"Always Daddy’s Little Girl": Incestuous Abuse During Adulthood

Abstract:

In recent years, in the wake of the case of Josef Fritzl, there have been an unprecedented number of press reports from around the globe on fathers who have continued incestuous relationships with one or more daughters into their adult years with the spectrum of abuse not infrequently involving incest also of a daughter’s offspring. Despite press accounts of such fathers going back well into the nineteenth century, there has been a very little acknowledgement of the reality of such fathers in the scientific literature. There has been the occasional brief anecdotal mention of such dynamics but there has never been a published study of the victims of ongoing incestuous abuse during the adult years nor a comparative analysis of what is known about such fathers. This paper compares the very limited references in the scientific literature regarding such incest cases with the much more frequent reporting in the popular media of recent years. An analysis of 44 cases from 24 countries including Australia, UK, USA, Italy, Poland, Columbia, Malaysia, Israel, India, France and Austria etc., etc. is made which illustrates a frequent lack of awareness/willingness to act on the part of health and family services professionals despite a burgeoning number of incestuously fathered children associated with the incestuously abused daughter(s) and/or obvious mental health problems exhibited by such victims. In no published book or in no press report of the father’s utterances is there anything approaching believable remorse or insight. In fact, unless external factors belatedly come into play, the apparent reality is that such incest is unrelenting and that it is associated with the direst psychological and frequently physical consequences for the victims of it.

The research and clinical experience of the author working long-term with patients with Dissociative Identity Disorder is that at the time of presentation as adults approximately one in eight report incestuous abuse continuing into the adult years and in this group for many, the abuse is current and ongoing. Such patients typically have been sexually abused from a very early age, with the manipulation of their sexual response a key component in conditioning an enduring sexualized attachment, at the same time as using shame and fear as key components in maintaining compliance and silence. Although rarely a focus of clinical enquiry, typically such women, when able to speak of it will describe the induction by their paternal abuser of orgasm at a very young age, typically around the age of six. Such women have high indices of self-harm and suicidality and are prone to place themselves in dangerous reenactment scenarios. Detailed data relating to a series of 10 such incestuously abused women is presented. The average duration of incestuous abuse for this group of women is 31 years and the average estimate episodes of sexual abuse in their lives is 3,320. Most such women experience being “fused” to their father and do not feel that they have ownership of their own body. Generally their mother was also sexually abused as a child and/or has actively participated in the sexual abuse or at least has done nothing to protect their daughter despite seeing ongoing obvious evidence of incestuous abuse. The fathers, despite a propensity to use or threaten violence to their daughters are generally outwardly productively employed, financially comfortable, stably married and many have had close involvement with a church. However, suicide and murder occur within the first or second degree relatives of these women at a high frequency. All these women have been sexually abused by various groupings of individuals connected to their fathers. The attachment dynamics associated with such troubled father-daughter relationships are discussed and the particular challenges of treatment are briefly addressed against an historical background where such cases have surfaced repeatedly in the literature of the past one and half centuries but without the surge in reporting such cases that dates from the phenomena of the case involving Josef Fritzl.