Delay in Disclosure of Non-Parental Child Sexual Abuse in the Context of Emotional and
Physical Maltreatment: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

The present pilot study sought to identify predictors of delays in child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure, specifically whether emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure contributes to predicting delays over and above other important victim factors. Alleged child sexual abuse victims ($N = 79$), whose parental figures were not the purported sexual abuse perpetrators, were interviewed and their case files reviewed, across two waves of a longitudinal study. Regression analyses indicated that experiencing both emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure was uniquely predictive of longer delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure. Victim-CSA perpetrator relationship type and sexual abuse duration also significantly predicted CSA disclosure delay, whereas victim age at the time of the police report, victim gender, and victims' feelings of complicity were not significant unique predictors. Child abuse victims' expectations of lack of parental support may underlie these findings. Parent-child relationships are likely crucial to timely disclosure of CSA, even when a parent is not the CSA perpetrator.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, disclosure, victimization, parent-child relationships

Delay in Disclosure of Non-Parental Child Sexual Abuse in the Context of Emotional and Physical Maltreatment: A Pilot Study

The burden of disclosing child sexual abuse (CSA) often falls upon child victims due to the frequent absence of physical evidence and the clandestine nature of the sexual acts. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to disclosure for CSA victims, including their fear of negative consequences (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Rates of disclosure in childhood are troublingly low (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2014; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2007), and when disclosure does occur it is frequently delayed (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990; Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; McElvaney, 2015). Delay in disclosing CSA to authorities can diminish successful prosecution, postpone needed therapeutic intervention, and expose other children to harm. For these reasons, and because early disclosure may reduce long-term negative sequelae associated with CSA (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Kogan, 2004), it is important to identify factors related to delays in CSA disclosure.

The present pilot study explored victim demographic, abuse-related, and psychological factors as predictors of CSA disclosure delays. Critically, this study also investigated emotional and physical abuse by a person in a parental role (a parental figure) as a unique predictor of delay in disclosure of CSA, specifically for victims *not* sexually abused by a parental figure (that is, not sexually abused by a biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, grandparent, or stepparent). Traditionally, "intrafamilial" CSA includes when biological parents are the offenders, for example, when fathers are the CSA perpetrators (Reitsema & Grietens, 2015). In the present study, we consider cases in which a parental figure, as defined above, was not the CSA perpetrator, but rather another family member (i.e., intrafamilial perpetrator, such as a

cousin, sibling, or a parent's partner) or non-family member (i.e., extrafamilial perpetrator, such as a babysitter, family friend, teacher, neighbor, or stranger) was the CSA offender.

Parents, most frequently mothers, play an important role in the disclosure process both as frequent recipients of child victims' initial disclosures and as intermediaries regulating access to intervention from authorities (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1995; Jensen et al., 2005; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015). To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure when child victims report having experienced emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure.

Disclosure Rates and Disclosure Delays

Obtaining a firm estimate of disclosure rates is obfuscated by differences across studies in research designs (e.g., retrospective vs. contemporaneous), disclosure characteristics (e.g., initial vs. repeated, spontaneous vs. prompted), and disclosure recipients (e.g., initial disclosure to anyone vs. later disclosure to authorities; Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Lyon & Ahern, 2010). However, past research and national surveys indicate that CSA disclosure rates in childhood may be as low as 16% to 25% (Lyon & Ahern, 2010; National Children's Advocacy Center, 2014). According to reviews by Paine and Hansen (2002) and McElvaney (2015), fewer than a quarter of child victims disclosed CSA immediately following the assaults.

Early disclosure is associated with significant emotional benefits into adulthood (e.g., less depression, reduced anxiety, and fewer self-destructive behaviors; Pipe et al., 2007). Disclosure can have psychological value for victims, although beneficial effects may depend upon the disclosure recipient's reaction. Although disclosure in general can be beneficial, disclosure to authorities is often needed to avail child victims of formal intervention (e.g., to prevent further abuse) and access to mental health resources (e.g., to treat emotional sequelae).

Factors Influencing Disclosure

To understand the disclosure process and to intervene effectively, it is imperative to determine factors that influence children's disclosure. One important consistency across different models of CSA disclosure is that children's expectations of disclosure recipients' potential reactions are central (Bussey & Grimbeek, 1995; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005). For example, McElvaney, Greene, and Hogan (2012) conceptualized children's decision making about whether to disclose as a dynamic process with three key components: active containing of the secret, conflict between a desire to tell and a desire to keep the secret, and expectations for the disclosure itself, including whether a trusted confidant is available to receive the disclosure. Whether or not the decision process includes these components, child victims may grapple with the costs and benefits of disclosure, including anticipation of their parents' responses. Even children who do not disclose to their parents may be concerned that their parents will find out, and the children may thus still fear negative ramifications (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011).

It is well established that low levels of familial support are associated with lower disclosure rates, delayed disclosure, and wavering after disclosure (Elliott & Briere, 1994; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). Supportiveness in relevant research is often defined as accepting that CSA occurred, showing positive actions/protectiveness, and not punishing victims following disclosure (e.g., Paine & Hansen, 2002). When considering parental support, however, these studies do not explicitly address children's delays in disclosure of CSA committed by someone other than a parental figure in the context of emotional or physical maltreatment by parental figures. Relatively little is known about whether non-CSA maltreatment by a parental figure predicts children's delays in

CSA disclosure, leaving a potential concern of many victims unaddressed, specifically, whether disclosing to emotionally or physically abusive parental figures will result in positive intervention.

Parent-child relationship and multiple victimization factors. Non-offending parents, especially mothers, are most often the recipients of CSA disclosure (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1995; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015; Schaeffer et al., 2011). However, children maltreated by parents, compared to non-maltreated children, form more negative expectations of their caretakers (Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001; Stronach, Toth, Oshri, Manly, & Cicchetti, 2011). Thus, children experiencing non-CSA maltreatment by parental figures may be likely to form negative expectations for parental reactions to CSA disclosure. In fact, Elliott and Briere (1994) found that children with a history of substantiated neglect or physical abuse by caretakers experienced less maternal support after CSA disclosure. We theorized that if children perceive their parental figures as hostile (e.g., emotionally or physically abusive), those children will have developed negative expectations for their parental figures' reactions in distressing situations (Bowlby, 1980; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), which may adversely affect speed of disclosure.

Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory offers insight as to why a history of maltreatment may influence children's expectations about how their parental figures will react to disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than those parental figures. Children who suffer maltreatment (e.g., physical and/or emotional abuse) at the hands of their parental figures are more likely to be insecurely attached to those parental figures than non-maltreated children (Stronach et al., 2011; Toth, Cicchetti, Macfie, Maughan, & VanMeenen, 2000). Insecurely attached children have difficulty turning to parental figures as sources of safety and comfort

when distressed (Shields et al., 2001; Stronach et al., 2011). CSA disclosure is often a distressing process (Paine & Hansen, 2002), and maltreated children's expectations that their parental figures cannot be trusted to react supportively or intervene to stop the CSA may increase their distrust of abusive parental figures as disclosure recipients. Formal intervention can be an incentive for disclosure; however, maltreated children are less likely than non-maltreated children to trust that parental figures will formally intervene by notifying the authorities after disclosure (Malloy, Quas, Lyon, & Ahern, 2014). This lack of trust may relate to delay in CSA disclosure by furthering internal conflict and confusion involved in deciding whether to disclose, thus lengthening the decision-making process.

CSA often co-occurs with other forms of maltreatment (Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010). Children who suffer emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure and CSA by perpetrators other than a parental figure could, by certain definitions, qualify as polyvictimized (Ford, Wasser, & Conner, 2011). Across development, children who suffer polyvictimization exhibit more distress symptoms than victims of only one type of maltreatment (Finkelhor et al., 2011; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007a). When polyvictimization is accounted for, the association between individual victimization and trauma symptoms is greatly reduced (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007b). Thus, experiencing multiple forms of childhood abuse appears to be uniquely traumatizing. To our knowledge, investigations of multiple victimization experiences (e.g., polyvictimization) have not addressed the disclosure dilemma for children who suffer non-CSA victimization specifically by parental figures as well as CSA by others (i.e., CSA by someone other than a biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, grandparent, or stepparent). Parent-child relationship factors that lead to delayed disclosure, as mentioned

earlier, should be exacerbated when children have been multiply victimized at the hands of their parental figures. Such children should be particularly likely to delay disclosure.

Although we propose, based on important psychological theory and empirical findings, that parent-child relationship factors are crucial for timely CSA disclosure, additional factors need to be taken into account that also potentially contribute to children's tendencies to delay telling what happened. Next we consider demographic, abuse-related, and psychological factors.

Demographic factors. Findings related to victim age as a predictor of delay in disclosure are somewhat mixed (Paine & Hansen, 2002). However, there is reason to believe that, overall, older compared to younger children are more likely to delay disclosure of CSA. Younger children's lack of knowledge and greater impulsiveness may inadvertently facilitate quick disclosure because younger children may be less likely to avoid topics or inhibit statements that deter older children (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas, & Moan, 1991; but see Lyon, Ahern, Malloy, & Quas, 2010; Nagel, Putnam, Noll, & Trickett, 1997). Older children are more likely to spend time grappling with the potential benefits and consequences of disclosure than younger children who are more likely to disclose accidentally (e.g., Campis, Hebden-Curtis, & DeMaso, 1993). This is particularly true if older children live with the perpetrator at the time of the abuse (Leclerc & Wortley, 2015). In the full sample of children involved in the Goodman et al. (1992) study, upon which the current study is based, older compared to younger children delayed disclosure longer (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003).

Findings generally suggest that boys are more hesitant to disclose than girls, which may be due to fears associated with social stigma about victimization (e.g., Finkelhor et al., 1990; Tang et al., 2007; Ullman & Filipas, 2005). Based on a prosecution sample, Sas (1993) reported

that boys delayed disclosure at higher rates than girls (81% of boys delayed disclosure vs. 58% of girls; but see Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994).

Abuse-related and psychological factors. Abuse-related factors of special interest to our study include victim-CSA perpetrator relationship type (intrafamilial vs. extrafamilial) and sexual abuse duration. Intrafamilial compared to extrafamilial CSA victims are less likely to disclose during childhood (Arata, 1998; Kogan, 2004; Smith et al., 2000), have longer delays in disclosure (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003), and are more concerned about potential punishment, appearing disloyal, and disrupting the family structure as a result of their disclosures (Malloy et al., 2011; Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant, & Loughlin, 1999). Although “intrafamilial” CSA traditionally focuses on biological parents as the offenders, similar factors of concern to child victims (e.g., punishment, appearing disloyal, family disruption) may exist when intrafamilial CSA is perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure.

Abuse duration is also an important consideration as several studies reveal that victims of intrafamilial CSA, as traditionally defined, tend to be abused for longer durations than victims of extrafamilial CSA (e.g., Mian, Marton, & LeBaron, 1996; Stern, Lynch, Oates, O’Toole, & Cooney, 1995). In considering delayed disclosure, it is thus important to statistically disentangle abuse duration from other possible influences.

On a more psychological level, a number of emotional forces could influence disclosure delay. We focused on feeling complicit in the abuse because past research identifies it as an important factor that dissuades children from telling (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Schaeffer et al., 2011). For example, CSA can involve a grooming process that may lead victims to feel partially or fully responsible for the abuse, increasing delays in disclosure (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Kellogg & Hoffman, 1995; McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014).

The Present Study

This pilot study was designed to elucidate associations between adverse parent-child relationship factors, as measured here by emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure, and delay in disclosure of CSA allegedly perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure. Although lack of parental support after disclosure has been linked to delayed disclosure, the role of maltreatment by a parental figure is also important to examine. Participants were 79 alleged CSA victims who were part of a longitudinal study examining various outcomes for CSA victims (Goodman et al., 1992). All participants' CSA cases had been referred for prosecution, and data for Wave 1 were collected at that time. Participants from Wave 1 were again interviewed as adolescents and young adults (Wave 2; Quas et al., 2005). Data for the present study were analyzed from both Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the longitudinal study. Delay in disclosure was measured from the last abuse incident to initial disclosure as well as from last abuse incident to disclosure to authorities.

We were specifically interested in trying to isolate parent-child relationship factors as a context for disclosure and therefore analyzed only those CSA cases where none of the child's parental figures was the alleged sexual abuse perpetrator. Parental figures were defined as biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, or stepparents.

Guided by the literature reviewed above, we advanced four main groups of hypotheses. First, in relation to demographic factors, child victim age at the time of the initial police report was expected to positively relate to delay in disclosure, with delay in disclosure increasing with age. Boys were expected to have longer delays in disclosure than girls, consistent with the bulk of prior research. Second, regarding abuse-related factors, child victims of intrafamilial (relatives and parental partners, but not parental figures) sexual abuse, compared to child victims

of extrafamilial sexual abuse, were expected to have longer delays in disclosure. Abuse duration was predicted to positively relate to delay in disclosure, with delay in disclosure increasing with longer durations of abuse. Third, in relation to psychological factors, victims' feelings of complicity were anticipated to positively relate to delay in disclosure, with feelings of greater responsibility for the CSA predicting longer delays in disclosure. Fourth, with regard to parent-child relationship factors, having experienced non-CSA abuse (especially multiple forms of victimization) by a parental figure was expected to predict longer delays in CSA disclosure over and above victim demographic, abuse-related, and psychological factors.

Method

Participants

Participants were 79 alleged CSA victims whose reported sexual abusers were not a parental figure from a larger sample of 218 CSA victims whose cases had been referred for prosecution (Goodman et al., 1992). The subsample was predominantly female (75%), ranged from 3- to 17-years-old at the time of the initial police report ($M = 9.62$, $SD = 3.35$), and ranged from 16- to 30-years-old at the time of the Wave 2 interview ($M = 22.89$, $SD = 3.93$). Seventy-five percent of the subsample was Caucasian (nonHispanic), 11% African American, 11% Hispanic, and 2% "other": Ethnicity was coded as 0 = minority (25%), 1 = majority (75%). Socio-economic status (SES) of the child victims' families was calculated using Watt's (1976) adaptation of Hollinghead's socio-economic status (SES) scale (1 = highest to 7 = lowest income). The subsample spanned the entire 7-point scale and was predominately middle-to-low SES ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.47$). Thirty-five percent of the CSA acts reported involved penetration, 53% genital contact without penetration, and 11% nongenital contact or exhibitionism, as

documented in legal records.¹ None of the alleged CSA acts were reported as perpetrated by the child victim's biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, or stepparents. Per relationship type, the percentage of CSA perpetrators, with the percentages based on the full sample of 79 participants, was as follows: (a) Intrafamilial perpetrators: 21.5% partners of the victim's parent, 7.6% uncles, 2.5% cousins, and 1.3% siblings (including step siblings), and (b) Extrafamilial perpetrators: 13.9% family friends, 12.7% neighbors, 11.4% strangers, 10.1% acquaintances, 7.6% babysitters, 2.5% daycare providers, and 8.9% "other" (e.g., teacher, church leader, school custodian, friend's father). All of the perpetrators except one were male.

Participants were enrolled in a longitudinal study examining outcomes for CSA victims whose cases had been referred for prosecution in an area of the western United States (Wave 1). Participants from Wave 1 were again interviewed as adolescents and young adults (Wave 2, $N = 174$; Quas et al., 2005). Criteria for inclusion in the present study were as follows: (1) participants lived with a biological parent or both biological parents when their cases were referred for prosecution in Wave 1; (2) none of the participants' parental figures (biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, or stepparents) was accused of being the sexual abuse perpetrator, and; (3) participants answered all questions of interest.

Wave 1 participants were generally representative of the population of CSA cases referred to the District Attorneys' offices at that time (Goodman et al., 1992). To determine whether our subsample of 79 participants was representative of the larger sample ($N = 218$ at Wave 1, $N = 174$ at Wave 2), chi-square analyses were performed to compare gender, ethnicity, CSA type, parental-figure emotional abuse, and parental-figure physical abuse. Our subsample did not significantly differ from the larger Wave 1 sample (Goodman et al., 1992) as to gender,

¹ Type of sexual act was uncorrelated with disclosure delay to anyone, $r = -.17$, n.s., and disclosure delay to authorities, $r = -.17$, n.s. Type of sexual act was therefore not considered further in this paper.

$\chi^2(1, n = 218) = .26, p = .61$, or ethnicity (majority or minority) $\chi^2(1, n = 216) = 1.11, p = .29$.

Our subsample did significantly differ from the larger Goodman et al. (1992) sample as to relationship type (intrafamilial or extrafamilial), $\chi^2(1, n = 218) = 20.82, p < .001$, consistent with our exclusion of participants who were abused by intrafamilial parental figures. Our subsample did not significantly differ from the larger Wave 2 sample (Quas et al., 2005) as to parental-figure perpetrated emotional abuse, $\chi^2(1, n = 173) = 2.51, p = .11$, or parental-figure perpetrated physical abuse, $\chi^2(1, n = 172) = .03, p = .86$ (these measures were assessed at Wave 2 only).

Measures

Wave 1 measures. Wave 1 data came from a modified version of the sexual assault profile (SAP; Conte & Berliner, 1984). Specific questions on the SAP concerned delay in CSA disclosure from the last abuse incident to the initial report to anyone ($M = 2.19, SD = 1.52$; 1 = less than 48 hours to 5 = more than 6 months), and separately to the initial report to authorities ($M = 2.22, SD = 1.47$; 1 = less than 48 hours to 5 = more than 6 months), victim age in years when the CSA was reported to authorities, victim gender (0 = male, 1 = female), victim relationship to the CSA perpetrator (0 = extrafamilial abuse, 65.8%; 1 = intrafamilial abuse by someone other than a parental figure, 34.2%), the overall duration of the CSA ($M = 1.68, SD = .81$; 1 = 1 day to 4 = more than 5 years), and victim's perception of own responsibility for the CSA ($M = 1.20, SD = .44$; 1 = victim attributes no responsibility to him/herself to 3 = victim attributes full responsibility to him/herself). Five researchers were trained on sample cases at the beginning of the study. Reliability for the SAP was calculated as proportion of agreement of the cases and ranged from .67 to 1.00 (see Goodman et al., 1992, and Goodman-Brown et al., 2003, for details).

Wave 2 measures. Self-report questionnaires at Wave 2 included questions about whether the child victim ever experienced emotional abuse by his or her mother or father (or a person acting in that role), or physical abuse by a caretaker before the child victim turned 18 (0 = did not experience emotional abuse, 55.7%; 1 = experienced emotional abuse, 44.3%). The emotional abuse questions asked were as follows: “As a child or teenager, before you turned 18, did your mother (or the person acting in a mother role, if you weren’t living with your mother for an extended period of time) reject you, terrorize you, isolate you, emotionally ignore you, exploit you, or involve you in illegal activity, that is, emotionally abuse you?” The identical question was asked for “father (or the person acting in a father role, if you weren’t living with your father for an extended period of time).” The physical abuse question was as follows: “Child physical abuse includes a parent or caretaker, including stepparents, foster parents or grandparents, ever hitting you with a fist or object; slapping, shoving, kicking, or biting you; or physically assaulting you, that is, beating you up, which includes assaulting you with an object such as a wooden board, knife, or even a gun. It does not include a normal spanking. Before you turned 18 years old, how many times were you a victim of child physical abuse? (Note: if it happened repeatedly by the same person, count that as one time.)” (0 = did not experience physical abuse, 51.9%; 1 = experienced physical abuse, 48.1%). Twenty-nine percent of participants indicated they experienced *both* emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure, 34% experienced one type of abuse by a parental figure but not the other abuse type, and 37% experienced neither type of abuse by a parental figure.

Procedure

Wave 1 SAP data were collected by trained graduate students, or for one jurisdiction, a trained victim advocate at the District Attorney’s office. Data were collected from various

sources, including prosecutor files, police and social service records, and parent and child reports (Goodman et al., 1992). Wave 2 data were collected primarily via phone interviews with the Wave 1 child victims (Quas et al., 2005). On average, the delay between the start of the legal case and Wave 2 was 12.5 years; the delay between the Wave 1 and Wave 2 was 13.4 years (see Quas et al., 2005).

Results

Preliminary analyses including correlations among variables of interest are presented first. Then, to test the hypothesis that presence of emotional abuse and/or physical abuse by a parental figure predicts longer delays in CSA disclosure, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) are reported. To examine whether emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure (including multiple forms of victimization) uniquely predicts longer delays in CSA disclosure over and above demographic, abuse-related, and psychological factors, multiple linear regression models were tested. Multicollinearity was not a concern (all Tolerance $\geq .78$, all VIF ≤ 1.29).

Correlational Analyses

Correlations revealed numerous significant relations among the variables and delay in disclosure. As apparent in Table 1, delay in disclosure to anyone and delay in disclosure to authorities were so strongly correlated as to be, in effect, the same variable ($r = .93$). We focus on delay from the last abuse incident to disclosure to authorities for several reasons. First, delay of disclosure to authorities was a more verifiable measure because we had access to objective documentation of the disclosure to authorities (e.g., police records, child protection information, and prosecutors' files), whereas initial disclosure to anyone was based on self-report. Second, delay in disclosure to authorities had better statistical properties (e.g., no significant skew [skewness = .82, $SE = .27$], fewer missing data). Although victim ethnicity was significantly

correlated with delay in disclosure in the correlational analyses, with Caucasian (nonHispanic) children taking longer to disclose, victim ethnicity and SES were not significant unique predictors of delay in disclosure in preliminary analyses and are not identified in prior literature as statistically significant factors influencing delays in CSA disclosure. Thus, to maximize the statistical power of our analyses, victim ethnicity and SES were not considered further.

Analysis of Variance

First, we created a parental-figure abuse type variable that had four levels: CSA victims who reported no parental-figure emotional or physical abuse ($n = 29$), only parental-figure emotional abuse ($n = 12$), only parental-figure physical abuse ($n = 15$), and both parental-figure emotional and parental-figure physical abuse ($n = 23$). A one-way ANOVA, with parental-figure abuse type as a between-subject independent variable and delay of disclosure of CSA as the dependent variable, revealed a significant main effect of parental-figure abuse type, $F(3, 75) = 6.13, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. Mean comparisons indicated that disclosure delay significantly differed for children who reported both forms of parental-figure abuse ($M = 3.22, SD = 1.51$, 95% CI[2.57, 3.87]) compared to those who reported no parental-figure abuse ($M = 1.76, SD = 1.24$, 95% CI[1.29, 2.23]), $t(75) = 3.90, p < .001$. Delay of disclosure for children who reported only parental-figure emotional abuse ($M = 1.75, SD = 1.22$, 95% CI[.98, 2.52]) or only parental-figure physical abuse ($M = 1.93, SD = 1.34$, 95% CI[1.19, 2.67]) did not significantly differ from that for children who reported no parental-figure abuse: emotional abuse, $t(75) = -.02, p = .99$; physical abuse, $t(75) = .41, p = .68$.

Next, we combined the “only emotional abuse” and the “only physical abuse” groups to examine number of abuse types as an independent variable, making group sizes more equivalent (0 = neither parental-figure emotional nor physical abuse, $n = 29$; 1 = either parental-figure

emotional or physical abuse, $n = 27$; 2 = both emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure, $n = 23$). A second ANOVA on CSA disclosure delay was conducted with this three-group independent variable. A significant main effect of number of abuse types emerged, $F(2, 76) = 9.23, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. Mean comparisons revealed that delay of disclosure significantly differed for children who experienced parental-figure multiple victimization compared to those who reported no parental-figure abuse, $t(76) = -3.93, p < .001$, and those who reported only one type of parental-figure abuse ($M = 1.85, SD = 1.26, 95\% \text{ CI}[1.35, 2.35]$), $t(76) = -3.62, p = .001$.

Multiple Regression Analyses

To investigate whether emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure uniquely predicted delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure, even after controlling for other predicted factors, multiple linear regression models were tested (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). We used the three-group number-of-abuse-types variable in our regressions (Table 2).

In the first model, we analyzed whether victim age at the initial police report and victim gender predicted delay in CSA disclosure. The model was significant. However, neither victim age at the time of the police report nor gender accounted for a significant amount of the variance. Victim-CSA perpetrator relationship type (intrafamilial vs. extrafamilial) and abuse duration were then added to the first model. The second model was significant. The added variables in Model 2 provided a significant improvement. Children took longer to disclose when the abuse perpetrator was intrafamilial (but not a parental figure) and when the abuse was longer in duration. When scores for feelings of complicity after disclosure were added, the third model was significant, but feeling complicit was not a significant unique predictor. Finally, number of abuse types was added as a possible predictor of delay in CSA disclosure over and above the

other variables. The model was significant, and the added variable provided significant model improvement. Number of abuse types by parental figures predicted longer delays in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure.

Different mechanisms could underlie delayed disclosure in cases where there is a dearth of substantiating evidence or in cases of false allegations. Thus, we tested regression models, as in Table 2, with only the cases for which corroborating evidence (e.g., medical evidence, additional eyewitnesses) was present ($n = 51$) to determine whether our findings held. Victim age, $\beta = .13, p = .048$, emerged as a significant predictor and victim gender remained non-significant, $\beta = -.23, p = .62, R^2 = .10$. However, likely due to reduced statistical power, the overall model was not significant, $F(2, 48) = 2.54, p = .09$. Victim-CSA perpetrator relationship type (intrafamilial vs. extrafamilial) was still a significant predictor, $\beta = 1.24, p = .002$, as was abuse duration, $\beta = .54, p = .02, R^2 = .37, F(4, 46) = 6.85, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .28, p < .001$. Feelings of complicity remained non-significant, $\beta = -.11, p = .81, R^2 = .37, F(5, 45) = 5.38, p = .001, \Delta R^2 = .001, p = .81$. Of importance, number of abuse types still uniquely predicted delays in disclosure above and beyond the other variables for the corroborated sample: $\beta = .50, p = .03, R^2 = .44, F(6, 44) = 5.75, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .07, p = .03$.

Discussion

This study sought to expand on prior research to identify factors that significantly predict delay in CSA disclosure, and specifically to examine the relation between disclosure delay, on the one hand, and emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure, on the other hand, after controlling for other important factors. As predicted, reports of emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure significantly predicted longer delays in CSA disclosure perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure, above and beyond victim demographic, abuse-related, and

psychological factors. Although participants in our prosecution sample eventually disclosed, which is not typical for children who have experienced sexual violations (Pipe et al., 2007), our findings add to an understanding of factors that contribute to delayed disclosure of CSA and call for further research to investigate these relations.

Only those participants who reported experiencing *both* emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure significantly differed in delay to their CSA disclosure from those who did not experience abuse by a parental figure. These findings suggest that, at least for a prosecution sample in which disclosure had been obtained, parental-figure maltreatment that is relatively extreme in scope, comprising both emotional and physical abuse, uniquely predicts significant delays in CSA disclosure. Given that our definitions of emotional and physical abuse included a range of examples with regard to severity of emotional and physical abuse, this pilot study cannot distinguish those victims who experienced severe and continuing abuse by a parental figure from those victims who experienced less severe and one-time abuse. It is possible that our lack of ability to identify the more severe emotional and physical abuse cases restricted our findings to significant disclosure delays only when children experienced multiple forms of parental-figure abuse. That said, our results are resonant with literature regarding polyvictimization, which indicates that individuals experiencing multiple victimizations are the ones who manifest more extreme traumatic responses (e.g., Finkelhor et al., 2007b). Our study calls attention to the need for research on behavioral outcomes associated with multiple victimization by parental figures. As revealed in our findings, experiencing multiple types of abuse (e.g., emotional and physical abuse by parental figures; CSA by individuals not in a parental role), even if committed by different people (e.g., parental figures vs. others), has an influence on children's behavior.

We hypothesized that non-CSA abuse by a parental figure would uniquely predict longer delays in disclosure to authorities of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure, and this hypothesis was supported with regard to parental-figure multiple victimization. A possible explanation, suggested by theory albeit still speculative, is that violations of parental-figure trust and disruptions of the attachment relationship underlie these effects (Stronach et al., 2011; Toth et al., 2000). Maltreated children are more likely to be insecurely attached, which is associated with difficulty trusting parental figures to provide safe environments when distressed (Shields et al., 2001; Stronach et al., 2011; Toth et al., 2000). When children expect parental figures to react unsupportively (e.g., blame the child victims, physically punish them), children are less likely to disclose (Lawson & Chaffin, 1992). Participants in the present study all eventually disclosed, but those who self-reported experiencing multiple types of maltreatment by a parental figure did so after longer delays.

In regression analyses, victim age was not a significant predictor of delay in disclosure. Given that in the full sample regression, victim age closely approached statistical significance, $p = .06$, with greater statistical power this factor may have become significant. In our corroborated subsample, victim age did emerge as a significant unique predictor, but the overall model was not significant, again likely due to lowered statistical power. We did not find a significant gender effect, perhaps because of reliance on a prosecution sample. Males in our study had disclosed the CSA to authorities, which is not characteristic of male CSA victims in general.

Intrafamilial victim-CSA perpetrator relationship (intrafamilial CSA as defined here excluded CSA by parental-figure perpetrators) predicted greater delay in disclosure. Much of the research investigating the influence of intrafamilial abuse on disclosure focuses on abuse where a biological parent is the perpetrator and finds that disclosure is more delayed in these cases. Of

importance, our findings suggest that intrafamilial CSA, even when not perpetrated by a parental figure, has a similar relation to delay in disclosure as CSA perpetrated by parents. These results suggest that the mechanisms thought to influence disclosure in CSA cases with parent-abusers (for example, emotional conflict about betraying the perpetrator or disrupting the family) may also influence disclosure when other relatives and parental partners are the CSA perpetrators.

Abuse duration was also a significant unique predictor of delayed disclosure and was not significantly correlated with victim-CSA perpetrator relationship type. Several mechanisms may underlie this finding. Although prior studies reveal that victims of intrafamilial CSA, as traditionally defined, tend to be abused for longer durations than victims of extrafamilial CSA (e.g., Mian et al., 1996; Stern et al., 1995), our results suggest that abuse duration can at times be significantly related to disclosure delays independent of the victim-perpetrator relationship.

Victims' feeling complicit was not a significant unique predictor of delays in CSA disclosure in our sample. Relatively few participants (19%) were rated as feeling any responsibility for the CSA. A non-prosecution sample may reveal a significant association between feelings of complicity and delay in disclosure where we did not find significant results.

The present study evaluated disclosure in relation to parental-figure emotional abuse, which has been viewed at times in the past as less damaging than other forms of childhood maltreatment (e.g., sexual and physical abuse) (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004). In fact, earlier versions of the Diagnostic Statistics Manual criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder failed to include as a traumatic event exposure to emotional abuse incidents that did not involve injury or physical threat (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). By showing that emotional abuse by a parental figure, in conjunction with physical abuse but not physical abuse alone,

related to CSA disclosure delay, this research adds to our understanding of potential consequences of emotional abuse (Binggeli, Hart, & Brassard, 2001; Hart & Brassard, 1987).

This research is also important to those working directly with child abuse victims. By considering the relationship between children and their parental figures, child welfare professionals can better respond to individual differences in CSA disclosure and aim to improve rates of disclosure over time, lessening traumatic effects for victims. In cases where the parental figures are not the alleged CSA offender, child protective services caseworkers are typically instructed to interview the family as a whole and develop a safety plan and assessment with the non-offending parental figure and victim both present (DePanfilis & Salus, 2003). This may be inadvisable if co-occurring maltreatment by a parental figure is indicated. For example, if children expect negative reactions to disclosure, they may be more likely to waiver or recant in the presence of their parents or parental figures (Elliott & Briere, 1994; Malloy et al., 2007). Considering other maltreatment the child may be experiencing can alleviate some of these issues.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this pilot study provides new insight into predictors of delay in CSA disclosure, the findings should be considered tentative rather than definitive. That said, the findings call for additional research. The bulk of research on familial support uses external assessment of post-disclosure evaluated support rather than the child victims' reported expectations or feelings of support. Given the significant relations in the present study between the victims' reports of emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure and their delay in disclosure of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure, future work should seek to better understand child victims' expectations of support as a potential factor driving their decisions to disclose.

Additionally, it is important to identify factors that mitigate the pressures on children to remain silent and that may encourage disclosure to a trusted source.

We defined child physical abuse as inclusive of severe forms of physical abuse as well as some forms of physical punishment (spanking was not included in our definition). Research is needed on corporal punishment independent of other child physical abuse (Gershoff, 2013). This is a particularly important area of research as evidence suggests corporal punishment is often accompanied by contemporaneous emotional abuse (Claussen & Crittenden, 1991; Simons, Johnson, & Conger, 1994; Taillieu & Brownridge, 2013), and corporal punishment can be considered as along a continuum of both physical and emotional abuse in terms of the effects on children (Goodman, 2015). Given our broad definitions, significant effects of emotional and physical abuse alone may have been masked. Future work should align the definitions of emotional and physical abuse and obtain more detailed information about severity, duration, and frequency of the emotional and physical abuse perpetrated by the CSA victims' parents and other parental figures separately.

We were not fully able to disaggregate whether parental figures were emotionally or physically abusive before their child disclosed CSA, only after their child disclosed CSA, or continuously (before and after CSA disclosure). We relied on retrospective self-reports to measure emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure due to limitations at Wave 1 in obtaining child self-report data of abuse by a parental figure during prosecution of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure. As with any retrospective reporting, concerns regarding both false negative and false positive reports may exist. Given that parental-figure abuse was assessed at Wave 2, we were unable to include a concurrent report of abuse by a parent or other parental figure. Although there are logistical complications with assessing

abuse by a parental figure after a formal report of CSA perpetrated by someone other than that parental figure, future research is critical to determine whether an environment of abuse by a parental figure is a factor influencing delayed CSA disclosure or whether parental-figure abuse only influences disclosure if closely tied to the disclosure process. Given these data were collected during a peak of new awareness surrounding CSA, we were able to obtain important pilot findings regarding the complexity of the CSA disclosure process. However, the age of the data calls for a more current and directed investigation of CSA disclosure and the association between emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure.

Our study is correlational in nature; therefore, we cannot identify causal factors. A longitudinal study that covers the disclosure process itself would be particularly informative. Furthermore, findings from a non-prosecution sample may differ. The majority of our sample disclosed within a relatively short period of time, and the disclosure resulted in a formal complaint. Children who have not yet disclosed may be influenced more by feeling responsible for the abuse than those children who were included in our sample. Additionally, it is possible that delay to an informal complaint without a subsequent formal report to authorities may be influenced by different factors than delay to authorities. Finally, a relatively small sample size likely limited the statistical power of our analyses.

Conclusions

Multiple forms of victimization by a parental figure uniquely predicted longer delays in disclosure to authorities of CSA perpetrated by someone other than a parental figure. Children's expectations of negative parental-figure reactions to disclosure may underlie these observed effects. Maltreated children who have been in homes where inconsistent and hostile parenting is the norm may assume negative reactions when they need their parental figures the most. These

cases may warrant special considerations to bolster support after CSA disclosure given the children's adverse home environments and the longer delay in the children receiving formal intervention.

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Table 1

Bivariate Correlations for Variables of Interest

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Victim age	—										
2. Victim gender	-.23*	—									
3. Victim ethnicity	.29**	-.27*	—								
4. Victim SES	-.08	.44***	-.23*	—							
5. Relationship type ^a	-.13	.05	-.07	.03	—						
6. CSA abuse duration	-.02	.06	.24*	-.17	.22	—					
7. Feelings of complicity	.19	-.13	.21	-.11	.16	.40***	—				
8. Emotional abuse by parental figure	.30**	-.18	.23*	-.03	.11	.002	.05	—			
9. Physical abuse by parental figure	.09	.21	.15*	.27*	.16	.13	.14	.31**	—		
10. Delay in disclosure to anyone	.27*	-.12	.26*	-.05	.36**	.45***	.19	.24*	.23	—	
11. Delay in disclosure to authorities	.25*	-.21	.29*	-.03	.43***	.38**	.25*	.31**	.33**	.93***	—

Note. $N = 79$.

^a0 = extrafamilial, 1 = intrafamilial

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Linear Regression Predicting Delays in CSA Disclosure for Children Experiencing Emotional and/or Physical Abuse by a Parental Figure

Factors	<u>Model 1</u>			<u>Model 2</u>			<u>Model 3</u>			<u>Model 4</u>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Demographic												
Victim age	.09	.05	.21 ⁺	.12	.04	.26**	.12	.04	.27**	.08	.04	.19*
Victim gender	-.55	.38	-.16	-.64	.31	-.19*	-.65	.32	-.19*	-.72	.30	-.21*
Abuse-related												
Relationship type				1.23	.29	.40***	1.23	.29	.40***	1.08	.28	.35***
CSA abuse duration				.57	.17	.31**	.58	.18	.32**	.56	.18	.31**
Psychological												
Feelings of complicity							-.04	.35	-.01	-.08	.33	-.02
Parent-child relationship												
Number of parental- figure abuse types ^a										.48	.17	.27**
<i>R</i> ²	.09			.40			.40			.46		
<i>F</i>	3.71*			12.21***			9.64***			10.29***		
ΔR^2	.09*			.31***			.00			.06**		

Note. *N* = 79.

^a 0 = neither emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure, 1 = either emotional or physical abuse by a parental figure, 2 = both emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure

⁺ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$