KNOWLEDGE ON SEXUAL ABUSE AND SELF-PROTECTION SKILLS: A STUDY ON FEMALE CHINESE ADOLESCENTS WITH MILD MENTAL RETARDATION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the level of sexual abuse knowledge and self-protection skills in a sample of female Chinese adolescents with mild mental retardation. It was hypothesized that the participants would exhibit impoverished knowledge on sexual abuse and related self-protection strategies.

Method: A total of 77 female Chinese adolescents aged from 11 to 15 years old who met the inclusion criterion of the study were recruited from four special schools for mental retardation. The Chinese versions of the Personal Safety Questionnaire and the “What If” Situation Test (Wurtele, 1990) were administered orally to the participants during individual interviews.

Results: Participants were more able to accurately recognize inappropriate than appropriate touches and sexual requests, and possessed limited information about sexual abuse. They were also inadequate in protecting themselves against sexual abuse, and had the most difficulty in reporting the sexually abusive incident and characteristics of the offender. Regression analyses also showed that their sexual abuse knowledge was the best predictor for self-protection skills.

Conclusion: The present findings provided strong cross-cultural support to previous Western studies that found females with mild mental retardation of high risk to sexual abuse and in need of specially designed prevention program to enhance their competency against sexual victimization and exploitation. With modification and refinement, measurement scales used in the Western general population could be extended to Chinese adolescents with mental retardation. Suggestions on the design of the sexual abuse prevention programs, limitations of the present study, and recommendations for future studies were also discussed. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd

Key Words—Sexual abuse, Chinese sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION

SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMIZATION is a pervasive problem among individuals with mental retardation (Beail & Warden, 1995; Brown, Stein, & Turk, 1995; Elvik, Berkowitz, Nicholas, Lipman, & Inkellis, 1990; Hames, 1996; Tharinger, Horton, & Millea, 1990; Turk & Brown, 1993), and its prevalence may be higher than the estimated prevalence within the general population (Baker & Duncan, 1985; Ludlow, 1991). Sexual abuse of these individuals often occurs repeatedly and over protracted periods of time in a variety of settings, including institutions, community residential facilities, and other service settings; and involves caregivers and other providers, family members, peers with mental retardation, and other acquaintances (Beail & Warden, 1995; Furey, 1994; Mansell, Sobsey, & Calder, 1992; Sobsey, 1994; Turk & Brown, 1993).

Individual risk factors that increase these people’s vulnerability to sexual victimization include...