

# Facilitators and Barriers to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Disclosures: A Research Update (2000–2016)

Ramona Alaggia, Delphine Collin-Vezina and Rusan Lateef

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# Facilitators and Barriers to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Disclosures: A Research Update (2000–2016)

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Ramona Alaggia<sup>1</sup>, Delphine Collin-Vézina<sup>2</sup>, and Rusan Lateef<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Identifying and understanding factors that promote or inhibit child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosures has the potential to facilitate earlier disclosures, assist survivors to receive services without delay, and prevent further sexual victimization. Timely access to therapeutic services can mitigate risk to the mental health of survivors of all ages. This review of the research focuses on CSA disclosures with children, youth, and adults across the life course. Using Kiteley and Stogdon's literature review framework, 33 studies since 2000 were identified and analyzed to extrapolate the most convincing findings to be considered for practice and future research. The centering question asked: What is the state of CSA disclosure research and what can be learned to apply to practice and future research? Using Braun and Clarke's guidelines for thematic analysis, five themes emerged: (1) Disclosure is an iterative, interactive process rather than a discrete event best done within a relational context; (2) contemporary disclosure models reflect a social-ecological, person-in-environment orientation for understanding the complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual, and cultural factors involved in CSA disclosure; (3) age and gender significantly influence disclosure; (4) there is a lack of a life-course perspective; and (5) barriers to disclosure continue to outweigh facilitators. Although solid strides have been made in understanding CSA disclosures, the current state of knowledge does not fully capture a cohesive picture of disclosure processes and pathways over the life course. More research is needed on environmental, contextual, and cultural factors. Barriers continue to be identified more frequently than facilitators, although dialogical forums are emerging as important facilitators of CSA disclosure. Implications for practice in facilitating CSA disclosures are discussed with recommendations for future research.

## Keywords

sexual abuse, child abuse, cultural contexts

## Introduction

Timely access to supportive and therapeutic resources for child sexual abuse (CSA) survivors can mitigate risk to the health and mental health well-being of children, youth, and adults. Identifying and understanding factors that promote or inhibit CSA disclosures have the potential to facilitate earlier disclosures, assist survivors to receive services without delay, and potentially prevent further sexual victimization. Increased knowledge on both the factors and the processes involved in CSA disclosures is timely when research continues to show high rates of delayed disclosures (Collin-Vézina, Sablonni, Palmer, & Milne, 2015; Crisma, Bascelli, Paci, & Romito, 2004; Easton, 2013; Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Jonzon & Lindblad, 2004; McElvaney, 2015; Smith et al., 2000).

Incidence studies in the United States and Canada report decreasing CSA rates (Fallon et al., 2015; Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014; Trocmé et al., 2005, 2008), while at

the same time global trends from systematic reviews and meta-analyses have found concerning rates of CSA, with averages of 18–20% for females and of 8–10% for males (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009). The highest rates found for girls is in Australia (21.5%) and for boys in Africa (19.3%), with the lowest rates for both girls (11.3%) and boys (4.1%) reported in Asia (Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). These findings point to the incongruence between the low number of official reports of

<sup>1</sup> Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Research on Children and Families, School of Social Work, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

## Corresponding Author:

Ramona Alaggia, Factor-Inwentash Chair in Children's Mental Health, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 246 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4K1W1.

Email: ramona.alaggia@utoronto.ca

CSA to authorities and the high rates reported in prevalence studies. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, and Bakermans-Kranenburg (2011) combining estimations of CSA in 217 studies published between 1980 and 2008 revealed rates of CSA to be more than 30 times greater in studies relying on self-reports (127 in 1,000) than in official report inquiries, such as those based on data from child protection services and the police (4 in 1,000) (Jillian, Cotter, & Perreault, 2014; Statistics Canada 2013). In other words, while 1 out of 8 people retrospectively report having experienced CSA, official incidence estimates indicate only 1 per 250 children. In a survey of Swiss child services, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Landholt, Schnyder, and Jud (2013) further found 2.68 cases per 1,000 of CSA disclosures, while in a recent comprehensive review McElvaney (2015) details the high prevalence of delayed, partial, and nondisclosures in childhood indicating a persistent trend toward withholding CSA disclosure.

It is our view that incidence statistics are likely an underestimation of CSA disclosures, and this drives the rationale for the current review. Given the persistence of delayed disclosures with research showing a large number of survivors only disclosing in adulthood (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Easton, 2013; Hunter, 2011; McElvaney, 2015; Smith et al., 2000), these issues should be a concern for practitioners, policy makers, and the general public (McElvaney, 2015). The longer disclosures are delayed, the longer individuals potentially live with serious negative effects and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, trauma disorders, and addictions, without receiving necessary treatment. This also increases the likelihood of more victims falling prey to undetected offenders. Learning more about CSA disclosure factors and processes to help advance our knowledge base may help professionals to facilitate earlier disclosures.

Previous literature reviews examining factors influencing CSA disclosure have served the field well but are no longer current. Important contributions on CSA disclosures include Paine and Hansen's (2002) original review covering the literature largely from the premillennium era, followed by London, Bruck, Ceci, and Shuman's (2005) subsequent review, which may not have captured publications affected by "lag to print" delays so common in peer-reviewed journals. These reviews are now dated and therefore do not take into account the plethora of research that has been accumulated over the past 15 years. Other recent reviews exist but with distinct contributions on the *dialogical relational processes* of disclosure (Reitsemá & Grietens, 2015), CSA disclosures in *adulthood* (Tener & Murphy, 2015), and delayed disclosures in *childhood* (McElvaney, 2015). This literature review differs by focusing on CSA disclosures in children, youth, and adults from childhood and into adulthood—over the life course.

## Method

Kiteley and Stogdon's (2014) systematic review framework was utilized to establish what has been investigated in CSA

disclosure research, through various mixed methods, to highlight the most convincing findings that should be considered for future research, practice, and program planning. This review centered on the question: *What is the state of CSA disclosure research and what can be learned to apply to future research and practice?* By way of clarification, the term systematic refers to a methodologically sound strategy for searching literature on studies for *knowledge construction*, in this case the CSA disclosure literature, rather than *intervention* studies. The years spanned for searching the literature were 2000–2016, building on previous reviews without a great deal of overlap. Retrieval of relevant research was done by searching international electronic databases: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Educational Resources Information Center, Canadian Research Index, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress, Sociological Abstracts, Social Service Abstracts, and Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts. This review searched peer-reviewed studies. A search of the gray literature (unpublished literature such as internal agency documents, government reports, etc.) was beyond the scope of this review because unpublished studies are not subjected to a peer-review process. Keyword search terms used were child sexual abuse, childhood sexual abuse, disclosure, and telling.

A search of the 9 databases produced 322 peer-reviewed articles. Selected search terms yielded 200 English publications, 1 French study, and 1 Portuguese review. The search was further refined by excluding studies focusing on forensic investigations, as these studies constitute a specialized legal focus on interview approaches and techniques. As well, papers that focused exclusively on rates and responses to CSA disclosure were excluded, as these are substantial areas unto themselves, exceeding the aims of the review question. Review articles were also excluded. Once the exclusion criteria were applied, the search results yielded 33 articles. These studies were subjected to a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This entailed (1) multiple readings by the three authors; (2) identifying patterns across studies by coding and charting specific features; (3) examining disclosure definitions used, sample characteristics, and measures utilized; and (4) major findings were extrapolated. Reading of the articles was initially conducted by the authors to identify general trends in a first level of analyses and then subsequently to identify themes through a deeper second-level analyses. A table of studies was generated and was continuously revised as the selection of studies was refined (see Table 1).

## Key Findings

First-level analysis of the studies identified key study characteristics. Trends emerged around definitions of CSA disclosure, study designs, and sampling issues. First, in regard to definitions, the term "telling" is most frequently used in place of the term disclosure. In the absence of standardized questionnaires or disclosure instruments, telling emerges as a practical term more readily understood by study participants. Several

**Table 1.** Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Disclosure Studies: 2000–2016.

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Gagnier and Collin-Vézina (2016)	To explore disclosure processes for male victims of CSA	Phenomenological methodology used to interview male CSA survivors. The Long Interview Method (LIM) guided data collection and analyses.	17 men ranged in age from 19 to 67—average age 47. Purposive sampling strategy was used	The majority of the men in the study waited until adulthood to disclose their abuse, with negative stereotypes contributing to their delayed disclosures. Negative stereotypes contributed to delayed disclosure with trying to forget. Breaking isolation was cited as a motivator to disclosure along with the aid of various forms of media on disclosure. Important contextual issues such as negative stereotyping of males, sexuality, and victims were noted. Social media was seen as a facilitator of disclosures	All participants had disclosed and received services before participating in the study. Member checking could not be done with the participants to check themes. Small but sufficient size for a qualitative inquiry. Otherwise, high level of rigor in establishing trustworthiness of the data and analysis. Retrospective study could imply recall issues
Brazelton (2015)	To explore the meaning African American women make of their traumatic experiences with CSA and how they disclosed across the life course	Collective case study design with using narrative tradition (storyboard) for data collection and analysis. Qualitative interviewing	17 African American women in mid-life between 40 and 63 who experienced intrafamilial CSA. Purposive, snowballing strategy	CSA onset was largely between the ages 5 and 9. No one ever talked to them about sex, so they didn't have language to disclose. Barriers: fear of family breakdown and removal, not wanting to tarnish the family's name, and fear of retribution by family members if they disclosed. Pattern of stifled and dismissed disclosures identified over the life course. All 17 participants identified spirituality as a primary source of strength throughout the life course	One of few studies to focus exclusively on African American women. Small but sufficient size for a qualitative inquiry. Important cultural and contextual issues were brought forward. Retrospective study that may have been affected by recall issues. Use of a life-course perspective as a theoretical lens for understanding CSA in the middle to later years of life that should be considered in further investigations
Collin-Vézina, Sablonni, Palmer, and Milne (2015)	To provide a mapping of factors that prevent CSA disclosures through an ecological lens from a sample of CSA adult survivors.	Qualitative design using LIM.	67 male and female CSA adult survivors (76% identified as female and 24% as male). Age ranges from 19 to 69 years ( $M = 44.9$ ). Purposive sampling strategy	Three broad categories were identified as barriers to CSA disclosure: Barriers from within-internalized victim blaming, mechanisms to protect oneself, and immature development at time of abuse; barriers in relation to others—violence and dysfunction in the family, power dynamics, awareness of the impact of telling, and fragile social network; barriers in relation to the social world labeling, taboo of sexuality, lack of services available, and culture or time period.	Half of the participants had not disclosed their CSA experiences before the age of 19. Retrospective aspect of the study could imply recall issues. All participants had disclosed and received counseling at some before participating in the study. High level of rigor in establishing trustworthiness of the data and analysis
Leclerc and Wortley (2015)	Study objectives investigated the factors that facilitate CSA disclosures	Adult male child sexual offenders were interviewed to examine predictors of	369 adult males who had been convicted of a sexual offense against a child aged between 1	Disclosure increased with the age of the victim: if penetration had occurred, if the victim was related to the offender, if the victim was not living with the offender at	Offender generated data through self-reports could be subject to cognitive distortions—minimization or exaggerations.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
McElvaney and Culhane (2015)	To investigate the feasibility of using child assessments as data sources of informal CSA disclosure. To assess if these reports provide substantive data on disclosures	victim disclosure. Semistructured interviews based on the QID questionnaire. File reports of children seen for assessment in a child sexual abuse unit in a children's hospital were reviewed	and 17 years old. Majority were White, uneducated, almost half unemployed before their arrest Content analysis was completed on 39 files (32 females and 7 males) based on a coding framework. Parents were asked to consent to have their child's file reviewed for the study. Victims assessed were 12–18 years of age	the time of the abuse, or if the victim resisted during the offense. Male victims and victims from dysfunctional backgrounds were less likely to disclose Majority of children told their mothers (43%) and peers (33%) first. Three major themes were identified as influencing the disclosure process: (1) feeling distressed, (2) opportunity to tell, and (3) fears for self. Additional themes of being believed, shame/self-blame, and peer influence were also identified	Perspectives of offenders on vulnerability of victims in relation to disclosure could be important information to inform interventions The sample size is small but will contribute to a large multisite study in Ireland. Serves as an important exploratory pilot bringing forward disclosure themes for consideration
Dumont, Messerschmitt, Vila, Bohu, and Rey-Salmon (2014)	This study aimed to explore how the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, especially whether these relations are intrafamilial or extrafamilial, impact CSA disclosure	File reports of children seen for assessment in a child sexual abuse unit in a children's hospital were reviewed	220 minor victims—78.2% female victims, 41.8% aged between 14 and 18 (most prevalent age range), and 48.2% were abused by a family member	Disclosure processes were more complex when it concerned sexual abuse committed by intrafamilial perpetrator: 60% of the victims reveal the facts several years after, and most often to individuals outside the family (78.6% of the disclosures done at school); on the contrary, extrafamilial disclosures take place more spontaneously and quickly: 80% of the victims reveal the facts a few days after, most often to their mother or peers	The relationship with the perpetrator has a significant impact on both timing and recipient of disclosure, with intrafamilial abuses less likely to be disclosed promptly and within the family system
Easton, Saltzman, and Willis (2014)	Study focus was on identification of barriers to CSA disclosure with male survivors	Using qualitative content analysis, researchers conducted a secondary analysis of online survey data, the 2010 Health and Well-Being Survey, that included men with self-reported CSA histories with an open-ended item on disclosure barriers	460 men with CSA histories completed an anonymous, Internet-based survey. Recruited from survivors' organizations. Age range of 18–84 years. Two thirds of respondents reported clergy-related abuse. Majority of respondents were White	Vast majority of participants (94.6%) were sexually abused by another male. Duration of sexual abuse broke down into: 30.2% less than 6 months, 32.3% 6 months to 3 years, and 34.3% more than 3 years. Ten years old was average age of CSA onset. Ten categories of barriers were classified into three domains: (1) sociopolitical: masculinity, limited resources; (2) interpersonal: mistrust of others, fear of being labeled "gay," safety and protection issues, past responses; and (3) personal: internal emotions, seeing the experience as sexual abuse, and sexual orientation.	At time of the study, this was the largest qualitative data set to have been analyzed with an explicit focus on adult male survivors' perceptions of barriers to CSA disclosure. Because the sample was limited in terms of the low percentage of racial minorities (9.3%), disclosure differences based on race or ethnicity were not discerned. The majority of abuse reported was by clergy which might present a unique set of barriers to disclosure

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Easton (2013)	Study purpose was to describe male CSA disclosure processes using a life span approach examining differences based on age. Also, to explore relationships between disclosure attributes and men's mental health	Cross-sectional survey design. Eligible participants were screened and completed an anonymous, Internet-based survey during 2010. Measures used: General Mental Health Distress Scale and General Assessment of Individual Needs. Questions related to CSA disclosure and supports were included	Purposive sampling of 487 men from three national organizations devoted to raising awareness of CSA among men. Age range: 19–84 years. Mean age for onset of CSA was 10.3 years	Older age and being abused by a family member were both related to delays in disclosure. Most participants who told someone during childhood did not receive emotionally supportive or protective responses and the helpfulness of responses across the life span was mixed. Delays in telling were significant periods of time (over 20 years). Approximately one half of the participants first told about the sexual abuse to a spouse/partner (27%) or a mental health professional (20%); 42% of participants reported that their most helpful discussion was with a mental health professional. However, unhelpful responses caused most mental distress. Clinical recommendations included more of a life-course perspective be adopted, understanding impact of unhelpful responses and the importance of expanding networks for male survivors	Purposive sampling of men from awareness raising organizations may have attracted particular participants who had already disclosed and received help. Participants needed to have access to Internet which would have eliminated men in lower SES groups and required proficiency in English which would eliminate certain cultural groups. However, the sampling strategy gained access to a predominantly hidden population. Important clinical recommendations are made with an emphasis on a life-course focus
McElvaney, Greene, and Hogan (2012)	Qualitative study asked the central research question: "How do children tell?" Objective was to develop theory of how children tell of their CSA disclosure experiences. Parents were interviewed.	Grounded theory method study. Interviews were conducted. Line-by-line open and axial coding was conducted on verbatim transcripts	Sample of 22 young people; 16 girls and 6 boys; age range: 8–18 years; 22 interviewed in total between the ages of 8 and 18. Mixed sample of some enduring intrafamilial CSA, some extrafamilial CSA, and two endured both forms	A theoretical model was developed that conceptualizes the process of CSA disclosure as one of containing the secret: (1) the active withholding of the secret on the part of the child; (2) the experience of a "pressure cooker effect" reflecting a conflict between the wish to tell and the wish to keep the secret; and (3) the confiding itself which often occurs in the context of a trusted relationship. These were derived from eleven categories that were developed through open and axial coding	Modest but sufficient sample for an exploratory qualitative inquiry. High level of trustworthiness rigor. A subsample of randomly selected transcripts was independently coded. Very young children and young adults were not captured in this sample. Transferability of findings can only be made to the age range sampled in the context of Ireland
Schonbucher, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Schnyder, and Landolt (2012)	To investigate the process of CSA disclosure with adolescents from the general population who had experienced CSA. How many disclosed, who did	Data collection was through face-to-face qualitative interviews. Standardized questions and measures were administered on family situation, sociodemographic	Convenience sample of 26 sexually victimized adolescents. 23 girls and 3 boys. Age range: 15–18 years. Online advertisements and flyers were used to recruit youth from	Less than one third of participants immediately disclosed CSA to another person. In most cases, recipients of both immediate and delayed disclosure were to peers. More than one third of participants had never disclosed the abuse to a parent. Participants reported reluctance to disclose to parents so as	Two thirds of the sample did not disclose right away. Strengthening parent-child relationships may be one of the most important ways to increase disclosure to parents. Disclosure to peers has been found a common trend in other

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Hunter (2011)	they disclose to, and what were their motives for disclosing	data, sexual victimization, general, and mental health. Sexual Assault Module of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire was used	community and counseling services	not to burden them. Earlier disclosures were related to extrafamilial CSA, single occurrence CSA, age of victim at abuse onset, and parents who were living together. Higher levels of reported guilt and shame were related to delayed disclosures. Peers were viewed by this sample as more reliable confidants	research and bears more examination
	Aim of this study was to develop a fuller understanding of CSA disclosures	Narrative inquiry methodology. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with participants. Data were analyzed using Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal's (2004) method.	Purposive sampling was employed. Sample consisted of 22 participants aged 25–70 years; 13 women and 9 men. Participants were sexually abused at 15 years or under with someone over the age of 18.	Only 5 out of 22 participants told anyone about their early sexual experiences as children. Fear, shame, and self-blame were the main inhibitors to disclosure. These factors are further detailed through subthemes. Telling as a child and as an adult was further expanded upon using Alaggia's (2004) framework verifying behavioral indirect attempts to tell and purposeful disclosure as categories. Thematic analysis supported that CSA disclosure should be conceptualized and viewed as a complex and lifelong process	Delayed disclosure was common in this qualitative sample. Most participants did not make a selective disclosure until adulthood. These findings support Alaggia's (2004) model of disclosure but also highlights the importance of life stage. Modest but sufficient sample size for a qualitative inquiry. Well-designed study with detailed analysis for transferability of findings
Schaeffer, Leventhal, and Asnes (2011)	This study aimed to: (1) add direct inquiry about the process of a child's CSA disclosure; (2) determine if children will discuss process that led them to tell; and (3) describe factors that children identify that led them to tell about or caused them to delay CSA disclosure	Study sought to find out if process issues of disclosure could be identified in the context of forensic interviews. Forensic interviewers were asked to incorporate questions about "telling" into an existing forensic interview protocol. Interview content related to the children's reasons for telling or waiting was extracted, transcribed, and analyzed using grounded theory method of analysis	191 interviews of CSA victims aged 3–18 over a 1-year period were used for the study. Inclusion criteria included children who made a statement about CSA prior to referral, reasons for telling or waiting to tell, and those who spoke English. Participants were children who were interviewed at a child sexual abuse clinic. 74% were female and 51% were Caucasian	Reasons the children identified for telling were classified into three domains: (1) disclosure as a result of internal stimuli (e.g., the child had nightmares); (2) disclosure facilitated by outside influences (e.g., the child was questioned); and (3) disclosure due to direct evidence of abuse (e.g., the child's abuse was witnessed). The barriers to disclosure identified fell into five groups: (1) threats made by the perpetrator (e.g., the child was told she or he would get in trouble if she or he told), (2) fears (e.g., the child was afraid something bad would happen if she or he told), (3) lack of opportunity (e.g., the child felt the opportunity to disclose never presented), (4) lack of understanding (e.g., the child failed to recognize abusive behavior as unacceptable), and (5) relationship with the perpetrator (e.g., the child thought the perpetrator was a friend)	An innovative study to try to assess if formal investigative interviews can facilitate disclosures of CSA. Data were based on a large number of interviews. Detailed analysis produced detailed findings supporting other study findings on CSA disclosure

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Alaggia (2010)	The study aimed to identify factors impeding or promoting CSA disclosures. Overarching research question: What individual, interpersonal, environmental, and contextual influences impede or promote CSA disclosures.	A qualitative phenomenological design, LIM, was used to interview adult CSA survivors about their disclosure experiences to provide retrospective accounts of CSA disclosure and meaning-making of these experiences. Thematic analysis was done through a social-ecological lens.	Purposive sampling was employed. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit more male survivors. 40 adult survivors of CSA were interviewed: 36% men and 64% women. Age range of 18–65 with a mean age of 40.1 years. Average age of abuse onset was 5.3 years old. 36% of the sample was non-White. Diverse socioeconomic backgrounds	Themes fell into four domains: (1) individual and developmental factors, developmental factors as to whether they comprehended what was happening, personality traits also had some bearing on their ability to tell, and anticipating not being believed; (2) disclosure inhibited by family characteristics such as rigidly fixed gender roles with dominating fathers, chaos and aggression, other forms of child abuse, domestic violence, dysfunctional communication, and social isolation; (3) neighborhood and community context, that is, lack of interest from neighbors and teachers not pursuing troubling behavior; and (4) cultural and societal attitudes, media messages and societal attitudes, feeling unheard as kids, gender socialization for males, and cultural attitudes influencing parent's reactions. Purposeful disclosure is higher than reported in other studies because of the sampling attempts to purposefully locate disclosers	The study presents a comprehensive social-ecological analysis to CSA disclosure highlighting the multifaceted influences. Of note, 42% had disclosed the abuse during childhood; 26% had not disclosed because they had repressed the memory, or the abuse had occurred in preschool years and they had difficulty with recall. The remainder had attempted some form of disclosure in indirect ways during childhood. A retrospective approach that could be affected by recall issues
Fontes and Plummer (2010)	This examination of CSA disclosure explored the ways culture affects processes of CSA disclosure and reporting, both in the United States and internationally	Using published literature with clinical data, this article conducted an analysis to provide a culturally competent framework for CSA disclosure questioning	Data consisted of published literature on disclosure and culture that was triangulated with clinical case material	Cultural and structural factors affecting CSA disclosure are identified in in-depth detail. Recommendations made include (1) disclosure interviewing should be tailored to the child's cultural context, (2) questioning should also take into consideration age and gender factors, and (3) culture stands as an important factor in all cases in which children are considering disclosing or being asked to disclose, and not solely in cases in which children are from noticeable minority groups. Presents a comprehensive interview framework integrating cultural considerations	One of the few works that adds knowledge to culturally contextual disclosure interviewing. Unique combination of literature findings with clinical material. Anecdotal accounts may preclude transferability of findings. Overall adds to an impoverished area of CSA disclosure information
Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, and Fairholm. (2009a)	This study explored disclosure strategies with a national sample of youth focusing on	Forms were completed by youth following participation in abuse prevention	Examination of results from a national sample of 1,621 evaluation forms where youth	Youth who have been abused or witnesses to abuse employ five disclosure strategies: using self-harming behaviors to signal the abuse to others; not talking	This study highlights that disclosure is an interactive ongoing process. Findings lend support to studies that have identified similarly

(continued)



**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
	(1) What are the hidden experiences of abuse among Canadian youth? (2) What impact does participation in abuse prevention programs have on youth to express their abuse experiences? (3) What disclosure barriers do youth face? (4) What are young people's disclosure patterns? and (5) Who do they tell?	programming by the Canadian Red Cross (RespectED). A series of focus groups and observations of the workshops were used to help contextualize the findings. Evaluation forms were analyzed from two violence prevention programs: (1) It's not your fault and (2) What's love got to do with it?	anonymously disclosed abuse experiences. Respondent's ages: 13 and under (27%), 14–15 (37%), 16–17 (25%), 18 and older (4%), and unknown (7%)	at all about the abuse to prevent intrusive interventions by others; seeking help from peers; seeking help from informal adult supports; and seeking help from mandated service providers (social workers and police). Results suggest disclosure is an interactive process, with expectations regarding consequences to disclosure. Patterns of incrementally sharing abuse experiences are shaped by young people's interactions with peers, educators, and caregivers. About three-quarters of females previously disclosed; significantly less males disclosed	interactive models of disclosure such as those detailed by Alaggia (2004) and Staller and Nelson-Gardell (2005). This mixed sample of youth who experienced different forms of abuse and violence exposure were participants—not limited to CSA survivors
Ungar, Tutty, McConnell, Barter, and Fairholm (2009b)	This study explored abuse disclosure strategies with a national sample of Canadian youth who participated in violence prevention programming. One of the goals of the study was to document not previously identified experiences of abuse and youth attitudes toward disclosure of abuse experiences	Exploratory design with a nonrepresentative samples. Qualitative analysis of 1,099 evaluation forms completed following Red Cross RespectED violence prevention delivered between 2000 and 2003	Purposeful sample of 1,099 evaluation forms completed following Red Cross RespectED violence prevention programming delivered between 2000 and 2003	Findings suggest high rates of hidden abuse, with less than one quarter of youth reporting a disclosure. 244 of the 1,099 youth who disclosed abuse on their evaluation forms identified specific individuals they told about their abuse. Disclosure patterns vary with boys, youth aged 14–15, victims of physical abuse, and those abused by a family member being most likely to disclose to professionals or the police. One third of disclosures were directed toward professionals and the least, 5% percent each, were directed toward friends, parents, and others. Participants were most likely to disclose sexual abuse to parents/family, professionals, and the police/courts, with fewer choosing friends.	Innovative design of this study provides insight into young people's perceptions of disclosure experiences. High level of rigor with trustworthiness of the data analysis ensured through use of youth focus groups, interviews, and observational data. The study results are somewhat limited in the thickness of the descriptions it can offer because most of the data are survey based. Regional differences may not have been picked up. Scope of the study is broad and approach is creative
		Twenty-seven interviews and focus groups were also done to understand contextual issues and engage youth and program facilitators in the interpretation of findings. A coding structure was developed for analysis to synthesize themes across data sources	Out of all 1,099 participants, 225 males and 779 females indicated that they had been abused. Out of those, 43 males and 180 females indicated that they had disclosed the abuse. Of those who had disclosed, only a portion of males and females specified who they had disclosed the abuse to ("While 1,099 evaluations with disclosure statements were analyzed, only 22% made mention of people to		

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**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Priebe and Svedin (2008)	This study aimed to investigate disclosure rates and disclosure patterns and examine predictors of nondisclosure in a sample of male and female adolescents with self-reported experiences of sexual abuse	Participants completed 65-item questionnaire that included questions about background, consensual sex, sexual abuse experiences (noncontact, contact or penetrating abuse, including peer abuse), disclosure of CSA, own sexual abusive behavior, sexual attitudes, and experiences with pornography and sexual exploitation. The questionnaire included 6 modified items from the SCL-90 and 9 of 25 items from the Parental Bonding Instrument. The data for girls and boys were analyzed separately	The sample consisted of 4,339 high school students in Sweden (2,324 girls and 2,015 boys). The mean age of the participants was 18.15 years. This study used a subsample of 1,962 participants who reported CSA and who answered disclosure questions	whom disclosures occurred. <sup>1)</sup> More females specified who they disclosed to compare to males. The data show perceptions among youth of negative consequences following disclosure of boys (23%) reported CSA. The disclosure rate was 81% (girls) and 69% (boys). Girls and boys disclosed most often to a friend of their own age. Few had disclosed to professionals, and even fewer had reported to the authorities. There were higher rates of disclosure to a professional with more severe abuse (contact abuse with or without penetration) for girls, but lower rates for boys. The more severe the sexual abuse was, the less likely both girls and boys had talked to their mother, father, or a sibling. Girls were less likely to disclose if they had experienced contact sexual abuse with or without penetration, less frequent abuse, abuse by a family member, or if they had perceived their parents as less caring and less overprotective and highly overprotective. Boys were less likely to disclose if a family member abused them, they were studying a vocational program (vs. an academic program), lived with both parents or had perceived their parents as less caring and not overprotective. Adolescents who reported CSA perceived their mental health as poorer compared to adolescents without CSA. Nondisclosers reported more symptoms on the Mental Health Scale than those who had disclosed	This study highlighted that sexual abuse is largely hidden from adult society, especially from professionals and the legal system. However, time lapsed to disclosure was not reported. Since friends appeared to be the main recipients of sexual abuse disclosures, practice implications of this could be to find ways to give young people better information and guidance about how to support a sexually abused peer. A qualitative component to the study would have provided a broader understanding of disclosure processes. Study limitations include a significant amount of boys who did not complete the questions regarding disclosure on; the timing of disclosures (whether they were delayed or not) was not measured; possibility of recall bias with retrospective studies based on self-reports; and youth participants may not have understood all the questions
Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, and Grossman (2008)	Study focused on disclosure challenges for male survivors of CSA to understand three issues: (1) To	Male survivors of CSA were interviewed about their disclosure experiences. Analytic techniques included	The sample consisted of 16 male survivors of childhood sexual abuse; 11 Caucasian, 2 African American, 1	Barriers to disclosure were found to be operant in three interrelated domains: (1) personal (e.g., lack of cognitive awareness, intentional avoidance, emotional readiness, and shame); (2)	Since the vast majority of men in the sample had not disclosed in childhood, they may have been predisposed to identifying barriers to disclosure more

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Table 1. (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
	<p>whom and in what contexts have they disclosed these experiences? (2) What do they have to say about their disclosure experiences? and (3) What are their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their disclosure, including incentives and barriers?</p>	<p>grounded theory method of analysis for coding and development of conceptually clustered matrices. Participants completed two in-depth, semi-structured interviews, lasting between 2 and 3 hr each taking place approximately a week apart</p>	<p>Puerto Rican, 1 part Native American, 1 African Cuban; age range of 24–61 years; 9 identified themselves as heterosexual, 5 as homosexual, and 2 as bisexual</p>	<p>relational (e.g., fears about negative repercussions, isolation); and (3) sociocultural (e.g., lack of acceptance for men to experience or acknowledge victimization). Only 1 of the 16 men in this sample disclosed the full extent of his sexual abuse experiences while he was still a child. The other men reported that they had not disclosed, although some reported attempts to tell that were indirect or incomplete. Several other men disclosed certain experiences or elements of their abuse, but concealed others. By the time of the study, many of these men had disclosed their past experiences in a variety of relationships, including those with family members, partners, therapists, and infrequently friends. Several had only limited discussions of their sexual abuse</p>	<p>readily. Retrospective accounts are subject to recall issues. Investigators made significant efforts to gather a diverse sample. High level of rigor was executed in the dependability of the data and iterative process of the interpretation of findings was conducted</p>
<p>Hershkowitz, Lanes, and Lamb (2007)</p>	<p>The goal of the present study was to examine how child victims of extrafamilial sexual abuse disclosed the abuse experience</p>	<p>Alleged victims of sexual abuse and their parents were interviewed. Children were interviewed using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol by experienced youth investigators. Information on disclosure processes was obtained in the first formal interview, before any police investigation or child welfare intervention</p>	<p>Thirty alleged victims of CSA; 18 boys and 12 girls. Child sample was 7- to 12-year-olds with an average age of 9.2 years. Twenty mothers and 10 fathers were also interviewed for a total of 30 parent interviews. A content analysis was conducted on child and parent interviews</p>	<p>Disclosure categories were identified as follows: (1) delayed 53% of the children delayed disclosure for between 1 week and 2 years; (2) recipient of disclosure: 47% of children first disclosed to siblings or friends, 43% first disclosed to their parents, and 10% first disclosed to another adult. 57% of the children spontaneously disclosed abuse, but 43% disclosed only after they were prompted. 50% of the children reported feeling afraid or ashamed of their parents' responses. Parents' reactions: supportive (37%) and unsupportive (63%). There was a strong correlation between predicted and actual parental reactions suggesting children anticipated their parents' likely reactions accurately. Disclosure processes varied depending on the children's ages (e.g., younger children disclosed to parents), severity and frequency of abuse, parents' expected reactions, suspects' identities, and strategies used to foster secrecy</p>	<p>Innovative design to gather disclosure data from young children. Focus is on extrafamilial CSA which may differ than disclosure patterns of intrafamilial CSA. Two thirds of the parents registered unsupportive responses which is high</p>

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**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Alaggia and Kirshenbaum (2005)	The objectives of the current study were to identify a broad range of factors, including family dynamics that contribute to or hinder a child's ability to disclose CSA.	A qualitative phenomenological design—LIM—was used to elicit disclosure experiences; facilitators and barriers; and relevant circumstances. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Line-by-line open coding was conducted to capture family-level factors. Axial and selective coding facilitated identification of themes	Purposive sampling was employed to recruit 20 adult survivors between the ages of 18 and 65 who were sexually abused by a family member. Average age of participants was 40.1 years; 60% of participants were female and 40% male. Average age of onset of abuse was 6.7 years. Mixed clinical and nonclinical sample. The majority had received treatment for CSA at some point in their lives	Four major themes emerged suggesting that CSA disclosure can be significantly compromised when certain family conditions exist: (1) rigidly fixed, gender roles based on a patriarchy-based family structure; (2) presence of family violence; (3) closed, indirect family communication patterns; and (4) social isolation of the family as a whole, or specific members, played a part in CSA victims feeling they had no one safe to tell. Family systems formulations through a feminist lens are important in understanding children and families at risk of disclosure barriers	Over half the participants had not disclosed the abuse during childhood. Of the nondisclosing participants, six did not disclose because they had repressed or forgotten the memory. Almost one third withheld disclosure intentionally. More data are needed on early disclosures to garner more information on facilitators of disclosure. Retrospective approach implies recall issues. High level of trustworthiness of the data and interpretations were achieved through credibility, dependability, and confirmability through direct quotes
Alaggia (2005)	The study purpose was to qualitatively explore dynamics that impede or promote disclosure by examining a range of factors including gender as a dynamic—how disclosures of females and males are similar and different, and in what ways gender affects CSA disclosure	Survivors of CSA were interviewed about their disclosure experiences using LIM. Analysis of 30 participant narratives was used for theme development regarding impact of gender on disclosure. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for open, axial, and selective coding. Categories and subcategories were collapsed and refining into theme areas	Purposive sampling of women and men, along with those who disclosed during the abuse and those who did not. 19 females and 11 males; 18–65 (mean 40.1) years who were sexually abused by a family member or a trusted adult. Average age of abuse onset was 5.3 years, 36% were nonwhite, and 58% had not disclosed during childhood	Three themes emerged for men that inhibited or precipitated disclosure for reasons related to gender: (1) fear of being viewed as homosexual; (2) profound feelings of stigmatization or isolation because of the belief that boys are rarely victimized; and (3) fear of becoming an abuser, which acted as a precipitant for disclosure. Two predominant themes with female participants related to difficulties disclosing: (1) they felt more conflicted about who was responsible for the abuse and (2) they more strongly anticipated being blamed and/or not believed	One in a dearth of studies that conduct gender analysis. Comparative analysis draws out important practice implications. Retrospective design of the study which implies possible recall issues. High level of trustworthiness of the data and interpretations were achieved through credibility, dependability, and confirmability through direct quotes
Collings, Griffiths, and Kumalo (2005).	Study examined patterns of disclosure in a large representative sample of South African CSA victims. Two study objectives to: (1) examine how and	File reviews of all social work and medical case files for CSA victims seen at the crisis center where all cases of CSA reported to the North Durban	1,737 cases of CSA reported in the North Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, during January 2001 to December 2003. 1,614 girls and	Content analysis identified two broad dimensions of disclosure: (1) agency: child-initiated disclosure versus detection by a third party and (2) temporal duration: an event versus a process. These disclosure dimensions defined four discrete categories of	These results fit into Alaggia's (2004) disclosure framework. Through data analysis two raters coded disclosure categories using author's disclosure framework, which proved to be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive

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Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
	when CSA victims disclose their abuse and (2) Identify factors associated with different patterns of disclosure	policing area were referred during the period of January 2001 to December 2003	123 boys; average age of victimized children was 9.9 years. 47% reports were made within 72 hr of the abuse, 31% from 72 hr to 1 month, and 22% more than a month after the abuse	disclosure: (1) purposeful disclosure (30% of cases), (2) indirect disclosure (9% of cases), (3) eyewitness detection (18% of cases), and (4) accidental detection (43% of cases). Disclosure independently predicted by victim's age, nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship, offender's age, frequency of abuse, and reporting latency. Mean age of purposeful disclosures (10.67) was higher than the mean age of indirect disclosures (5.84). Explicit forms of disclosure were less likely when the offender was a family member. Shorter reporting latency was more likely with repeated abuse	with the percentage of interrater agreement at 98%. Generalizability of this study is limited to child clients receiving a crisis assessment referred through a police report
Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Lamb (2005).	This study aimed to identify characteristics of suspected child abuse victims that are associated with disclosure and nondisclosure during formal investigations	Large database of suspected cases of physical and sexual abuse investigated in Israel between 1998 and 2002 was analyzed. Interviews were also conducted using standardized NICHDI Investigative Interview Protocol. Archival data were analyzed	The sample was comprised of 26,446 of 3- to 14-year-old alleged victims of sexual and physical abuse interviewed in Israel in the 5-year period from 1998 to 2002. 140 experienced trained youth investigators conducted interviews	Overall, 65% of the 26,446 children made allegations when interviewed. Rates of disclosure were greater for sexual abuse (71%) over physical abuse (61%). Children of all ages were less likely to disclose/allege abuse when a parent was the suspected perpetrator. Disclosure rates increased as children grew older: 50% with 3- to 6-year-olds, 67% of the 7- to 10-year-olds, and 74% of the 11- to 14-year-olds disclosed abuse when questioned	Overall findings indicated that rates of disclosure varied systematically depending on the nature of the alleged offences, the relationship between alleged victims and suspected perpetrators, and the age of the suspected victims. Analyses only involved cases that had come to the attention of official agencies, making it difficult to determine how many of abuse take place without ever triggering any kind of official investigation. Evidence for delayed disclosures.
Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Mossige, Reichelt, and Tjersland (2005)	This study investigated the context in which children were able to report their child sexual abuse experiences; their views as to what made it difficult to talk about abuse; what helped them in the disclosing process; and their parent's perceptions of their disclosure processes	Qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was used. Therapeutic interviews o the children and mostly their mothers were analyzed through a qualitative approach. Follow-up interviews were held 1 year later	20 families with a total of 22 children participated. All children had told about experiences that created concerns for care-givers about CSA. Children's ages ranged between 3 and 16 years (average age 7.5 years); 15 girls and 7 boys. Sexually abused by someone in the family or a close person to the family	None of the children told of abuse immediately after it occurred. Children exposed to repetitive abuse kept this as a secret for up to several years; 17 told their mothers first, 3 first told a friend, 1 told their father, and 1 their uncle. Majority of remarks that led to the suspicion of CSA were made in situations where someone engaged the child in a dialogue about what was bothering them, resulting in a referral. The children felt it was difficult to find situations containing enough privacy and prompts that they could share their experiences. When the children did	The results indicate that disclosure is a fundamentally dialogical process that becomes less difficult if children perceive that there is an opportunity to talk, a purpose for speaking and a connection has been established to what they are talking about. Strengthening parent-child relationships is an important practice implication

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Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Staller and Nelson-Gardell (2005)	The purpose of this study was to understand the full process of CSA disclosure and how this unfolded for preadolescent and adolescent girls. Examined what facilitated and hindered disclosure and subsequent consequences	Secondary analysis of qualitative focus group data. Original project consisted of four focus groups conducted within the context of ongoing therapy for girls who had experienced CSA. Secondary analysis consisted of written narrative summaries of each session grouping these conceptually, and examining their interconnectedness	Sample consisted of 34 participants from four groups. Sessions analyzed were between 60 and 90 min long; audiotaped and later transcribed for content analysis	Findings are reported in three major domains: (1) self-phase: where children come to understand victimization internally; (2) confidant selection-reaction phase: where they select a time, place, and person to tell and then whether that person's reaction was supportive or hostile; and (3) consequences phase: good and bad that continued to inform their ongoing strategies of telling. The actions and reactions of adults were significant and informed the girls' decisions. The consequences phase was further subdivided into four aspects: (1) gossiping and news networks, (2) changing relationships, (3) institutional responses and the afterlife of telling, and (4) insider and outsider communities	disclose they did it in situations where the topic of child sexual abuse was in some form addressed or activated, where someone recognized the child's cues and probed further. They also were sensitive to others' reactions, and whether their disclosures would be misinterpreted. Several of the children perceived negative consequences as major factors contributing to delaying disclosure. They were primarily concerned about negative effects for the mother. The mothers said they were also sensitive to the children's feelings. If their children showed signs of distress and did not want to talk, the mothers would change the subject or not pursue the topic further
Alaggia (2004)	The study sought to examine influences that inhibit or promote children's disclosure of CSA to address gaps in knowledge about how, when, and under what circumstances victims of CSA disclose	The study employed LIM—a phenomenological design. Intensive interviewing that were 2 hr long on average generated data for a thematic analysis. The interview guide was	Using purposive sampling 24 adult survivors of intrafamilial abuse between ages of 18 and 65 (average age 41.2) were recruited from agencies and one university; 57% male and 43% female;	Through analysis of the interview new categories of disclosure were identified to add to existing types. Three previously identified were confirmed in these data: accidental, purposeful, and prompted/elicitated accounted for 42% of disclosure patterns in the study sample. Over half the disclosure patterns described by the study sample did not fit these	This study expanded types of CSA disclosures to more fully understand how children and adults disclose. And under what circumstances. Asking people to recount events that occurred in childhood is susceptible to memory failure, especially when memories were forgotten,

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Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Crisma, Bascelli, Paci, and Romito (2004)	The main goals of this study were to understand impediments that prevent adolescents from disclosing CSA and seeking help from their social network and/or the services	In-depth telephone (anonymous) interviews were conducted after informed consent was explained and obtained. Three investigators experienced in counseling CSA counseling conducted the interviews which were recorded with permission. Three researchers independently scored the interviews according to a coding framework	The sample was comprised of 36 young people who experienced sexual abuse in adolescence; 35 females and 1 male; aged 12–17. Some of the sample experienced sexual violence in a dating relationship	previously established categories. Three additional disclosure categories emerged: behavioral and indirect verbal attempts, disclosures intentionally withheld, and disclosures triggered by recovered memories	delayed, or repressed and later recovered. Distortion and revision of events are also potential problems in recall. High degree of trustworthiness of the data was achieved and quotes provided supported the categories This study represented the findings of a mixed sample of survivors of child sexual abuse and intimate partner violence. The study was conducted in Italy and it is not clear what sexual abuse response training is available. There may have been a selection bias as the most dissatisfied survivors responded to the research call
Jonzon and Lindblad (2004)	Study purpose was to explore how abuse traits, openness, reactions to CSA disclosure, and social support were related. Differences based on severity of abuse, timing and outcomes of disclosure, social support, and predicting factors of positive and negative reactions were probed	Adult women reporting CSA by someone close were interviewed using semi-structured guides together with questionnaires. Data on victimization and current social support were retrieved through the questionnaires, and data on disclosure and reactions were gathered through the interviews with participants	122 adult women between 20 and 60 years old (average age of 41 years) reporting exposure to child sexual abuse by someone close before the age of 18 and had told someone about at least one abuse event. 90% were Swedish subjects. Purposive sampling strategy was used	Abuse characteristics: abuse by multiple perpetrators was more common than by a single perpetrator. Age of onset was often before age of 7, with an average duration of 7 years. Severely abused women had talked to more of their social network, especially to professionals. Disclosures: 32% disclosed during childhood (before the age of 18) with an average of 21 years delay. Women who had disclosed in childhood reported more instances of physical abuse, multiple perpetrators, use of violence, and were more likely to have confronted a perpetrator, and had received a negative first reaction. Factors	68% delayed disclosure until adulthood. At the time of the study, it was one of the first studies to focus on the interplay between social support networks and disclosure of child sexual abuse. The study results are somewhat limited by an overrepresentation of severely abused women. Retrospective study and self-report of information could imply recall issues and thus limits the accuracy of the information obtained on abuse and disclosure characteristics. Cross-sectional

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**Table 1.** (continued)

Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Kogan (2004)	The purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence the disclosures made by female survivors of USE in childhood and adolescence. The predictors of both the timing of disclosure and the recipient of the disclosure were investigated	Data were gathered from a subsample of female adolescents that participated in the NSA, which consisted of structured phone interviews. USEs reported in the NSA were assessed using a modified version of the Incident Classification Interview. They were then asked a series of questions about each episode of unwanted sexual contact including event characteristics and perpetrator characteristics	A subsample of 263 adolescent females between 12 and 17 years old, mean age of 15.2 years old, who reported at least one unwanted sexual contact in the NSA. Participant characteristics, USE characteristics, and family contextual attributes were explored	significantly predicting delay were younger age at first event and no use of violence. Disclosure outcomes: of the 26 women who told in childhood during a period with ongoing abuse, 15 women were continuously abused after disclosure Children under the age of 7 were at a higher risk for delayed disclosures. Participants whose USE occurred between the ages of 7 and 13 were most likely to tell an adult. Adolescents (14–17) were more likely to tell only peers than children aged 7–10 years. Children under 11 were more likely to tell an adult, but were at risk for delaying disclosure beyond a month. Children aged 11–13 tended to disclose within a month. Closer relationship to the perpetrator or a family member was associated with delayed disclosure. Immediate disclosure was more likely with stranger perpetration. Fear for one's life during and penetration were associated with disclosure to adults. Family factors linked to disclosure were (1) drug abusing household member, which made survivors more likely to disclose more promptly and (2) never living with both parents was associated with nondisclosure	This study examined factors including disclosures of USEs in childhood and adolescence in a nationally representative sample of female adolescents who participated in the NSA. Surveys for investigations of victimization experiences may be biased due to underreporting. Adolescents who refused to report or discuss an USE may represent a source of systematic bias and would make the results generalizable only to adolescents who are willing to disclose USE via survey. Although data may be retrospective, recall bias may have been minimized in this study since participants were adolescents, and so the time lag between the USE and the interview were presumably shorter than a study of adult participants recalling CSA experiences
Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, and Gordon (2003)	The purpose of this study was to investigate variables associated with delay of disclosure of CSA and test a model for factors that influence how quickly children disclose sexual abuse	Case file reviews of data obtained from prosecution files, as well as from structured interviews with the children's caretaker and observations of child interviews. Trained graduate students and one victim advocate completed the Sexual Assault Profile	Sample consisted of 218 children referred to prosecutors' offices for alleged CSA. All children in the sample had disclosed their abuse in some manner. Children ranged in age from 2 to 16 years at the beginning of abuse; 3–16 years at the end of the abuse, and 4–16 years at the time of the	64% disclosed within a month and 29% within 6 months. Five variables for the model were tested. (1) age: children who were older took longer to disclose and older children feared more negative consequences to others than younger children; (2) type of abuse: victims of intrafamilial families took longer to disclose—victims of intrafamilial abuse feared greater negative consequences to others compared to victims of extrafamilial abuse; (3) fear of negative consequences: children who feared	This study represents a higher rate of disclosers within a month. These cases had been reported to authorities and were in process of prosecution which may explain higher rate of early disclosures. Legal sample with higher rate of extrafamilial abuse (52%) may also account for earlier disclosures. Model suggests that older children, victims of intrafamilial abuse; felt greater responsibility for the abuse, and perceiving

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Study	Purpose	Design	Sample	Findings	Summary
Smith, Letourneau, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick, and Best (2000)	The study focus was to gather data from a large sample of women about the length of time women who were raped before age 18 delayed disclosure who they disclosed to, and variables that predicted disclosure within 1 month	questionnaire for child abuse and their disclosure. Children's perception of responsibility and fear of negative consequences were probed. Correlational analyses were conducted with path analyses to test the hypothesized causal relations among variables Structured telephone interviews that lasted approximately 35 min were used to collect data using a computer-assisted telephone interview system. All telephone interviews were conducted with each question on a computer screen. The survey consisted of several measures designed to elicit demographic information, psychiatric symptoms, substance use, and victimization history. The present study reports on data from the demographic and child rape victimization questions	initial police report; 77% female, 70% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, and 11% African American. Predominantly middle to low SES. Approximately 47% intrafamilial abuse	negative consequences of disclosure took longer to disclose, children who believed that their disclosure would bring harm to others took longer to disclose, fear of negative consequences to the self or the perpetrator was unrelated to time of disclosure, and girls more than boys feared negative consequences to others; (4) Perceived responsibility: children who felt greater responsibility for the abuse took longer to disclose and older children felt more responsibility for the abuse; and (5) gender was not significantly correlated with time to disclosure	negative consequences to disclosing took longer to disclose. Well-designed study with high level of rigor. Produced a viable model of disclosure for further investigations. However, researchers were not able to interview children directly
			Two probability samples. Wave 1 was a random sample of 2,009 respondents selected from stratified samples of defined jurisdictions. Random digital dialing was used to solicit households for listed and unlisted telephone numbers. Second random sample of 2,000 women between the ages of 18 and 34 was selected. Both Wave 1 and Wave 2 data were weighted to conform to the 1989 Census statistics	288 (9%) reported experiencing at least one event that met the study's definition of childhood rape. The average age at the time of the first rape was 10.9 years. Of the 288 women who reported a child rape, 28% stated that they had never told anyone about this sexual assault until specifically queried by the interviewer for this study. 58% did not disclose for over 1 year and up to 5 years post-rape. 27% disclosed within a month. Among women who disclosed prior to their NWS interview close friends were the most common person to whom victims made disclosures, followed by mothers and other immediate family members. Fewer than 10% of victims reported making their initial disclosure to social workers or law enforcement personnel. Only 12% of child rape victims stated that their assaults were reported to authorities at some point	The time frame of this survey may have had contextual implications. The majority of child rapes reported by this sample occurred prior to the large-scale child assault prevention education programs that were begun in the 1980s that teach children that assaults (including CSA) are wrong and should be disclosed to responsible adults. This information may have influenced (and may currently be influencing) young women's disclosure patterns. For Wave 1, comparison of these data with the population parameters obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that the sample closely matched the demographic attributes of the population of U.S. women

Note. SCL-90 = Symptom Check List-90; SES = socioeconomic status; LIM = long interview method; CSA = child sexual abuse; NICHD = National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; USE = unwanted sexual experiences; NSA = National Survey of Adolescents; NWS = National Women's Study; QIDS = Questionnaire informatssé sur les délinquants sexuels.

examples of this usage were found in the research questions, interview guides, and surveys examined: “How and when do people decide to tell others about their early sexual experiences with adults?” (Hunter, 2011, p. 161); “Some men take many years to tell someone that they were sexually abused. Please describe why it may be difficult for men to tell about/discuss the sexual abuse” (Easton, Saltzman, & Willis, 2014, p. 462). “Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to elicit a narrative regarding their experiences of telling . . .” (McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2012, p. 1160). “Who was the first person you told?” (Schaeffer, Leventhal, & Anes, 2011, p. 346).

There was sound consistency between studies, defining disclosure in multifaceted ways with uniform use of categories of prompted, purposeful, withheld, accidental, direct, and indirect. However, defining the period of time that would delineate a disclosure as delayed varied widely across studies, wherein some studies viewed 1 week or 1 month as a delayed disclosure (i.e., Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Kogan, 2004; Schönbucher, Maier, Moher-Kuo, Schnyder, & Lamdolt, 2012). Other studies simply reported average years of delay sometimes as long as from 20 to 46 years (Easton, 2013; Jonzon & Linblad, 2004; Smith et al., 2000).

Second, the number of qualitative studies has increased significantly over the last 15 years. This rise is in response to a previous dearth of qualitative studies. Based on Jones’s (2000) observation that disclosure factors and outcomes had been well documented through quantitative methods; in a widely read editorial, he recommended “Qualitative studies which are able to track the individual experiences of children and their perception of the influences upon them which led to their disclosure of information are needed to complement . . .” (p. 270).

Third, although a few studies strived to obtain representative samples in quantitative investigations (Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Lamb, 2005; Kogan, 2004; Smith et al., 2000), sampling was for the most part convenience based, relying on voluntary participation in surveys and consent-based participation in file reviews (Collings, Griffiths, & Kumalo, 2005; Priebe & Sveidin, 2008; Schönbucher et al., 2012; Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, & Fairholm, 2009a). Therefore, generalizability of findings is understandably limited. The qualitative studies used purposive sampling as is deemed appropriate for transferability of findings to similar populations. Some of those samples contained unique characteristics, since they were sought through counseling centers or sexual advocacy groups. These would be considered clinical samples producing results based on disclosures that may have been delayed or problematic. This might presumably produce data skewed toward barriers and bring forward less information on disclosure facilitators.

Through an in-depth, second-level analysis, this review identified five distinct themes and subthemes beyond the general trends as noted earlier.

**Theme 1:** Disclosure is viewed as an ongoing process as opposed to a discrete event—iterative and interactive in nature. A subtheme was identified regarding disclosure as

being facilitated within a dialogical and relational context is being more clearly delineated.

**Theme 2:** Contemporary disclosure models reflect a social-ecological, person-in-environment perspective to understand the complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual, and cultural factors involved in CSA disclosure. Subthemes include new categories of disclosure and a growing focus on previously missing cultural and contextual factors.

**Theme 3:** Age and gender are strong predictors for delaying disclosure or withholding disclosure with trends showing fewer disclosures by younger children and boys. One subtheme emerged that intrafamilial abuse/family-like relationship of perpetrator has a bearing on disclosure delays or withholding.

**Theme 4:** There is a lack of a cohesive life-course perspective. One subtheme includes the lack of data within the 18- to 24-year-old emerging adult population.

**Theme 5:** Significantly more information is available on barriers than on facilitators of CSA disclosure. Subthemes of shame, self-blame, and fear are uniformly identified as disclosure deterrents.

*Disclosure as an ongoing process: Iterative and interactive in nature.*

Disclosure is now generally accepted as a complex and lifelong process, with current trends showing that CSA disclosures are too often delayed until adulthood (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Easton, 2013; Hunter, 2011). Knowledge building about CSA disclosure has moved in the direction of understanding this as an iterative and interactive process rather than a discrete, one-time event. Since the new millennium, disclosure is being viewed as a dynamic, rather than static, process and described “not as a single event but rather a carefully measured process” (Alaggia, 2005, p. 455). The catalyst for this view originates from Summit (1983) who initially conceptualized CSA disclosures as process based, although this notion was not fully explored until several years later. Examinations of Summit’s (1983) groundbreaking proposition of the CSA accommodation (CSAA) model produced varying results as to whether his five stages of secrecy, helplessness, entrapment and accommodation, delayed, conflicted, and unconvincing disclosures, and retraction or recantation, hold validity (for a review, see London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005). However, the idea of disclosure as a process has been carried over into contemporary thinking.

Recently, McElvaney, Greene, and Hogan (2012) detailed a process model of disclosure wherein they describe an interaction of internal factors with external motivators which they liken to a “pressure cooker” effect, preceded by a period of containment of the secret. Moreover, this and other studies strongly suggest disclosures are more likely to occur within a dialogical context—activated by discussions of abuse or prevention forums providing information about sexual abuse (Hershkowitz et al., 2005; Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Mossige, Reichelt, & Tjersland, 2005; Ungar et al., 2009a). The term

dialogical simply means to participate in dialogue. Key dialogical vehicles identified in these studies were providing sexual abuse information through prevention programs, being asked about sexual abuse, and being prompted to tell (McElvaney et al., 2012; Ungar et al., 2009a).

*Contemporary models of CSA disclosure reflect a social-ecological perspective.* Knowledge on CSA disclosure has been steadily advancing toward a holistic understanding of the complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual, and cultural factors (Alaggia & Kirshenbaum, 2005; Brazelton, 2015; Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Where at one time factors examined and identified were predominantly of intrapersonal factors of child victims, knowledge construction has shifted to fuller social-ecological, person-in-environment explanations (Alaggia, 2010; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Easton et al., 2014; Hunter, 2011; Ungar, Tutty, McConnell, Barter, & Fairholm, 2009b). Social-ecological explanations open up more opportunities to intervene in facilitating earlier disclosures. Alaggia (2010) proposes an ecological mapping of what individual, interpersonal, environmental, and contextual influences impede or promote CSA disclosures based on analysis of in-depth interview data of 40 adult survivors. Subsequently, based on a sample of 67 adult survivors, Collin-Vézina, Sablonni, Palmer, and Milne (2015) identified three broad categories, closely aligned with an ecological framework that impede CSA disclosure: (1) barriers from within, (2) barriers in relation to others, and (3) barriers in relation to the social world which can be aligned to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors.

A summary of knowledge building using a social-ecological framework follows. Knowledge gained in the intrapersonal domain includes expanded conceptualization of disclosure by building on previous categories of accidental, purposeful, and prompted disclosure to also include behavioral and indirect attempts to tell, intentionally withheld disclosure, and triggered and recovered memories (Alaggia, 2004). Categories of indirect behavioral disclosure patterns have been further verified in follow-up research by Hunter (2011), and through an extensive file review that used Alaggia's (2004) disclosure framework to analyze their data (Collins et al., 2005) for verification.

Interpersonal factors have also emerged in regard to certain family characteristics as disclosure barriers. Families with rigidly fixed gender roles, patriarchal attitudes, power imbalances, other forms of child abuse and domestic violence, chaotic family structure, dysfunctional communication, and social isolation have been found to suppress disclosure (Alaggia & Kirshenbaum, 2005; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Fontes & Plummer, 2010). In addition, relationship with perpetrator is a factor whereby research indicates that disclosure is made more difficult when the perpetrator is a family member or close to the family (Dumont, Messerschmitt, Vila, Bohu, & Rey-Salmon, 2014; Easton, 2013; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Hershkovitz et al., 2005; Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Schönbucher et al., 2012). This is especially a barrier when the perpetrator lives with the victim (LeClerc & Wortley, 2015).

In terms of environmental factors, one study revealed that neighborhood/community conditions can hinder disclosure when there is lack of school involvement in providing a supportive environment, such as in following up on troubling student behavior (Alaggia, 2010). Additionally, a child victim's anticipation of a negative response to disclosure, especially that they may not be believed by others outside their family such as neighbors or other community members, has shown to deter disclosure (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015).

Cultural factors influencing CSA disclosure have been studied to a much lesser degree. Despite this, a few important studies examining critical sociocultural factors now exist for better understanding CSA disclosure within a cultural context (Brazelton, 2015; Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Among these important contributions, Brazelton's (2015) research has delineated CSA disclosure processes as "shaped by relational, racial, socio-cultural, historical, and developmental factors" (p. 182). In a unique study using culturally focused research literature as data triangulated with clinical case material, culturally based belief systems in many cultures have been found to foster family climates that can silence children from disclosing abuse (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Taboos about sexuality, patriarchal attitudes, and devaluation of women are among some of the cultural barriers that inhibit disclosure (Fontes & Plummer, 2010).

Clearly, disclosure conceptualizations are being integrated into a social-ecological model of individual and developmental factors, family dynamics, neighborhood, and community context as well as cultural and societal attitudes toward better understanding disclosure barriers and facilitators (Alaggia, 2010), although more data are needed on cultural and contextual factors.

#### *Age and gender as predictors of disclosure*

*Age.* Age is consistently found to be an influential factor in CSA disclosure, making the life stage of the victim/survivor a critical consideration. Studies draw distinctions in age-groups falling into either under or over 18 years of age. Eighteen years of age was the common age cutoff point that investigators chose in order to distinguish child/youth populations from adult samples. Sixteen of the studies drew on samples of children and youth, while the other 15 studies sampled adults over the age of 18, and a further two studies used mixed age-groups (refer to Table 1). Among the child and youth samples, the age ranges spanned from preschool to late adolescence (3–17 years of age), with varying methodological approaches implemented across age cohorts. For younger cohorts, file reviews and secondary data analyses of CSA reports were typically undertaken. Adolescents were most often given surveys. Sometimes children and youth were interviewed as part of administering a survey or as a follow-up (Crisma et al., 2004; Hershkovitz et al., 2005; Ungar et al., 2009b). In the majority of child and adolescent samples, sexual abuse concerns were already flagged to investigative authorities. However, the work of Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, and Fairholm (2009a, 2009b) is one exception, whereby their survey elicited new disclosures.

Adult studies typically had a mean age between 40 and 50 years. Interviews were the main data collection method with a few exceptions using survey designs (i.e., Easton, 2013; Kogan, 2004; Smith et al., 2000) and case file reviews (i.e., Collings et al., 2005; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). Results show a clear trend toward increased likelihood of disclosure in older youth, and findings from adult samples showing a preponderance of disclosures in adulthood, with the large majority of participants of adults reporting never having had a sexual abuse complaint filed with investigative authorities as a child or an adolescent (i.e., Hunter, 2011; Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016; Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008; Ungar et al., 2009b).

With children and youth under the ages of 18 distinct patterns emerged. First, accidental detection, rather than purposeful disclosure, is more likely to occur with younger children. For example, in one large-scale study of over 1,737 file reviews, over half of the CSA-related cases were identified through accidental and eyewitness detection (61%), while less than one third were purposeful disclosures initiated by the child victim (Collings et al., 2005). A second pattern which emerged is that rates of disclosure increase with age, especially into adulthood, which is supported by persistent findings of high rates of delayed disclosure reported later in the life course by adult survivors (Collings et al., 2005; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Easton, 2013; Jonzon & Linblad, 2004; Kogan, 2004; Leclerc & Wortley, 2015; Sorsoli et al., 2008). While gender and relationship with the perpetrator are considerable factors in CSA disclosure, age is consistently a stronger predictor of disclosure (or nondisclosure) (Hershkowitz et al., 2005; Leclerc & Wortley, 2015). Third, younger children who disclose are more likely to do so in an interview situation or other environment that provides prompts or questions about sexual abuse (Hershkowitz et al., 2005; McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014; Schaeffer et al., 2011), but this trend can also be seen in older youth (Ungar et al., 2009a, 2009b).

**Gender.** A number of studies have recently focused on CSA disclosures with male victims, since males have been an understudied population (Alaggia, 2005; Easton, 2013; Easton et al., 2014; Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016). Most investigations that sampled both sexes show females outweighing male participants. Although women are at double the risk of being subjected to CSA, the ratio of women to men in most disclosure studies has not been representative. This finding may be indicative of male victims more likely delaying disclosing their CSA experiences, leaving male disclosure in child and youth samples underrepresented (Hébert, Tourigny, Cyr, McDuff, & Joly, 2009; Ungar et al., 2009b).

Easton, Saltzman, and Willis (2014) have been developing gender-specific modeling of disclosure examining male disclosures. Their proposed model groups male disclosures into barrier categories as determined by individual factors, interpersonal issues, and factors that are sociopolitical in nature. These authors suggest that predominant gender norms around masculinity reinforce the tendency for male victims of CSA to blame themselves

for the abuse, resulting in no disclosure. Male participants in a subsequent study also relayed that gender norms and stereotypes contributed to them concealing the abuse because they were abused by a woman (Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016). In the one study that compared male and female disclosures, investigator found that men's fears of being viewed as homosexual; profound feelings of stigmatization or isolation because of the belief that boys are rarely victimized; and fear of becoming an abuser acted as disclosure barriers. Whereas females felt more conflicted about who was responsible for the abuse and more strongly anticipated being blamed and not believed (Alaggia, 2005).

**Lack of a life-course perspective.** Given that the study of CSA disclosure draws on age-groups ranging from samples of very young children to retrospective studies of adult survivors, with significant developmental considerations, this area of study lacks an intentional cohesive life-course perspective. Most data are derived from either cross-sectional or retrospective designs, with few longitudinal studies. There are a series of sound, yet disconnected, studies focusing on specific age-groups of children and adolescents, along with adult retrospective studies. Thus, the available knowledge base does not allow for a cohesive picture of CSA disclosure processes and pathways over the life course to emerge.

The life-course perspective has long been recommended as a critical lens for the study of child abuse (Browning & Laumann, 1997; Williams, 2003). For example, a life-course perspective has been utilized to understand the immediate- and long-term effects of CSA on the developing child victim (Browning & Laumann, 1997). Further, a life-course perspective is important in terms of examining age of onset of CSA to explain the differential effects of sexual victimization and developmental impacts in terms of understanding their ability to disclose—effects that need to be understood within a developmental context, especially for designing appropriate interventions for disclosure at critical transitions from early childhood through to adolescence and into adulthood. In addition, important “turning points” in life may facilitate disclosures. For example, entry into adulthood given that delayed disclosure occurs more often in adulthood. Alaggia (2004, 2005) found that being in a committed relationship or the birth of children acted as facilitators for some survivors to disclose, especially to their spouses. These significant life events, as contributing to disclosures, bear further examination.

**Summary of barriers and facilitators.** Research over the past 15 years continues to uncover barriers to CSA disclosure at a higher frequency than that of facilitators. As stated previously, this might be the result of sampling methods whereby participants who volunteer for disclosure research may have had more negative disclosure experiences, especially since many report delays in disclosure. The following section outlines the major trends in both barriers and facilitators (see Table 2).

**Barriers.** Age and gender were found to contribute to barriers as covered in Theme 3. Disclosures generally increase with age

**Table 2.** Factors Influencing Child Sexual Abuse Disclosures.

Barriers	Facilitators
Age: The younger the child victim, the less likely they will purposefully disclose.	Age: Disclosures increase with age, especially in adulthood.
Gender: Males may be less likely to disclose in childhood/adolescence, fear of being seen as homosexual and as a victim, females experience more self-blame and anticipation of being blamed and/or not believed	Gender: Slight trend toward females who are older (adolescent) to disclose before adulthood
Relationship to perpetrator: If the perpetrator is a family member or in a family-like role, disclosure is less likely to happen	Relationship to perpetrator: If the perpetrator is not living with the victim, disclosure rates increase
Internal: Shame, self-blame, and fear are psychological barriers. In addition, fear of negative consequences on the family and for self-safety inhibits disclosure	Dialogical context: Opportunities to disclose through discussion, therapeutic relationship, information sessions on sexuality, and sexual abuse prevention programs
Family relations: Families with a patriarchal structure, rigidly fixed gender roles, dysfunctional communication, other forms of abuse (i.e., domestic violence), and isolation inhibit disclosure	Family relations: Supportive parent-child relationship.
Environmental and cultural context: Lack of discussion about sexuality; passive acceptance that unwanted sexual experiences are inevitable; not wanting to bring shame to the family by admitting sexual abuse; lack of involvement from neighbors, school personnel; and stigma perpetuated by societal perceptions	Involvement of others: Eyewitnesses coming forward and reporting; detection through community members, professionals
	Environmental and cultural context: Promotion of open discussion of sexuality; community member involvement

as children gain more developmental capacity, understanding of sexual abuse as victimization, and increased independence. Males are somewhat less likely to disclose, but this is often in interaction with other factors in the environment such as societal attitudes that promote hypermasculinity as desirable, attitudes that perpetuate negative views of boys and men who are victims, and homophobic attitudes (Alaggia, 2010; Easton et al., 2014; Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016).

Victims of intrafamilial abuse when the offender is a parent, caregiver, significant family member, or someone in a family-like role are less likely to disclose immediately or at all in childhood/adolescence because of obvious power differentials and dependency needs (Collings et al., 2005; Dumont et al., 2014; Hershkowitz et al., 2005; Kogan, 2004; Leclerc & Wortley, 2015; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Schaeffer et al., 2011).

Further, the perpetrator residing with their victim(s) increases the likelihood of no disclosure (Leclerc & Wortley, 2015).

Internalized victim-blaming, mechanisms to protect oneself (such as minimizing the impact of the abuse), and developmental immaturity at the onset of abuse constituted internal barriers. Further, shame, self-blame, and fear have been identified as significant factors deterring disclosure (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Crisma et al., 2004; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Hunter, 2011; Kogan, 2004; McElvaney & Culhane, 2015; McElvaney et al., 2014). However, aspects of shame, self-blame and fear, and have not been fully explored in research. Since these are strong predictors of disclosure suppression, they bear further examination in future research to understand more fully how they operate in disclosure processes.

In terms of interpersonal and environmental factors, family dynamics can play a part in deterring disclosure. As previously mentioned, families characterized by rigidly defined gender roles, patriarchal attitudes that perpetuate power imbalances

between men and women, parents and children, presence of other forms of child abuse and/or domestic violence, chaotic family structure, dysfunctional communication, and social isolation have been found to suppress disclosure (Alaggia & Kirshenbaum, 2005; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Fontes & Plummer, 2010). In regard to broader environmental factors, disclosure can be hindered when involved and supportive community members are not available, or not trained in sensitive responses, or when child victims anticipate not being believed by neighbors and other people outside the family (Alaggia, 2010; Collin-Vézina et al., 2015). Further, barriers in relation to the social world were identified as stigmatization, the negative labeling of sexual abuse victims, and taboos surrounding sexuality and talking about sex as driven by cultural norms (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Fontes & Plummer, 2010).

Identification of cultural barriers is important recent contribution to understanding disclosure processes—and in particular to the obstacles. Findings related to cultural barriers included themes of children's voices not being heard leading to silencing, the normalization of the sexualization and objectification of girls and women, and the perpetuation of hypermasculinity in men—all acting as barriers in terms of stigma to disclosure (Alaggia, 2005, 2010; Easton et al., 2014). Brazelton (2015) similarly found that lack of discussions about sex, young age at the onset of sexual abuse, therefore not having the language to express what was happening to them, and preserving the family good name by not talking about abuse in the family were also barriers to disclosure.

Finally, it may be the case that more barriers continue to be identified over facilitators of CSA disclosure perhaps because of the methods employed in studies—particularly those drawing on adult populations who delayed disclosure. These samples may not be representative of the overall population of CSA victims, since they may have had more negative disclosure

experiences, consequently more readily identifying barriers. On the other hand, these findings may speak to the actual imbalance between facilitating factors and barriers for disclosure, the latter carrying more weight in the victims/survivors' experiences, thus, explaining the high rates of disclosures delayed until adulthood.

**Facilitators.** Although fewer disclosure facilitators are identified in this review, very important facilitators were nonetheless uncovered—ones that should be noted for professionals in this field of practice. Internal factors that facilitate disclosures include symptoms that become unbearable, getting older with increased developmental efficacy, and realizing that an offence was committed (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Crisma et al., 2004; Easton, 2013; Hershkowitz et al. 2007; McElavaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014; Schaeffer et al., 2011). Circumstantial facilitators are those where the child discloses because there has been evidence provided, eye-witnessing has occurred, and a report has been made. Environmental factors include settings that provide opportunities such as counseling, interviews, information sessions and educational forums/workshops, and prevention programs for children and youth to disclose.

To elaborate, dialogical contexts about CSA for children and youth can provide opportunities for discussion that may facilitate disclosures (Jensen et al., 2005). The research shows creating open dialogue in relationship contexts, to offset the power and influence of the perpetrator, can facilitate earlier disclosure. Among disclosure facilitators is being asked about abuse and given the opportunity to “tell” (McElavaney et al., 2014); workshops on abuse and sexual abuse, in particular, can facilitate disclosures (Ungar et al., 2009b); and using culturally sensitive probes and questions (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). In Gagnier and Collin-Vézina's (2016) study, positive disclosure experiences were described by participants as those where they felt that they had been listened to, were safe, were believed, and were not judged by the person they disclosed to. Further, family members and friends (peers) of the child victim can act as key supports to creating an open relational context and fostering positive responses (Jensen et al., 2005; Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Schönbucher et al., 2012; Ungar et al., 2009b). In particular, as children grow older, they are more likely to disclose to a peer, as shown in a number of studies, and this is an important reality for counselors and educators to be aware of (Dumont et al., 2014; Kogan, 2004; Schönbucher et al., 2012; Ungar et al., 2009b).

## Discussion

Through examination of 33 studies published since the year 2000, this review identified five distinct themes regarding CSA disclosure: (1) Disclosure is best viewed as an iterative, interactive process rather than a discrete event done within a relational context; (2) contemporary models reflect a social-ecological, person-in-environment framework for understanding the complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual, and cultural factors involved in CSA disclosure;

(3) age and gender are significant disclosure factors; (4) there is a lack of a life-course perspective; and (5) barriers to disclosure continue to outweigh facilitators. Based on these themes, a number of conclusions are drawn from this review. First, disclosure as a process is emphasized throughout contemporary research. Advances have been made in understanding these complex processes. However, the disclosure process over time—for example, how the first detection of CSA or attempts to disclose in childhood impact later disclosures—are not well understood. This is the result of the absence of a cohesive life-course perspective in investigations, although age consistently surfaces as significantly influencing CSA disclosure. Using a life-course perspective through the use of longitudinal studies is recommended.

The use of varied methodological designs, depending on the developmental stage of the victims/survivors, influences the data generated and subsequent findings. For example, most studies on children and youth are based on file reviews of cases that have been brought to the attention of authorities, or surveys, with only a few studies using interviewing of younger children. Therefore, there is less information available on process issues with children and youth. In contrast, research on adult populations largely favors the use of qualitative interview methods for retrospective inquiry producing important process findings. In addition, investigations have not yet captured the disclosure experiences of adults in the “emerging adult” stage given that adult studies have failed to recognize that the age range of 18–24, which is now considered a developmental phase defined by neurobiological developmental uniqueness. As well, late adulthood has not been given attention as shown by the absence of participants representing this age-group in current research (70+). With a swelling geriatric population in North America, issues of historic CSA can be expected to surface and, with that, new disclosures. This trend is also anticipated due to attitudinal shifts that have presumably occurred over the last two generations about revealing such traumas and changing views about discussing sexual victimization.

Interview guides used in a number of studies intentionally probed for facilitators, producing notable findings. For example, one such finding focuses on the importance of creating a contextually supportive environment to promote disclosure across the life course. These include developing therapeutic relational contexts for disclosure by providing information about sexuality, sexual abuse, prevention programming, and by asking directly. Disclosures to professionals are positive outcomes of how therapeutic contexts work; however, for forensic purposes prompting such disclosures would be viewed as problematic in legal settings, seriously compromising testimonies for trial proceedings. This is one example that speaks to the structural barriers victims and survivors run up against time and time again. Facilitators that show evidence to promote disclosure in one domain (therapeutic) are seen to work against CSA survivors in another domain—such as legal settings when perpetrators face prosecution. Defense attorneys will use this as evidence that the disclosure was prompted, and therefore the disclosure is potentially seen as not credible. Broadcasting of

the frequency of acquitted cases or rulings in favor of the perpetrator through media outlets, often sensationalized, become a further compounding barrier. Given the review findings, we conclude that barriers and facilitators to CSA disclosures are nuanced and clearly embedded within intrapersonal, interpersonal, environmental, contextual, and cultural domains—often interlocked in complex ways.

### Limitations

Although comprehensive in nature with its life-course coverage, this review may be limited by its qualitative, thematic focus rather than providing an evaluative, quantitative accounting of CSA disclosures. However, because of the recent focus on disclosure processes, the authors chose a suitably compatible approach—qualitative in nature. As well, a traditional checklist approach in rating the studies was not employed for interrater reliability, since two of the authors hold expertise in CSA disclosure research and are well versed with the literature. This expertise, and through closely following a systematic review framework (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2014), assures that a thorough adjudication of the research literature was completed.

### Implications for Research and Practice

These review findings have implications that can be useful in guiding future research and practice:

- Solid strides are being made in the use of a social–ecological framework to underpin investigations in the CSA disclosure investigations. Research efforts and practice considerations should continue in this vein. Investigating environmental factors and contextual and cultural forces is understudied, necessitating more research in these areas to more fully fill out understanding of CSA disclosure from a social–ecological perspective.
- There is good evidence that CSA disclosures are more likely to occur in a dialogical context—formal helping relationships but as well as other relationships such as peers and trusted adults. Providing information and education on topics of sexuality in general, and sexual abuse specifically, can help children and youth to disclose. Raising awareness and prevention programs can promote disclosures of sexual violence committed against children and youth.
- Goals of therapeutically supported disclosures (i.e., through therapy) may need to take precedence over forensic approaches, if well-being of child victims and adult survivors is to be made paramount. Legal processes may act to facilitate disclosures but can also act as barriers because of the negative outcomes experienced in the court process.
- Practitioners need to keep in mind that the legal system is lagging far behind in knowledge uptake of recent evidence on CSA disclosures so that victims and

survivors continue to be systemically and structurally disadvantaged in legal proceedings.

- Health-care practitioners (i.e., child abuse pediatricians, family practice doctors, clinical nurse specialists, and public health nurses) should be made aware of the evidence in the CSA disclosure literature to create environments for facilitating therapeutic disclosures.
- Given that age is a stable predictor of disclosure of CSA, more studies are needed that make use of a life-course perspective. More longitudinal studies are needed to better identify trends over different life stages.
- The emerging young adult as a developmental age group needs specific investigation. Neuroscience research has established that ages 18–24 is a distinct developmental phase. Late adulthood is another life stage that deserves to be researched.
- Gender needs to be more fully investigated in relation to impact on disclosure. Awareness that boys and girls have unique challenges and barriers in disclosing CSA should be paramount for practitioners.
- Intervention planning should take note that disclosures increase when perpetrators no longer reside with victims, and this finding should be heeded by policy and law makers.
- Shame, self-blame, and fear are intrapersonal factors that persistently emerge as barriers to CSA disclosures and warrant more research to understand how to redress these barriers for earlier disclosures.

### Conclusion

There are still a substantial number of children and youth who are subjected to sexual abuse, despite preventative efforts. Just as concerning is the fact that many victims continue to suffer in silence as evidenced by the high numbers of delayed disclosure. These hidden cases should not be overlooked, and these victims should not be forgotten. Despite significant progress in bringing the issue of CSA to the forefront, improving facilitation of disclosure and increasing positive influences on disclosure processes are still critical in order to protect current and future generations of children and youth from the grave effects of sexual violence. Further, the focus should not be simply on strengthening and shoring up intrapersonal resources of victims to disclose but rather to change environmental conditions to create a more supportive and safer context for CSA victims and survivors to disclose.

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### Author Biographies

**Ramona Alaggia**, MSW, PhD, is an associate professor in social work and the Factor-Inwentash Chair in Children's Mental Health at the University of Toronto. Her teaching and research focuses on gender and violence, sexual abuse disclosures, domestic violence exposure, and resilience processes.

**Delphine Collin-Vézina**, PhD, is an associate professor for School of Social Work, McGill University and director for Centre for Research on Children and Families. She holds the Nicolas Steinmetz and Gilles Julien Chair in Social Pediatrics in Community and the Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Child Welfare. Her work focuses on research and clinical topics related to child maltreatment, child sexual abuse, and trauma.

**Rusan Lateef**, MSW, is a social worker employed in the criminal justice system with adult male offenders in Ontario, Canada. She specializes in the intersection of health and mental health, child sexual abuse disclosures, and she is a researcher on the "Make Resilience Matter" project examining childhood exposure to domestic violence with Dr. Alaggia at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.