



# The Stranger Inside of Me

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# Childbirth & Surviving Sexual Abuse

- Sanctum Midwives
- Evidence
- Survivors & Midwives
- The 'Risks'



# Few Facts & Figures

- Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is increasingly recognised as a major cause of morbidity and mortality. Two recent World Health Organisation (WHO) reports - World Report on Violence and Health (2002) and World Health Report 2002 (2002) - acknowledge that CSA is common in both females (20%) and males (5-10%).
- CSA is even more prevalent in specific populations including substance abusers, the homeless and psychiatric inpatients. (Report of the Scottish Executive Short-Life Working Group on the care needs of people who have survived childhood sexual abuse)
- Over half the babies born to girls 18 years & younger are fathered by men over 20 years older  
( *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1998, V. 280. No. 7), by M. Joycelyn Elders, Former Surgeon General of US and Alexa E. Albert.





## James Mercy from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia,

'Imagine a childhood disease that affects one in five girls and one in seven boys before they reach 18; a disease that can cause dramatic mood swings, erratic behaviour, and even severe conduct disorders among those exposed; a disease that breeds distrust of adults and undermines the possibility of experiencing normal sexual relationships; a disease that can have profound implications for an individuals future health by increasing the risk of problems such a substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicidal behaviour; a disease that replicates itself by causing some of its victims to expose future generations to its debilitating effects.

Imagine what we would do as a society if such a disease existed. We would spare no expense. We would invest heavily in basic and applied research. We would devise systems to identify those affected and provide services to treat them. We would develop and broadly implement prevention campaigns to protect our children. Wouldn't we?'



# Joys & Myths of Motherhood

- Married and planned
- Old Wives Tales
- Pregnancy is a time of joy
- All women feel well & 'blossom'
- No negative feelings for her pregnancy
- Every woman gives birth 'normally'
- She will love her child immediately
- She will breastfeed without any problems



# How relevant is CSA to Childbirth?

- Prevalence CSA in women is 1:4/5
- Births in England & Wales = 600,000
- Therefore it is probable that at least 150,000 childbearing women at any time are survivors of CSA
- Midwives and obstetricians do not have any regular training on these issues



# What is Special about Childbirth?

- The 'Blue Line'
- Increased surveillance
- Dreams & fears
- My body in charge
- Public ownership



# What effect does it have?

## Behavioural

- Perception of 'Self' is altered.
- View themselves as a 'thing' to be used and abused.
- Risk taking behaviours-"If I hurt I feel"
- Use defence mechanisms.
- Personal boundaries are blurred or non-existent.
- Pattern of denial, repression, minimization, dissociation-"not really there".
- Prevented from accessing health care.
- Depression, PTSD, Trauma, Anxiety states, OCD, suicide, infanticide,
- Brain neuro-electroprogramming altered



# Effect on Reproductivity

## Immediate, Short term, Long term

- Trauma
- Infection
- Dyspareunia
- Vaginismus
- Endometriosis
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Hyperemesis
- Teenage pregnancy
- Baby adopted
- Needle phobic
- Rigid control of labour
- Home birth request
- No pain relief
- Requests caesarean
- Reluctance to breastfeed
- Maternal/infant attachment disorder



# Sensitivity & Subjectivity

- History taking
- Investigations
- Touching
- Broken boundaries
- Putting it all back again
- Becoming a mother
- Getting on with life



# Asking Questions.....

- When did you have sex?
- When was your last period?
- Was this baby planned?
- Who is the baby's father?
- Have you had a sexually transmitted disease?
- Have you had a mental illness?
- Have you felt your baby move?



# 'Keeping the Secret'

- Huge cost at stake
- Silence to be broken
- See inside the soul
- Taking my baby away
- I will never be looked at the same again
- My abuser will hurt my baby
- Promise at birth
- Being the best mother



# Critical Moments in Childbirth

- Any examinations
- During questioning
- During vaginal examinations
- When in pain
- During intimate procedures
- Coming into hospital
- When things go wrong
- During epidural



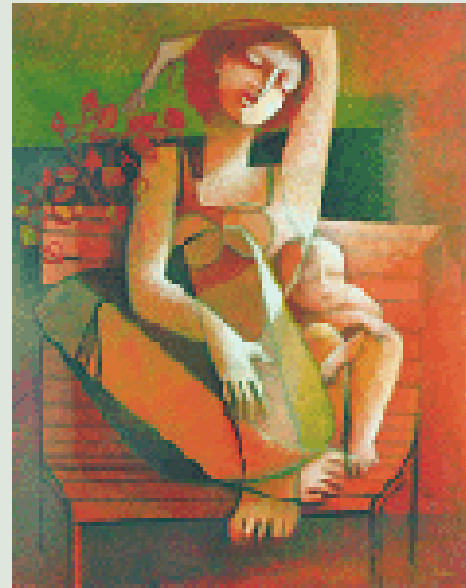
# Surveillance.....

- Taking blood
- Taking blood pressure
- Taking information
- Taking pictures
- Taking measurements
- Taking consent
- 'Taking the baby out'



# 'Stranger Inside of Me'- quotes

- I hated the way it moved
- I hated the way my body felt
- I didn't know who I was anymore
- I couldn't even think about what was happening to me
- I just blanked it out of my mind
- I gave birth at home alone in my bedroom
- I let them do what they had to do...it was what I knew best



# 'Pain of the Past'

Women survivors will disclose their abuse in many ways, initially this may take its form using metaphors or by 'testing the water' (Courtois, 1992; Draucker, 1995).

*The child in me is hurting, she feels such pain inside*

*Of years of passive torture, she lived through in denial.*

*She played a game of make believe,*

*She fooled the best of them*

*But now pretence is over she hurts so much again.*



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# Health Care Response

## Depersonalisation

- To reduce stress levels when facing an emotional situation
- Client is seen as an illness
- Described pathologically- Gravid 5, ARM, VE
- Feel we have to do something



## Re-traumatisation

- Continue with the procedure despite the signs that all is not ok
- Abandonment

## Minimisation

- Do not believe it is important
- Patronise
- Take over and control

# Think about.....


- Think of when you last went to the dentist.....
- How did you feel?
- Were you nervous?
- What made you nervous?
- How did you cope?




# Short Group Work.....



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Discuss what fears a survivor may experience when:

- Confirming pregnancy
  - Attending antenatal clinic
  - During labour
  - Postnatally
  - Becoming a parent
- 

# Case Examples.....

- Karen.....15 pregnancies  
Survivor of multiple sexual abuse, mother of 5 children, , puerperal psychosis x 2, anorexia, self harm, in and out of mental health services, only felt good when she was pregnant



# Case Example.....

- Polly.....articulate & dynamic studio producer, mother of 2 boys, requested a CS at booking, self harms, sexually abused by stepfather as a child. Hated breastfeeding but could not say no, had flashbacks when baby latched onto breast



At 18 weeks her  
baby started  
kicking - it was  
then she started  
to cut her  
abdomen, she  
wanted to cut it  
out

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# My Story.....



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# 'Strong at the Broken Places'

I am available for advice and support in all aspects for midwifery, maternity and personal support in dealing with CSA.

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We all deserve to be treated as individuals, not to be judged because of something society does not understand. Things are not always how they seem, we all have secrets and live our lives with the burden of our pasts. I am a survivor now thriving.

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