

what are the Experiences of Parents of Children who
have Engaged in Harmful Sexual Behaviour?



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ORIENTATING TO THE PERSON

- ...Untold stories
- My role as story teller
- An invitation to 'step into their shoes'

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WHAT IS HSB?

“Young people (below the age of 18 years) who engage in any form of sexual activity with another individual, that they have powers over by virtue of age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and where the victim in this relationship has suffered a sexual exploitation and betrayal of trust”

(Calder, 2002)

Why might it happen?

Current theories emphasise developmental, social, familial, and economic contributing factors

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RATIONALE

Context

- Poorly researched area; lived experience and meaning-making little heard or understood (Hackett et al., 2015)
- Limited attention given to experiences of birth parents alone.
- Assumed meanings: societal discourse of deficit, dysfunction and causality

Clinical Relevance

- Parents considered key agents for change
- Systemic practice not consistently established and nationally there is an absence of family work (Smith et al., 2013)
- Richer framework from which to provide appropriate support

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METHODOLOGY

Participants

- Semi-structured individual interviews
- Involvement of lived experience consultant

Research Design

- n= 6 biological parents of a child who has engaged in HSB
- Recruited from a multi-agency partnership service working with children and young people with HSB.

Analysis

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- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
- Aim of study is to better understand how parents make sense of their experiences

RESULTS

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A DEVASTATED A

Distressed and struggling

- “The whole world came down”
- “I just felt sick”
- “It’s a mixture of anger, disgust and despair”
- “When it all first kicked off I was an absolute wreck”
- “The guilt and shame are horrible”



‘Help’ from services as an added burden

- “I didn’t trust anybody. I felt scrutinised”
- “You’ve got social workers, meetings... you’ve got no time to yourself”
- “We’ve got to always be vigilant”
- “Even though you’re the mum, other people take over”

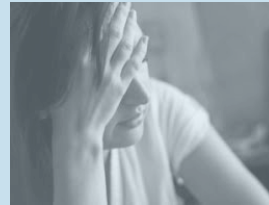
Coping alone

- “Everything was a struggle”
- “I got really down”
- “It was basically just left to me, and I found it difficult to cope”
- “Sometimes I feel very lonely”

THREATENED AN

Escaping awful feelings

- “I blocked it out for quite a while”
- “I bottled up my feelings”
- Downplaying what happened
- “I just refused to think about it”



Rejected and in Retreat

- “I felt like I couldn't have him around my family”
- “I backed away and made sort of new friends that didn't know”
- “My dad stopped seeing us, because he couldn't deal with it”

Hiding in shame

- “You just keep it behind closed doors”
- “I just stayed in, I didn't even go to the shops”
- “I think it's best to keep it private”
- “I used to hide”
- “It's better to say that he's coming to sessions for a different reason”

A CHALLENGED R

Questioning “Why?”

- “Why is he doing this?”
- “Where is this coming from?”
- Because of his gender?
- “I thought he was still a little boy and didn’t know anything like that”
- “Has what happened affected him?”
- “It’s like my abuser, like that person has gone into him”



Finding distance from son

- “I just couldn’t bear to be around him”
- “I just wanted to push him away”
- “I don’t know if I love him the way that I did before...it’s changed”
- “I was sort of like, he’s not my son but I’ve got to deal with this”

SPACE FOR HOPE

Valuing support

- “Professionals do help with talking”
- “It was nice to think you’ve not on your own”
- “She’d give me a hug and sort of say “we’ll deal with it, we’ll get there”

Trapped and helpless



Hopeful moving forwards

Inner strength through adversity

- “I’m always expecting more trouble”
- “There’s something hanging over me all the time”
- “It’s constant”

- “You just brush yourself down and pick yourself up”
- “I gave him a cuddle. He needs his mum. I kept trying”
- “It feels like a bit of an achievement you know, we’ve stepped up to it”
- “I’ve coped with this, so I can cope with anything”

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IMPLICATIONS

- Experience of being parent in this circumstance extremely challenging

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- Think systemically! Respond to whole family needs
- Parent/ family based interventions integral to support of families
- Collaborative practices which empower and respect parents
- Professional involvement- Therapy positively viewed (e.g., parenting skills) but impact of intensity of professional involvement

IMPLICATIONS

- Facilitate provision of spaces for peer-support
- Social influence and meaning...a crisis of belonging! Power of both actual and feared judgement of others
- 'Avoidant' strategies as resourceful means of coping V's detrimental impact on wellbeing and positive presence in child's life
- Disconnection from the skills, strengths, resources and resilience's which could assist them moving forwards- narrative approaches?
- **Policy level/ Clinical implications**