

JOANNA DWORAKOWSKA

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD IN THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS' VIEWS COMMENTARY TO THE STUDIES

**A b s t r a c t.** For the full and harmonious development of their personality children should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. In many families, children are not provided with fundamental rights and fulfillment of their needs: safety, love, acceptance, and respect. Their sense of dignity collapses, they are prohibited from revealing emotions and thoughts. All this triggers a sense of shame, anger and fear, which are often passed on to the child's functioning in different environments. The phenomenon of violence against children in the family – care deprivation, negligence of their emotionality as well as of bringing up, physical and mental harm, beatings, abuse, and sexual abuse are not uncommon. The issue of various types of child abuse, its recognition, intervention as well as prevention, and helping those children is a concern and a great challenge not only for teachers, educators, psychologists, therapists, but for the whole society, too.

In the first part of the considerations theoretical framework for difficult issues posed by sexual violence against children has been presented. An attempt at defining the problem has been presented: a form of sexual abuse, signals that may indicate that the child was the object of sexual violence and direct and long-term consequences of sexual violence against a child. In the second part, in a form of commentary the results of the author's own research regarding the various categories of respondents, who are employees of the social services on sexual violence against a child have been thoroughly analyzed.

**Key words:** child; sexual violence; forms; causes; effects; commentaries.

### INTRODUCTION

Among various forms of harming a child sexual abuse is the most cruel one. It is one of the events that are difficult to resign oneself to or to understand. Anna C. Salter,<sup>1</sup> a highly regarded specialist in the field of

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Joanna Dworakowska, MA – doctoral student, the Institute of Pedagogy, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: [asiadworakowska@o2.pl](mailto:asiadworakowska@o2.pl)

<sup>1</sup> See Anna C. Salter, *Drapieżcy. Pedofile, gwałciciele i inni przestępcy seksualni. Kim są, jak działają i jak możemy chronić siebie i nasze dzieci*, translated by Andrzej Jankowski (Poznań:

sexual abuse, directly expresses her opinion that among all forms of harming, this one seems to be really a work of Satan.

In a situation when a child suffers this kind of emotional harm from a loved one who, in principle, should secure his safety, love and respect, the trauma is the deeper. Since any sexual activity towards a child destroys the normative order both in the scope of the obliging laws, and social and moral norms, protecting children from sexual abuse has become a priority. At the same time the tendency is clearly seen to perceive the fact of sexual abuse of a child, especially in the family, as a social problem that is only concerned with deeply pathological circles.

The aim of the present discussion is to present the results of the research on the opinions of social services workers, people who are responsible for offering aid, including aid to sexually abused children. However, this requires previously sketching the theoretical background of the issue in the aspect of the operationalization of the concept of sexual violence, presenting its forms and signals showing that the child might have been abused and in consequence it might have been a case of sexual violence.

#### 1. DEFINITIONS REFERRING TO THE ISSUE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD

In theoretical and empirical studies concerning the issue of sexual violence against a child frequently lack of clearly defined standards referring to this problem is emphasized. According to Monika Sajkowska<sup>2</sup> the troubles with the terms result from the differences in the definition borders of the phenomenon, depending on whether it is analyzed from the point of view of social norms or of legal ones.

Taking into consideration the perspective from which this form of abuse is perceived the existing definitions of sexual violence may be most generally divided into: clinical, legal and social.<sup>3</sup> The definitions are designed for different needs then, and they are formulated according to these needs.

In the literature concerning the problem, beside the term "sexual violence" there are other ones, like "sexual harassment," "sexual exploitation,"

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Media Rodzina, 2005), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Monika Sajkowska, "Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci," *Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, Badania, Praktyka* 10 (2011), 36 (3): 147.

<sup>3</sup> See Maria Beisert, Agnieszka Izdebska, "Wykorzystanie seksualne dzieci," *Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, Badania, Praktyka* 11(2012), 39 (2): 49.

“sexual molesting.” The term “child sexual abuse” is often used when the object of interest is a child as a victim of sexual violence, and “child molesting” or “pedophilia” in the study of the perpetrators.<sup>4</sup>

A clinical approach to the problem aiming first of all at an accurate diagnosis is presented in the definition accepted by the World Health Organization. The authors of the definition suggest accepting the term “sexual violence” and they state that it is: “Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.”<sup>5</sup>

The definition presents a broad perspective of the approach to the problem, but the term “sexual violence” itself may suggest that sexual abuse of a child happens only in the situations when physical aggression is used. It should be remembered that this form of violence does not only consist in acts on the part of an adult person that are concluded with a sexual intercourse. Also exhibitionist behaviors, seducing, conscious making a child a witness of sexual intercourses, peeping during the bath, encouraging a child to watch pornography, or punishing in a way that is associated with sexual deviations are in its scope.<sup>6</sup> The forms of sexual violence that children may experience will be presented in the further part of the present discussion, but it should be stressed that the use of physical strength by the perpetrator is not the basic component of sexual violence. Its essence is usually the use of somebody’s dependence, including, or perhaps first of all, emotional dependence.

Generally speaking, it should be accepted that a child who is sexually harmed is any individual at the age of absolute protection (in Poland the law defines this as 15 years of age), who an older, sexually mature person exposes

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<sup>4</sup> See Paris Goodyear-Brown, *Handbook of Child Sexual Abuse: Identification, Assessment, and Treatment* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 11.

<sup>5</sup> After: Monika Sajkowska, “Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci. Ustalenia terminologiczne, skala zjawiska, oblicza problemu społecznego,” *Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, Badania, Praktyka* 1 (2002), 1: 7.

<sup>6</sup> See Mirosława Kątna, “Dziecko krzywdzone – ofiara przemocy w rodzinie,” in Krzysztof Pikor, Wiesława Walc (ed.), *Przemoc wobec dzieci. Wybrane zagadnienia teoretyczne i praktyczne* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2002), 16; Józefa Brągiel, *Zrozumieć dziecko skrzywdzone* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1996), 99-100.

to any sexual activity whose intention is satisfying sexually the adult person.<sup>7</sup> It is accepted then, that a juvenile is not able to make a legally valid decision about giving consent to engaging in definite sexual activities, as they do not properly recognize all the realities. Anyone who engages in these activities with such a person, in this way violates the person's freedom, not in the scope of infringing his very will (a juvenile may give consent to these activities, or even inspire them), but because the victim of such an activity is not able to give legally valid consent about allowing these activities.<sup>8</sup> So the aspect of giving consent by a juvenile is not a factor implying the judgment of the perpetrator's act either in the legal sphere, or in the ethical or moral one.

Krystyna Marzec-Holka's definition of sexual violence seems accurate in this context; it defines sexual violence as: [...] involving a dependent, developmentally immature and unable to give full consent, child or adolescent in a sexual activity to which such persons are not prepared, in an activity that violates a social taboo or the rules of family life."<sup>9</sup> Similarly Krystyna Dymek-Balcerek states that: "Sexual violence occurs when there is no consent to the gender, to the partner, to what he or she does with us, and we with him or her. Such a forced sexual act is always an offence, irrespective of the victim's age. Until a child is 15 he or she is not able to give consent to an intercourse and in such a case we will always talk about violence. Also abusing a child up to 18 years of age when the perpetrator is a person close to the victim, e.g. a relative, a teacher and so on, is violence."<sup>10</sup> In the context of sexual exploitation a child is generally defined then by referring to the legal criteria (the age of absolute protection). At the same time the quoted definitions in a particular way stress the demand of safety and protecting children from this type of practices, and the adults' responsibility in this sphere.

## 2. THE FORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND SIGNALS THAT MAY INDICATE SEXUAL ABUSE OF THE CHILD

The forms of sexual abuse of a child are often very difficult to classify, because basically they include all the possible sexual activities. According to

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<sup>7</sup> See Izabela Kałka, *Dzieci krzywdzone i wykorzystywane seksualnie: dla rodziców. Poradnik dla rodziców i opiekunów* (Sosnowiec: Projekt-Kom, 2007), 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> See Sajkowska, *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Krystyna Marzec-Holka, *Nie będziesz bił dziecka swego! Studium z zakresu profilaktyki społecznej* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1996), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Krystyna Dymek-Balcerek, *Dziecko w obliczu patologii społecznej dnia codziennego – rzeczywistość lat dziewięćdziesiątych* (Radom: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Radomskiej, 1998), 127.

Krystyna Baranowicz<sup>11</sup> the concept includes both aggressive sexual acts (rapes) and cases of involving a child in conversations with sexual contents, of exposing one's private parts and of sexual activities, or touching the private parts. The author also mentions a dangerous form of sexual exploitation that is dangerous for the development of the child, that is child prostitution and children taking part in pornographic films.

Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz<sup>12</sup> after Kathleen Faller distinguishes seven types of sexual violence against children: 1) without physical contact (conversations with sexual contents directed to a child, exposing one's anatomy and sexual activities, voyeurism); 2) sexual contacts consisting in stimulating a private part; 3) oral-genital contacts; 4) intercrural intercourses; 5) sexual penetrations; 6) sexual exploitation of children – child pornography and prostitution; 7) harming children sexually, combined with various forms of physical violence.

Andres Soriano,<sup>13</sup> taking into consideration in his classification the degree of brutality of behaviors and the relation between the perpetrator and the child, distinguishes four types of sexual exploitation: “incest – a physical sexual contact or a sexual intercourse with a child realized by one of the family members, a guardian or a close person with whom the child lives; rape – a sexual activity with a juvenile in the family context or outside it; sexual molestation – a sexual relation consisting in touching the child's erogenous zones or forcing the child to do the same with the molesting person; sexual exploitation without physical contact – the maltreating person receives sexual pleasure by seducing, making verbal commentaries, showing his sexual organs to the child, or by realization of a sexual intercourse or masturbation in the presence of the child.”

According to Stanisława Tucholska<sup>14</sup>, among the forms of sexual exploitation of a child a sexual intercourse undoubtedly belongs to extreme behaviors, but data from epidemiologic studies show that it is one of the most frequent forms of sexual exploitation of a child.

Sexual violence against a child is additionally characterized by certain relatively stable features to which it is worth paying attention, at the same

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<sup>11</sup> See Krystyna Baranowicz, “Seksualne krzywdzenie dziecka,” *Edukacja* 1998, nr 2, 68.

<sup>12</sup> See Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, *Przemoc seksualna* (Warszawa: Agencja Wydawnicza Jacek Santorski, 1992), 44.

<sup>13</sup> See Andres Soriano, *Przemoc wobec dzieci*, translated by Piotr Rak (Kraków: „eSPe”, 2002), 55.

<sup>14</sup> See Stanisława Tucholska, “Charakterystyka sprawców przemocy domowej,” *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze* 2002, nr 1, 35.

time refraining from generalizations. Irena Pospiszyl<sup>15</sup> points to determinants that do not exhaust the catalogue of circumstances in which sexual exploitation may occur, but she mentions factors that indicate that the probability of it clearly increases. As the author states: children are most often abused by acquaintances (uncles, cousins, the family's friends, fathers of fathers-in-law); the younger the child is, the greater probability that someone in the closest environment will be the perpetrator; the closer family ties there are between the perpetrator and the child, the greater probability that the abuse will be repeated many times, and the child will try to keep it secret; children are most often abused by means of seduction, blackmail, bribery, and not by means of rape; girls are abused twice more often than boys; boys are abused more often by men; the age of the highest risk in the case of girls is 10-15, and in the case of boys 3-12.

In the context of the presented catalogue of circumstances increasing the probability of the occurrence of sexual violence against children Anna C. Salter's statement seems adequate: "Sexual offenders very rarely sneak into the home in the middle of the night. More often they enter the front door [...] We allow them to, because we do not recognize predators in those people, as we think that sexual offenders are monsters, and we would surely recognize a monster, wouldn't we?"<sup>16</sup> In connection with the growing variety of sexual behaviors towards children a debate is going on among experts. The question is whether we are dealing with a really growing wave of sexual violence, or if just more activities that have been concealed up for various reasons till now – are revealed. The reasons for the "silence" are usually numerous, and they may include: the child's sense of guilt, especially when he or she was threatened by the perpetrator, or felt some kind of pleasure as a result of the contact; feeling ashamed, feeling sinful, feeling unchaste because of violating the sphere of intimacy; fear of losing his or her close ones, especially if a person belonging to the family is the perpetrator; lack of knowledge about the possibilities of receiving aid and about people to whom the child may turn, helplessness, not believing that someone can help.<sup>17</sup> Sex therapists estimate that only one in one hundred, or even fewer cases of sexual abuse of a child are revealed.

The uncovering of the fact of sexual exploitation is the more difficult because often the victim and the perpetrator are the only people who have full

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<sup>15</sup> See Irena Pospiszyl, *Patologie społeczne* (Warszawa: PWN, 2008), 254.

<sup>16</sup> Salter, *Drapieżcy. Pedofile, gwałciciele i inni przestępcy seksualni*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> See Pospiszyl, *Patologie społeczne*, 521.

knowledge about the situation. Such a concealed character of the situation is the cause why a person who suspects that the child was sexually abused has to be well informed about the symptoms that may speak for such a diagnosis.<sup>18</sup>

Most generally speaking the symptoms indicating that a child is a victim of sexual violence may be divided into somatic, behavioral and psychological. The somatic symptoms most often have an indirect character, and they include: pregnancy; venereal diseases; infections of the urogenital system; injuries of the anus; injuries of the vagina; vaginal bleeding; pain while defecating or urinating; blood in stool; infections of the oral cavity. Exclusively somatic symptoms suggest that sexual exploitation might have happened. The very symptoms have a little diagnostic value, and only combined with the recognized psychological and behavioral symptoms they are an important element of the diagnosis.<sup>19</sup> Excessive, inadequate to the age erotization of the child; a strong sense of guilt, a sense of being bad or worse; disturbances of the behavior – should be treated as signs of psychological nature.<sup>20</sup>

According to Maria Beisert,<sup>21</sup> the adequacy of symptoms to the child's age as well as combining symptoms that come from different subgroups of somatic, psychological and behavioral disturbances is a good indication that increases the probability of abuse. The knowledge of symptoms, a penetrating observation of the child's behavior, listening to what he or she says, facilitates the recognition of the fact that sexual violence occurred.

### 3. INDIRECT AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN ONE'S CHILDHOOD

Undoubtedly if a child experiences sexual violence it is one of the most traumatic events, especially if this harm comes from the closest person, that is from a parent. The results are definitely more acute in situations when: the child was abused many times; a person who the child knows was the

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<sup>18</sup> See Wiesław Czernikiewicz, Beata Pawlak- Jordan, *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci* (Warszawa: Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 1998), 25.

<sup>19</sup> See Sylwia Kluczyńska, *Przemoc seksualna wobec dzieci*, [www.zlydotyk.pl](http://www.zlydotyk.pl) [accessed: 10.09.15].

<sup>20</sup> See Judith L. Herman, *Przemoc – uraz psychiczny i powrót do równowagi* (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 1999), 132-133.

<sup>21</sup> See Maria Beisert, "Wykorzystanie seksualne – warunki powstania traumy," *Seksuologia Polska* 1 (2003), nr 2, 87.

perpetrator; the child does not have support from the family and does not get any care or interest; the abuse resulted in an injury; the perpetrator was unusually cynical, cruel and he used the forms of violence that are most traumatic for the child, and when the child was suspected of consciously co-participating in the event; or the child was questioned many times and did not receive any therapeutic aid soon after the event.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly Agnieszka Widera-Wysoczańska<sup>23</sup> on the basis of her own clinical experiments states that the most severe effects of sexual violence occur when: violence is experienced before the age of 12; it lasts for a long time; it is combined with physical contact, caresses or penetration of the body; the child is rewarded and forced to take sexual activities on his or her own initiative; it is combined with fear of aggression; after revealing sexual abuse the child does not get proper aid from the parents; it is accused by the closest ones.

Angela Browne and David Finkelhor<sup>24</sup> emphasize that a child who is sexually abused may experience four kinds of trauma: traumagenic sexualization, betrayal of the child's trust, stigmatization occurring together with an accusation, and helplessness. The authors assume that the consequences of sexual violence are a derivative of the question whether the child experienced all the kinds of trauma, and of the question of the length of time they lasted. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz,<sup>25</sup> in turn, among the direct consequences of sexual violence distinguishes: behavioral symptoms (such as hyperactivity or aggressiveness, and the opposite ones, manifested in regressive behaviors or psychosomatic disorders); emotional disorders (anxiety, depressions, self-destruction); cognitive disorders (disturbances in thinking, difficulties at school); interpersonal disorders (conflicts, family problems, collapse of authorities).

Maria Beisert<sup>26</sup> remarks that the circumstance resulting in the most serious effects is the fact that the father or a person fulfilling the function of the father, e.g. father-in-law, is the perpetrator. From a review of the studies conducted by the author it follows that long-term consequences of incest first of all affected the victims of biological fathers. Among the 365 adults who saw the doctor in order to get aid in coping with long-term effects of

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<sup>22</sup> See Czernikiewicz, Pawlak-Jordan, *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> See Agnieszka Widera-Wysoczańska, "Ten straszny bliski," *Charaktery* 3 (1998): 17.

<sup>24</sup> See Angela Browne, David Finkelhor, "Impact of child sexual abuse: A review of the literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 99 (1986), 1: 67.

<sup>25</sup> See Lew-Starowicz, *Przemoc seksualna*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> See Beisert, *Wykorzystanie seksualne*, 87.



incestuous relations 36% were victims of the biological father, 20% of the father-in-law and 3% of the mother. This stresses the significance of the father's perpetration, and at the same time it points to the fact that what deepens the trauma is a closest person's perpetration. In the author's opinion the close relation between the perpetrator and the victim changes the situation of the latter, because he or she has to look for support in a different group, not in the family. Moreover, the victim is dependent on the perpetrator in such a situation and because they live together he or she has to spend most time with him.<sup>27</sup>

In such situations the attitude mothers assume is particularly significant. Mothers of sexually abused children are often characterized as passive, dependent, immature, inhibited, unable to protect their own children. There are proofs that in many situations mothers do know about the harm that their children suffer and they do not react to it (the so-called silent mothers).<sup>28</sup>

The results of Diana E. H. Russel's research quoted by Maria Beisert<sup>29</sup> show that the following factors cause an increase in the traumatic effects of incestuous relations: the type of sexual activity of the father and the daughter; frequency of the contacts; the use of physical force; the type of dependence between the victim and the perpetrator (the child is usually supported by the father); the age difference.

Children who experience sexual violence live in the hope that when they grow up they will be able to escape and become free. However, their personality that was formed in the conditions of being controlled through compulsion is not well adjusted to adult life. The victim stays with her fundamental problems concerning basic trust, autonomy and taking the initiative. She faces the task every young adult faces – that of achieving independence and establishing an intimate relation – burdened with serious deficits in the sphere of taking care of herself, of perception and memory, of her identity and the ability to establish stable relationships. She remains a prisoner of her own childhood; and trying to start a new life she suffers further traumas.<sup>30</sup>

Collins's studies prove that 77% victims who suffered sexual violence when they were children have problems starting a family, 49% abuse physical force, 28% require constant care of a psychologist, and 9% become

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Baranowicz, *Seksualne krzywdzenie dziecka*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> See Maria Beisert, *Kazirodztwo. Rodzice w roli sprawców* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, 2004), 95.

<sup>30</sup> See Herman, *Przemoc*, 120-121.

homeless or they are social misfits. What is more, we see a peculiar sexual “imprint” here, namely, as many as 58% women who were molested when they were children, engage in prostitution when they are mature, and 53% exploited boys in their adult life show pedophile inclinations. Also, men who were sexually exploited by their mothers, after becoming mature are not able to free themselves from psychological dependence. Most of them are still involved with their mothers who molested them. Victims assume a passive attitude, they are to a greater degree predisposed to the struggle to survive than to the struggle to satisfy their own needs. They often choose social alienation, often combined with escape into addictions.<sup>31</sup> The trauma connected with the experience of sexual violence in the childhood causes acute consequences not only for the victim, but for the society the victim lives in as well.

#### 4. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF STUDIES CONCERNING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD IN THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS’ VIEWS

The presented theoretical outline makes one propose a thesis that sexual exploitation is the most painful, severe in its effects, form of violence that may happen to a child. According to Krystyna Marzec-Holka<sup>32</sup> the problem of sexual exploitation of a child was dramatically revealed in Poland only after 1989, and one of the basic causes why it had been passed in silence earlier was the tendency to create social problems by the previous political system. As a result of the systemic transformation the problem that was first revealed by NGO’s was the protection of children from various kinds of pathologies. Undoubtedly it is due to liberalization of social life in Poland that the subject of violence in the family (also of sexual violence) is more often, and first of all more openly talked about. As Ewa Markowska-Gos writes: “[...] the mentality of some social circles is transformed, the stereotype that had functioned in the society up till now, one that said violence is a problem of a particular person (i.e. of the victim), or of two people

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<sup>31</sup> See Grażyna Jarzabek, Anna Grętkiewicz-Tomczyk, “Problem przemocy seksualnej wobec dzieci,” *Ginekologia Praktyczna* 15 (2007), nr 2: 33.

<sup>32</sup> See Krystyna Marzec-Holka, *Przemoc seksualna wobec dziecka. Studium pedagogiczno-kryminologiczne* (Kraków: Impuls, 2011), 9-10.

(i.e. of the aggressor and the victim) is being broken, and it is valid and necessary to perceive this phenomenon as a social problem”<sup>33</sup>.

The aim of the present study is to find an answer to the questions: What are social services workers' views of the question of sexual violence against a child? What social-demographic features of the respondents make these views different? A detailed scheme of the explication of the study problem was concerned with the following questions: What forms of sexual violence, according to the respondents, most often happen to a child? What factors do social services workers see as the causes of sexual violence against a child? How do social services workers evaluate the effects of this violence? In what situations, in the workers' opinion, does a child experience the worst trauma? Do the selected social-demographic variables (gender, place of residence, age, religious denomination) differentiate the respondents' opinions in the mentioned spheres? Also the respondents were asked to declare if when practicing their profession they had encountered the problem of sexual violence against a child and who, according to their knowledge of the fact, was the perpetrator of the particular form of violence.

The assumption was made that social services workers' opinions on sexual violence against a child will be different because of the independent variables taken into consideration, with the respondents' socio-demographic features such as age and place of residence being the most significant. The place of residence is connected with definite cultural influences that determine the character of a man's social attitudes. The attitudes are consolidated by mechanisms of informal social control that in small communities still remains very strong. The age, on the other hand, to a significant degree determines the perception of the reality that surrounds a man. Hence it was assumed that these two features will basically differentiate the respondents' views.

The study was conducted in September 2015 in Rzeszów. The diagnostic survey method was applied. A group of 124 social services workers employed by the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Rzeszów were the respondents in the study. In the survey study both social workers doing their work in the environment of the supported people and administration employees took part.

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<sup>33</sup> Ewa Markowska-Gos, “Realizacja praw dziecka we współczesnej rodzinie – wybrane aspekty socjologiczno-prawne (komunikat z badań),” in: Izabela Marczykowska, Ewa Markowska-Gos, Adam Solak, Wiesław Walc, *Prawa dziecka. Wybrane aspekty* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2006), 172.

In the group of the respondents there were more women (62.9%) than men (37.1%). The greatest percentage of the respondents were inhabitants of big cities where more than one hundred thousand people lived, 37.9% inhabited villages, and 10.5% respondents were inhabitants of small towns. As far as the category of age is concerned the greatest percentage of the social workers were young people, up to 30 years of age (45.9%), 30.6% – people between 31 and 40, 16.1% respondents were over 50 years of age. The smallest category was made up by people between 41 and 50 (7.3%). Among the respondents 50.8% were believers and involved in religious practices, 35.5% declared that they believed in God, but they did not practice their religion, and 13.7% were non-believers.

#### 5. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD IN THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS' VIEWS – THE RESULTS OF THE AUTHOR'S OWN STUDIES

9.7% respondents said that in their work they encountered the problem of sexual violence against a child. According to the subjects' knowledge in 66.7% cases a child experienced sexual violence in his or her family environment, but the perpetrators were people from the distant family, related to the child. No respondent indicated a parent as the perpetrator of this kind of violence. In the remaining cases social services workers pointed to perpetration by a guardian or a carer (25%), and one case concerned sexual violence committed by the child's peer.

Analyzing the social services workers' opinions on the forms of sexual violence against a child that occur most often the author found that in their opinions the most frequent form are acts without physical contact, e.g. peeping during the bath, miction or defecation; conversations with sexual contents; showing pornographic photographs. This form of sexual violence as the most often occurring one was indicated by 59.7% respondents. Next, attempts at forcing the child to have an intercourse (23.4%) and contacts consisting in stimulating private parts, that is touching the child's body, rubbing and kissing private parts (11.3%) were mentioned. Most rarely acts with the features of rape, that is forcing the child to take sexual activities were indicated (5.6%). It should be noted that this form of violence was indicated by those social workers who in their work encountered the problem of sexual violence against a child.

Analysis of the study results indicates the existence of statistically significant relation between independent variables taken into consideration and the respondents' opinions on the most frequent forms of sexual violence. As far as gender is concerned the differences were rather quantitative than qualitative.

Considering the place of residence we find an average strength relationship; however, some interesting tendencies may be noticed here. All the respondents inhabiting small towns, between 20 and 100 thousand inhabitants, stated that most often sexual violence had the form of sexual acts without a physical contact. In the case of inhabitants of villages it was the form of attempts of forcing children to engage in sexual contacts; this was the answer given by 57% respondents in this group, while among people living in big towns this was the form of sexual violence that was mentioned most rarely (3.1% indications). Respondents in this category mostly stated that the most frequently encountered form of sexual violence were acts without physical contact (76.6%).

In the case of the age that differentiated the respondents' opinions (an average strength relationship) it should be remarked that the subjects mostly indicated acts without physical contact. It was so in the case of social workers up to 30 (85.9%), from 31 to 40 (42.1%) and from 41 to 50 years of age (44.4%). Subjects older than 50 in 55% cases indicated attempts to force engaging in a sexual intercourse.

When analyzing the dependence between the declaration made by social workers concerning their religiousness and their opinions on the most frequently encountered forms of sexual violence it should be noted that the form most often mentioned by practicing believers (68.3%) and non-practicing believers (56.8%) were acts without physical contact. In the case of social workers who declared that they were non-believers the same percentage (35.3%) of them indicated acts with the features of rape, that is forcing the child to sexual activities.

Analysis of the results of the studies has allowed the author to establish that the respondents perceived the causes of sexual violence in the perpetrator's disturbances (resulting, e.g. from their own experience of sexual violence when they were children, from a high level of aggression, from attempts to compensate their own harm etc.). Such an answer was given by 66.9% of the whole sample. As the next ones the causes were chosen that had their source in pathologization of the family environment (poverty, addictions, violence). These factors were indicated by 16.9% respondents, and 16.1% social workers mentioned situational causes.

The gender of the respondents did not differentiate their opinions in a statistically significant degree. It may be remarked that men much more rarely than women looked for the causes of sexual violence against a child in the pathology of the family environment (21.8% women and only 8.7% men indicated it). However, both women (66.7%) and men (67.4%) saw the etiology of sexual violence against a child first of all in the perpetrator's disturbances. Like in the case of gender, statistical analysis of the relationship between social workers' religious declaration and their opinion on the causes of the phenomenon showed that there was no such relationship, and the tendencies did not differ from the ones generally seen in the study results.

With respect to the place of residence, statistical analysis showed a significant relationship. It may be noted that opinions given by inhabitants of villages and of big towns were similar and they corresponded to the general tendency revealed in the presented studies. The difference was concerned here with the inhabitants of small towns who indicated mostly situational causes. Similarly in the case of the age the difference concerned the choices made by respondents who were 50 years of age or older; the highest percentage of them (55%) mentioned situational causes (at the same time it was the most rarely indicated group of responses from the subjects in other categories).

Analysis of social services workers' opinions on the effects of sexual violence against a child proves that when evaluating the effects the subjects most often indicated those of psychological nature (depressions, neuroses, suicidal attempts). 47.6% respondents recognized them as the most severe ones. Then consequences effecting future troubles in the functioning in social life (37.1%) were mentioned. Physical effects (injuries) were pointed to by 15.3% subjects.

Gender did not differentiate the respondents' opinions in this sphere; also tendencies differing from those generally encountered ones were not noticed. Statistical analysis of the place of residence and the respondents' opinions on the effects of sexual violence against a child showed a statistically significant relationship with an average strength. It seems interesting that respondents living in villages ascribed the greatest significance to physical effects (36.2%), while no social workers coming from a big town indicated them. Both inhabitants of big towns (56.3%) and of small towns (69.2%) ascribed the greatest significance to psychological effects of sexual violence.

As far as the age of the respondents is concerned also a relationship was revealed with an average strength between the variables. It is worth noting

that older respondents ascribed a greater significance to long-term effects causing troubles in the child's later social functioning. It was, respectively: in the case of respondents from 31 to 40 years of age – 63.2%, from 41 to 50 – 44.4%, 50 and older – 55%. Social workers younger than 30 mostly (85.9%) indicated psychological consequences for the victim.

Considering the religious declarations made by the respondents, the existence of a statistically significant relationship with an average strength should be noted. In this case the difference was revealed in the tendency to ascribe a greater significance to social effects that was shown by non-practicing believers (47.7%) and non-believers (64.7%). The believing and practicing subjects (66.7%) indicated psychological consequences of sexual violence.

It is also worth noting that all the subjects properly recognized the situation in which a child experiences the greatest trauma. In this case it was indicated, with no exceptions, that a greater trauma for the victim is connected with situations when: the child is abused many times, when the child knows the perpetrator, the child does not have support from the family; the child was suspected of co-participating (giving consent), and when the child was questioned many times.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of analysis of the study results it may be stated that the subjects have knowledge of the issue of sexual violence against a child. They properly indicate situations that make the harm that was caused more severe. It may be supposed that when working with a family suffering from such a problem they will react to such situations and participate in minimizing the trauma experienced by the child who is a victim of sexual violence. Taking into consideration the fact that some of the subjects had encountered the discussed problem in their work, they know the situations and circumstances in which this kind of harm may happen.

The respondents' opinions about the most frequent forms of sexual violence indicate that most often acts without physical contact happen, but the subjects' opinions are different in different categories. Analysis of the results has allowed finding a statistically significant dependence between: the gender ( $\chi^2 = 11,8 > \chi^2_{0,05;3} = 7,8$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c = 0,3$ ); place of residence ( $\chi^2 = 60,4 > \chi^2_{0,05;6} = 9,5$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c = 0,5$ ); age ( $\chi^2 = 53,7 > \chi^2_{0,05;9} = 9,5$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c = 0,5$ );

religious declaration ( $x^2=36,1 > x^2_{0,05;6}=12,6$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,4$ ). The fact that most subjects living in the country indicated that attempts to force a child to engage in sexual contacts were the most frequently occurring forms of sexual violence seems an interesting tendency that has been observed; at the same time no respondents living in towns pointed to this response. Probably this results from the fact that life in bigger towns is connected with more anonymity. Family problems are usually reserved for the ones who are involved in them. A child's drama often happens behind the closed door to which no one has access; this especially concerns families that belong to the so-called "normal" ones, families that do not receive any social support and if there are no clear signs of their children's harm they remain unnoticed.

As far as opinions on the causes of sexual violence against children are concerned statistically significant dependences were not found between: gender ( $x^2=5,7 < x^2_{0,05;2}=5,9$ ;  $H_0=0$ ) and religious declaration ( $x^2=7,4 < x^2_{0,05;4}=9,5$ ;  $H_0=0$ ) on the one hand, and the respondents' opinions on these etiological factors on the other. A statistically significant dependence has been found between the place of residence ( $x^2=40,7 > x^2_{0,05;4}=9,5$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,4$ ) and the age of the subjects ( $x^2=36,3 > x^2_{0,05;6}=12,6$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,4$ ) on the one hand, and their opinions in this sphere. It seems important that the respondents do not reserve the problem of sexual violence for pathological families. The approach in which a greater significance is ascribed to the perpetrator's disturbances allows noticing, which was mentioned above, that the drama of the sexually abused child may also concern so-called "normal families".

In the case of the respondents' opinions on the effects of this form of harming a child no statistically significant relationship has been found between the gender of the subjects ( $x^2=5,7 < x^2_{0,05;2}=5,9$ ;  $H_0=0$ ) and their opinions in this sphere. However, there was a significant relationship between: the place of residence ( $x^2=31,1 > x^2_{0,05;4}=9,5$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,4$ ); age ( $x^2=64,8 > x^2_{0,05;6}=12,6$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,5$ ) and religious declaration ( $x^2=21,7 > x^2_{0,05;4}=9,5$ ;  $H_0 \neq 0$ ;  $r_c=0,3$ ) and social workers' opinion on the effects of sexually abusing a child. The tendency to ascribe this form of violence to social, long-term effects, which has been found in older respondents seems interesting. Older people are generally characterized by a more rational system of attitudes and evaluations as well as by a long-range perception of the reality.

Tentatively a hypothetic assumption has been made that chosen independent variables will differentiate the respondents' opinions on sexual violence against a child, with age and place of residence having a priority significance. Analysis of the study results indicates that in this case we cannot



talk about gradation of significance of the considered variables. Nevertheless, the practical suggestion that concerns improving social workers' skills and knowledge in the sphere of this difficult and painful problem acquires a priority significance.

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