate safety knowledge into their day-to-day teaching made most progress.

Although the majority of studies found no overall difference in gender response to prevention programmes a few studies reported that girls learned and retained more of the material (Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1995 and Hazzard et al., 1991). McIntyre and Carr (1999b) found more female participants disclosed abuse as a result of the Stay Safe programme however Oldfield et al., (1996) noted that girls scored higher anxiety scores. It would appear that there was enough variation in the outcomes to suggest that there may be subtle differences in which boys and girls received an abuse prevention programme.

In terms of ethnicity, because of the lack of studies it was impossible to come to any conclusions. The lack of any evidence of any academic effects on outcomes may have meant that it was appropriate to deliver abuse prevention programmes to whole classes. Evidence from studies which looked at age differences and the capacity of children to learn child protection concepts indicated that prevention programmes needed to be developmentally appropriate and thus adapted across the childhood age range.

The research into child characteristics has been minimal and narrow in focus. A number of potential moderating factors were identified however there was insufficient research to come to any conclusions.

## **Conclusions**

The design limitations of studies were many. There were insufficient studies with control groups and few studies randomly allocated participants to experimental and control conditions. There was a wide variety of outcome measures and few standardised measures.

Despite the methodological limitations most researchers indicated that their results showed that school-based abuse prevention programmes had a measure of effectiveness in increasing children's awareness and possibly skills in relation to child sexual abuse. There was no evidence however to demonstrate that these programmes protected children from intra-familial abuse other than at a secondary prevention level of disclosure. Some researchers argued that the disclosure of abuse was the most valid and reliable measure of these programmes. Even within this context there was still a big discrepancy between disclosure rates following prevention programmes compared to prevalence figures. Pelcovitz et al, (1992) cautioned about making the assumption that just because children had experienced a prevention programme this meant that they were safe from harm.

Overall studies indicated that prevention programmes led to small average gains in self-protective knowledge with the likelihood of a range of individual response. It was proposed that such small gains might have been due to surprisingly high levels of prior knowledge that children brought to programmes or that the efficacy studies had really measured attitudes and beliefs which were more embedded in children's thinking and thus more difficult to change. Indications were that the amount of prior

learning with parents varied with socio-economic status and environmental deprivation.

Some studies found that some self-protection concepts were more difficult for all children to learn. One concept that occurred across a number of studies was that children found it difficult to understand that trusted adults including family members could abuse.

The gaining of knowledge was seen as a necessary pre-requisite to action but not sufficient in itself to keep children safe. Some research referred to an attitude/behaviour discrepancy where children's reports of behavioural intentions did not always fit with their behaviour in the actual situation. However from a National study (Finkelhor et al, 1995) indications were that children who had experienced a prevention programme were more likely to use the self-protective strategies they learned on the programme and felt more confident about doing so. Other studies provided very little evidence to suggest that this reduced the likelihood of sexual abuse although there was some evidence to suggest children might disclose earlier. Changes in children's perception of risk were difficult to assess as studies were minimal and mixed in quality and outcome.

There were sufficient follow-up studies to suggest that knowledge gains tended to be retained up to a year after a short duration programme. Skill gains, as measured through behavioural intentions were less conclusive because of the small number of studies as well as the mixed results. Active parental and teacher involvement both during and following the prevention programme potentially led to further small

average gains in knowledge. A small number of studies examined the repeated exposure to prevention programmes and booster sessions and indications were that these might have enhanced further learning. Some concepts appeared to be more difficult to retain than others, i.e. abuse by someone you know.

Most children reported the programmes as enjoyable however for a small number prevention programmes seemed to generate anxiety. It was uncertain as to the role this anxiety played in the development of self-protective behaviour. Such negative feelings were illusive to statistical tests of significance. As previous researchers concluded, it appeared that anxiety and other negative feelings were mostly mild and of short duration.

### **Recommendations for policy and practice**

Recommendations fitted into eight categories: evaluation, training, school context, programme presenter, planning for disclosure, length of programmes, effective teaching and learning and partnership with parents:

1. Evaluation built into programmes through providing teachers materials to assess children's pre and post programme knowledge
2. Training for teachers which takes into account their attitudes and gives them the opportunity to explore their concerns about delivering programmes
3. Teachers involved in the planning of delivering a programme to enhance ownership
4. Programmes delivered within a supportive school context
5. Child Protection agencies to be alerted to when a programme is being delivered to ensure planned response to disclosures

6. Training for teachers in how to respond to disclosures
7. Ensure children have sufficient information to make informed choices about disclosure
8. Provide a range of contextualised scenarios, taking into account the power differential and the child's feelings
9. Comprehensive programmes (parents, teachers and community involvement) over many sessions repeated annually, including booster sessions
10. Sufficient repetition of concepts and additional input/discussion for difficult to learn concepts
11. Age and stage programme materials
12. Approaches which include modelling, an affective component and behavioural skills training
13. Active parental involvement into the programme building on what parents already teach about self-protection

### **Recommendations for future research**

These recommendations fitted into 9 categories: methodological development, evaluation measures, process evaluation, specific populations, longer term programmes, impact factors, specific concepts, age range and emotional outcomes:

1. Larger scale studies (over 1000 participants).
2. Demographic factors reported in a standardised way and for these to be analysed as interactive factors.
3. Research design with pre and post-test valid and reliable psychometric measures with random allocation to waiting list control groups.
4. Comparison of different intervention methods

5. Examination of which items are most difficult to retain
6. Cost-effectiveness of programmes.
7. Programme integrity measures
8. How children who have been abused and children with disabilities respond to programmes
9. The impact of cumulative programmes
10. To what extent the duration of sessions impact on learning
11. Examination of school factors in programme effectiveness
12. The impact of different programme presenters
13. Examination of a range of child characteristics and how these interact with programme factors
14. Failed as well as successful programmes to be published
15. The impact of prevention programmes on children's perception of risk.
16. Efficacy studies with high school aged participants.
17. A broader examination of children's emotional changes including the development of psychometric measures.

Although the above recommendations describe a variety of separate research issues it is suggested that evaluation of the interaction of the above factors will be of most significance.



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**Table 1: Evaluation Studies of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programmes (Methodology).**

Study	Target Population					Prevention Programme Implementation				Evaluation Methodology					
	Author, Date & Country	Participants: Number /Gender	Age &/or Grade	Socio-economic status	Urban rural, suburban	Ethnicity (%)	Named Programme	Type of intervention	Number and length of sessions	Programme presenter	Type of evaluation study	Pre-test / post-test design	Control group	Evaluation tools	Programme integrity check
Pohl & Hazzard 1990 USA	526 263m 263f	3rd 4th	-	Urban	65 White 27 Black 5 Hispanic 3 Oriental	Feeling yes: Feeling no	video comic role-play discussion structured exercises	three 1 hr classes	Professional staff	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	N	Questionnaire Silent questions box Random selection for interview Parent & Teacher questionnaire	N	-
Blumberg et al., 1991 USA	264 139m 125f	K 1st 2nd 3rd	Mean income 30,000	-	51 White 18 Black 17 Hispanic 7 Asian 7 Other	1 STOP 2 CAPP	1 role-play 2 multi-media	1 hr	1 trained volunteers. 2 4 teachers, counsellor, school nurse	Comparison of programmes	Y	Y	Touch Disc Task (vignettes) Interviews Fear Survey Sexual Abuse Knowledge Index	N	-
Hazzard et al., 1991 USA	399 % 50m 50f	3rd 4th	Low middle to upper middle	-	matched	Feeling Yes: Feeling No	Video Group discussion Role-play	3 sessions	Mental health professionals	Evaluation of multi-system programme	Y	Y	Knowledge Scale Anxiety Inventory Video vignettes Disclosure data	N	-
Tutty 1992, 1994 Canada	400 - m - f	1st 3rd 6th	-	-	Control group > Canadian born parents	Touching	A play Group discussion	1 session 45mins	Theatre group	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	N not random	Children's Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire (CKAQ)	N	-

Madak & Berg 1992 Canada	833 - m - f	K/ 1 <sup>st</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup>	Working class	Urban	-	Talking About Touching	Photograph Vignettes Discussion	15 lessons	Teachers	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	N	Questionnaires short vignettes Interview	N	-
Hensley et al., 1993 (Gerndal, 1991) USA	40 % 45m 55f	2nd	-	-	87.5 white 12.5 African & American	Body Safety Training	-	1 session 50mins.	-	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	N	What if Situations Test Personal Safety Questionnaire Interview	N	-
Dzuiba- Leather- man & Finkelhor, 1994 USA	44 44m 0 f	10 to 16 yrs	-	-	White	-	-	-	-	Survey – evaluation of child focused programme	Post -test	N	Interview Perceived Likelihood of Sex Abuse (PLSA)	N	-
Briggs & Hawkins 1994, 1994b Australia/ New Zealand	378 - m - f	5 to 8 yrs	-	-	Diverse cultural & ethnic mix	1. Protective Behav- iours  2. Keeping Ourselves Safe	1. Group discussion  2. Group discussion Video	1. 8 sessions.  2. 12 sessions	Teachers	Comparison of programmes	Y	N	Questionnaire & Interview	N	-
Jacobs & Hashima 1995 USA	75 - m - f	2nd 6th	Lower / Lower middle 81% employed	Small mid- west comm.- unity	95 Native American	Talking About Touching	Picture cards Discussion	26 sessions	Teachers	Evaluation of child focused programme (risk perception)	Y	N	Interview (Base rate estimates) Video vignettes Situational Risk Measure	N	-
Dhooper & Schneider 1995 USA	796 % 51m 49 f	3rd 4th 5th	Variety of levels	Semi- urban	Mainly black or white	Kids on the Block	Puppet show Question and Answer Song	1 session.	-	Evaluation of child focused programme.	Y	Y non equivalent	Questionnaire	N	-

Finkelhor et al., 1995, 1995b USA	2000 1042 m 958 f	10 to 16 yrs	Nat. Rep.*	Nat. Rep.*	Nat. Rep.*	-	-	-	-	Survey – Evaluation of child focused programmes	Post -test	Comparison no programme group	Telephone Interview 30mins – 1 hr	N	-
Sylvester 1996 USA	133 66m 67f	K 1st 2nd 3rd	10 to 90% free school meals	Urban Rural Sub*	80 White 20 Range	Talking About Touching	Video story Audio cassette Poster Discussion	10 to 20 min. 6 – 8 weeks	10 teachers & 2 school counsellors	Evaluation of child focused programme.	Y	N	Interviews Photographs of hypothetical scenarios Pupil and Teacher surveys	N	-
Oldfield et al., 1996 USA	1269 598m 671f	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th	-	Urban	91 White 3 African American 3 Hispanic 1 Asian American	Project TRUST: Touch	Play presented Pre-post discussion	1 session 30 min. play 15min Q & A	Teachers High School students Facilitators	Evaluation of child focused programme	Post -test	Y Random	CKAQ – R Anxiety Inventory Disclosure Report Form	N	-
Taal & Edelaar 1997 Holland	292 76m 85f	6th 7th 8th	Matched	-	-	Right to Security	Presentation plays Role-play Discussion	8 sessions 30 min to 1 hr per sessions	2 sessions facilitators 4 sessions by teachers	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	Y	6 Questionnaires	N	-
Tutty 1997, 2000 Canada	231 - m - f	K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th	33% semi skilled 27.5% prof* 19.2% Tech. 19.2% business	-	8 East Indian 2 Latino 2 Black	Who Do You Tell	Discussion Pictures Video Role-play Discussion	2 sessions. 45 – 60 min per sessions.	2 Programme trainers	Evaluation of child focused programme	Y	Y Random	CKAQ - R	N	-
Telljohann et al., 1997 USA	431 220m 211f	3rd	-	Rand.* Urban Rural Sub*	Mostly white	-	Role-play Videos Demonstration Discussion	2 sessions 1hr per session	Trained volunteers & social service staff	Evaluation of child focused programme.	Y	Y	Questionnaire	N	-



Warden et al., 1997 United Kingdom	120 % 50m 50f	P2 P6	Matched	Urban	-	KID-SCAPE	Video Role-play Discussion Poster	Various 10 to 20 sessions.	Teachers	Evaluation of child focused programme.	Y	Y Random & Matched	Drawings with story line Interview	Y	-
McIntyre & Carr 1999, 1999b Ireland	772 % 55m 45f	7y 10y	-	-	-	Stay Safe	Group discussion Video Behaviour training	12 sessions 40 min per session.	Teachers	Evaluation of multi-system programme	Y	Y	CSKS* Questionnaire Self Esteem inventory	N	-
Casper 1999 USA	382 – 503 - m - f	2nd 5th 6th	-	-	-	Touch Continuum	Discussion Vignette presentation	1 session 45min	Amateur actors & trained facilitators	Evaluation of child focused programme. (Children's characteristics)	Y	N	CKAQ – R – II Locus of Control Scale Anxiety Scale	N	-
Gibson & Leitenberg 2000 USA	825 0 m 825f	16 to 28 yrs	University undergraduates	Parents msb*	95 White	-	62% participated in Good touch/bad touch type programme	-	-	Survey – Evaluation of child focused programmes.	Post-test	Comparison no programme group	Questionnaire Childhood Sexual Experience Scale Sexual Functioning Inventory	N	-
Herbert et al., 2001 Canada	133 - m - f	1st 3rd	Middle income	-	-	ESPACE	Role-play Guided discussion Behavioural modelling and rehearsal	1 hr to 75 min	3 female community workers	Evaluation of child focused programme.	Y	Y	CKAQ Video vignette measure	Y	-
Ko & Cosden 2001 USA	137 83m 54f	9th	-	-	53 European American 25 Hispanic 22 Native American	-	Discussion Role-play Pencil & paper activities	K – 1 to 2 hrs 4th – 1 to 2 hrs and follow-up session.	Trained Professionals	Evaluation of child focused programmes.	Post-test	Y	Questionnaire	N	-

CSKS\* = Children's Safety Knowledge and Skills Questionnaire Prof.\* = professional  
sized business

Sub\* = suburban

msb \* = medium

Nat. Rep\* = National representative sample

Rand.\* = random

**Table 2: Evaluation Studies of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programmes (Outcomes).**

Study	Outcomes for Children								
	Knowledge gains	Skill gains	Emotional gains	Perception of risk gains	Touch discrimination	Reported response to actual threats	Disclosure	Negative effects	Maintenance of gains
<b>Author, Date &amp; Country</b>									
Pohl & Hazzard (1990)	-	-	Y	-	-	-	6.5%	N	-
Blumberg et al., (1991)	1 Y 2 N	1 Y 2 -	-	-	1 Y 2 N	-	-	-	-
Hazzard et al., (1991)	Y	Y	Y	-	-	-	> 5%	N	Y 6 w & 1y
Tutty (1992, 1994)	Y	-	-	-	Y	-	-	-	Y 5m
Madak & Berg (1992)	Y	-	-	-	-	-	1%	Y	-
Hensley et al., (1993)	Y	Y	-	-	N	-	-	-	Y 1y
D - L & Finkelhor (1994)	-	-	-	N	-	-	-	Y	-
Briggs & Hawkins (1994, 1994b)	1. N 2. Y	1. N 2. Y	-	-	-	-	4.3%	N	1. N 1y 2. Y 1y
Jacobs & Hashima (1995)	Y	-	-	Y	-	-	-	N	Y 2m
Dhooper & Schneider (1995)	Y	-	-	-	-	-	0.3%	-	-
Finkelhor et al., (1995a, 1995b)	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	P = .01	Y	Y 37% within last year
Sylvester (1996)	Y	Y	-	-	-	-	-	N	-
Oldfield et al., (1996)	Y	-	-	-	-	-	0.4%	N	Y 3m

Taal & Edelaar (1997)	-	Y	Y	-	Y	-	-	Y	N 6w
Tutty (1997, 2000)	Y	-	-	-	Y	-	-	Y	-
Telljohann et al., (1997)	Y	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Warden et al., (1997)	Y	-	-	Y	-	-	-	-	Y 2-3m
McIntyre & Carr (1999a, 1999b)	Y	Y	Y 7y	-	-	-	Y	Y	Y 3m
Casper (1999)	Y	-	Y		-	-	-	Y	Y 3y (previous exposure)
Gibson & Leitenberg (2000)	-	Y	-	-	-	8% versus 14%	-	N	-
Herbert et al., (2001)	Y	Y	Y	-	-	-	-	Y	Y 2m
Ko et al., (2001)	Y	Y	-	-	-	Y	-	-	Y into H.S