

Helping fathers of sexually abused children

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The preliminary results of a Université de Montréal study show that fathers of sexually abused children can suffer from anxiety, depression and grief. Such patriarchs are often overwhelmed by a desire for vengeance, yet little literature exists to help them deal with their pain. Marie-Alexia Allard plans to change that.

"Many [fathers](#) of sexually abused children want revenge and express the desire to torture their child's aggressor," says Allard, a PhD student at the Université de Montréal Department of Psychology. "Supporting the mother is essential to the recovery of the child. And the focus is often put on the mother because the father is the aggressor. But what happens in cases where the father is not the aggressor?"

Preliminary data provides some insight on the extent of the trauma experienced by fathers. "Their situation is particularly difficult," says Allard. "The most violent reactions arise when the aggressor is the stepfather of the child, the mother's new boyfriend or her new husband."

Cases in which vengeance is not the dominant emotion are ones where the aggressor is a family member with whom the father has an emotional bond. This was the situation in more than 50 percent of cases.

For many fathers, the dominant emotion is grief. "Some fathers draw comparisons with the death of a loved one, as many grieve the death of their child's innocence," says Allard. "Fathers told us they became reluctant to tickle their child or give them a bath fearing that physical contact would remind the child of the aggression."

In some cases, a child can reject their father because their aggressor was a man, too. These fathers struggle with deep feelings of helplessness and dismissal. On the other hand, an aggression can become an opportunity for advancing a father-child relationship, especially when the father realizes how sustaining such a relationship is in the best interest of their child.

Provided by University of Montreal

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