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# Case Illustrations of Negative Sexual Experiences Among University Women in Japan

## Victimization Disclosure and Reactions of the Confidant

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A retrospective study of negative sexual experiences (NSEs) was conducted among 532 Japanese university women. More than one third of the respondents reported having experienced at least one NSE, and two thirds were victimized by strangers. When the woman knew the perpetrator well, the NSE was more likely to be repeated. One sixth of victims did not disclose the incident. Older children disclosed incidents more frequently than did younger children. Women in the total disclosure group disclosed the incidents more quickly than did those in the partial disclosure group. Women victimized by strangers were more likely to disclose the incident completely. Less than 10% of women were disappointed with the reaction of the first-disclosure receiver. Unlike results obtained in previous studies, the victims did not necessarily regard it negatively when the incident was viewed less seriously or they were criticized by first-disclosure receivers. On the other hand, instrumental support was not always supportive.

**Keywords:** *negative sexual experiences; disclosure; perception; reaction*

The recognition of the impact and prevalence of sexual abuse and sexual victimization is poor in Japan, although the recognition of child physical abuse has increased during the past few decades. Several explanations may explain this discrepancy. First, because of its covert nature, people think that the prevalence of sexual abuse is low unless physical violence is used. Second, people tend to underestimate the prevalence and impact of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1979) because of its intrinsic horrible nature,

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particularly in the case of incest. Third, victims and their families want to keep abusive incidents secret to maintain their public reputations, motivated by collective value (Toukmanian & Brouwere, 1998). It may also be because of the fact that the feminist movement in Japan has not yet progressed as far as those in Western societies.

A common aspect observed across many studies of sexual abuse (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Finkelhor, 1994; Fergusson, Horwood, & Michael, 1997) is the victim's reluctance to disclose the abuse. Recent studies have been concerned with social support networks and particularly the social reaction to the disclosure of sexual victimization. Ullman (2003) reviewed past studies and estimated that one third of women never disclosed their childhood sexual abuse experiences because of fear of being blamed, fear of the abuser, shame, loyalty, trying to avoid betrayal, disbelief, absence of a person to whom they could disclose, embarrassment, and concerns about hurting others (Anderson, Martin, Mullen, Romans, & Herbison, 1993; Kellogg & Huston, 1995; Roesler & Wind, 1994).

Several factors, such as close relationships to the perpetrator, frequency, severity, and age at onset, contribute to the reluctance to disclose. When the victim knows the perpetrator well, the victimization will not be disclosed or there will be a long latency prior to disclosure (Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991; Smith et al., 2000). This is particularly the case if the perpetrator is a family member of the victim (Anderson et al., 1993; Smith et al., 2000). The victim is often afraid of repercussions from the perpetrator and will maintain the secret to accommodate the situation. This is what Summit (1983) called the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome. Some researchers have compared two different types of rape (acquaintance rape vs. stranger rape) in terms of how people view these negative sexual experiences (NSEs). Abrams, Viki, Masser, and Bohner (2003) showed the result that respondents assigned more blame to the victim of an acquaintance rape in comparison with the stranger rape victim using acquaintance and stranger rape vignettes. Check and Malamuth (1983) examined how the respondents evaluate the vignette of three different situation of rapes (stranger rape condition, acquaintance rape condition, and mutually consenting condition) and presented that respondents perceived the acquaintance rape victim as reacting more favorably to the assault than the stranger rape victim. Therefore, we assumed that the closer the relationship between the victims and perpetrators, the more the victims are blamed for their spontaneous commitment to the victimizations. When the victims also have these attitudes toward rape victims, they would have fear of being blamed in the case of acquaintance NSEs if they disclose them. As a result, they may not disclose the events or may disclose them partially.

A second factor is the duration or frequency of victimization. Many past studies showed that the longer the children were abused, the more they were reluctant to disclose (Arata, 1998; Kitamura et al., 1999). Other factors that are related to the high frequency and the long duration of victimization, such as closeness to the perpetrator or the young age at which the repeated victimization started, may contribute to the reluctance of disclosure.

A third factor is the severity of victimization. According to Arata (1998), severe abuses are less likely to be disclosed than are mild ones. Gomes-Schwarz, Horowitz, and Cardarelli (1990) concluded that extremely severe and extremely mild types of sexual abuse are less likely to be disclosed. When perpetrators used threats or physical aggression as strategies to gain and maintain victims' compliance and secrecy, disclosure decreased (Kaufman, Hilliker, & Daleiden, 1996; Kelly, Brant, & Waterman, 1993).

Age at onset is another important element. In a review of the disclosure of sexual abuse, Paine and Hansen (2002) wrote that younger children's disclosure is more vague and accidental, rather than purposeful. The younger the age, the less likely the victim is to appreciate the situation or to make a comprehensive "story" of the events. This leads to the long latency prior to disclosure. Alternatively, attribution may mediate the children's age and reluctance of disclosure. If the children strongly attribute the event to themselves, it is hard to disclose it to an adult because of fear that they will be blamed. On the other hand, if the children attribute the event to others, including the perpetrators, they can more easily tell what they have experienced. Miller-Perrin (1998) reported that younger children exhibited greater victim-blaming attitudes than did older children. In contrast, Hunter, Goodwin, and Wilson (1992) reported that younger children were less likely to attribute the event to themselves.

Although some practitioners think that disclosing the traumatic experience brings beneficial effects to subsequent mental health and that this is a prerequisite for access to the professional care system, the results obtained from several studies showed the complicated nature of the disclosure of sexual victimization in relation to interactions with the social network. Ruggiero et al. (2004) reported that participants who reported taking more than 1 month for disclosure showed a higher prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression than did those who disclosed the victimization within a month or did not disclose the victimization at all.

In this study, we asked the victims of NSEs whether they disclosed it totally or partially. Several factors could be related to this. First, if the NSEs were by perpetrators they know well, it might be hard for victims to disclose totally, as they have fear of being misunderstood that they committed the victimization spontaneously or invited the victimization. They are afraid of being criticized by the disclosure receiver. They might remove or revise some parts of the facts they experienced to get empathy from the disclosure receiver. Thus, we hypothesized that when disclosed, it will be more partial in the case of victimization by perpetrators who they know well (e.g., classmates) than that of victimization by strangers. Second, if the perpetrator was the person they had trusted or respected (e.g., schoolteacher), it may be hard to tell others about the perpetrator's misdeed fully because they may feel that they betray those people. Thus, they may modify their story. We hypothesized that partial disclosure would be related to the delay of the disclosure. Finally, younger children are more likely to disclose the event more accidentally than are older children. They do not have enough linguistic capacity to make up a story comprehensively. Therefore, we hypothesized that it would be difficult for younger children to disclose the event totally.

Other studies have suggested the importance of the reaction of first-disclosure receivers. Because illnesses are socially constructed, we can never neglect the role of social interactions. Jonzon and Lindblad (2004) showed a positive relationship between social reaction and current social support. This indicates that disclosure per se does not circumscribe the entire consequences. When we deal with sexual abuse, we should take into account the entire process following the abuse and prevent a negative chain: severe sexual abuse, disclosure, negative reaction from the social network, and negative current social support. Other studies have assessed the relationships among negative reactions, such as blame, disbelief or invalidation, belittling, rejection, disgust, hostility, ignoring, and denying, and psychological outcome (Arata, 1998; Lange et al., 1999). The story of the victim may be modified and reconstructed based on the interactions between the victim and the community. If the victims encounter negative reactions, their negative experiences become deepened and complicated. However, it has generally been assumed that reactions such as blame, disbelief or invalidation, belittling, rejection, disgust, hostility, ignoring, and denying were always perceived negatively, and deep empathizing and taking action to stop the victimization were always perceived positively. Thus, one of the purposes of this study is to show how the perception of the reaction of disclosure receivers varies from individual to individual by case illustration.

Based on the background mentioned above, the purposes of this study are (a) to determine the prevalence of NSEs among Japanese college women, (b) to explore the influence of several variables—age at onset, characteristics of the NSEs, and relationship to the perpetrator—on disclosure, and (c) to show perceptions toward the reactions of first-disclosure receivers by case illustration.

There were several reasons for having selected university students as the sample. First, as to the participants' age, if we chose the participants before 18 years, these surveys could be sometimes detrimental, particularly immediately after the victimization, because of their level of maturity. On the other hand, if we chose the participants after 30 years, it might be difficult to obtain the accurate information about NSE during childhood. Second, we chose university students because one of our purposes was to solicit them to describe their experiences by writing. Thus, considerable linguistic capacity was required. Third, we chose female students as participants because the prevalence of sexual victimization is much higher among them than among men. Factors associated with the sexual victimizations, such as victims' shame feeling, relationship to the perpetrator, prevalence of disclosure, people's attitudes toward the victims, may be different between the genders.

## Method

### Participants

The NSE questionnaire was sent to five Japanese universities. Each university was asked to distribute the questionnaire exclusively to female students. The method of

collecting the questionnaire was at the discretion of the president of each university. At four universities, the questionnaires were collected by staff during class, and at the fifth university, they were collected by self-addressed envelope. The questionnaire was anonymous. Usable questionnaires were returned by 532 students. The mean age was 19.7 ( $SD = 3.4$ ). The majors of the respondents were science of nursing ( $n = 143$ ), psychology ( $n = 127$ ), pedagogy ( $n = 93$ ), welfare ( $n = 18$ ), medicine ( $n = 20$ ), literature ( $n = 16$ ), and other (including dietetics and science).

## The Questionnaire

Participants were asked whether they had experienced each of 13 types of NSEs (Table 1). They were asked further for details about the NSE that they chose as the most distressful: whether violence (i.e., severe bodily attack) was used, whether they were forbidden to disclose the event by the perpetrator (i.e., perpetrator threatened the victim for the purpose of getting the victim's compliance to keep it secret by forecasting negative outcome such as physical harm or dire outcomes for the victim or her loved ones), how many times they were victimized by the same person, the age at which victimization started, and the relationship to the perpetrator. They were also asked whether they had disclosed the victimization. If disclosed, they were further asked whether the victimization was disclosed partially (the partial disclosure group included victims who recanted after the disclosure was made) or totally, when and to whom they disclosed the victimization, the reaction of the confidant, and the level of satisfaction obtained from disclosure. The satisfaction level was assessed on a 3-point, Likert-type scale: *satisfied, neither satisfied nor disappointed, disappointed*.

## Results

### Experience of NSEs

Of the participants, 40% ( $n = 213$ ) reported having experienced any of the NSEs (Table 1). The participants who reported NSEs and those who did not were not different in terms of the method of collecting the questionnaire,  $167/415 = .40$  for those collected during class,  $46/117 = .40$  for those collected by self-addressed envelope;  $\chi^2(1) = .06, p = .44$ .

### The Use of Violence (i.e., Severe Bodily Assault)

Seven women reported that they experienced violence during NSEs. Five of these women experienced rape ( $n = 2$ ) or attempted rape ( $n = 3$ ). In one of the rape cases, the perpetrator was the woman's boss at a part-time job. In the cases of attempted rape, the perpetrators were a classmate, a brother, and a stranger. The woman who was nearly raped by her brother had been abused more than 10 times between the ages of 9 and 14. One of the other 2 respondents reported that she was sexually

**Table 1**  
**Prevalence of Negative Sexual Experiences**

	<i>n</i>	%
I was sexually touched even though I did not want to be.	100	18.8
The person exhibited her/his genitals.	77	14.5
The person talked sexually to me even though I did not like it.	75	14.1
I was kissed or hugged even though I did not want to be.	61	11.5
The person sneaked a shot of me or peeped.	61	11.5
My genitals were touched even though I did not want them to be.	19	3.6
I was made to touch the person's genitals.	18	3.4
Other	16	3.0
The person showed me sexual magazines or pictures even though I did not like it.	15	2.8
I was almost raped.	12	2.3
I was made to perform sex-simulation behavior.	8	1.5
I was raped.	7	1.3
The person performed a sexual act in front of me.	1	0.2
Any of the above	213	40.0

Note: *N* = 532. The sum of the accounts exceeds 100% because multiple answers were allowed. Other included things such as being asked to perform sexual simulation behavior by a stranger using a mobile phone, being chased by a naked man, being teased about her body by a colleague in front of other people, being asked to have sex, and having a skirt pulled off by a stranger.

touched, and the other was kissed or hugged. Both of them were assaulted by strangers.

**The Forbiddance of Disclosure**

In all, 23 victims were forbidden to disclose. Among these, violence was used on 3 victims. One was the woman who was nearly raped by her brother, one was the woman who was raped by her boss, and the third was the woman who was nearly raped by a stranger. The forbiddance of disclosure and use of violence were not independent each other (Fisher's Exact test *p* = .042).

**The Frequency of NSEs**

A total of 183 participants reported the frequency of NSEs: 123 women (67.2%) were victimized only once, and 22 (12.0%) were victimized more than four times. There were two women (1.1%) who were sexually abused by a schoolteacher more than four times.

**The Age at Onset**

All of the victims experienced the NSEs after entering elementary school, with the exception of one participant, who was exposed to a penis by a stranger before

entering elementary school. This woman refrained from disclosing the victimization to others until this questionnaire survey. She attributed this experience to her young age and the perpetrator's "crazy" personality. Incidents of rape and attempted rape increased after adolescence.

The victims' ages (classified into 6 groups: younger than 6, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18 or older) and the number of times they were victimized (classified into 2 groups: nonrepeated, repeated) were not related to each other,  $\chi^2(5) = 5.55, p = .352$ .

### **The Relationship to the Perpetrator**

This question was answered by 171 students (Table 2). Among them, 65.5% of respondents ( $n = 112$ ) were victimized by strangers. A total of 47 women reported they were sexually touched; in 35 of these incidents (74.5%), the perpetrator was a stranger.

In 26 cases (15.2%), the victims knew the perpetrators well: neighbors, classmates, seniors, boyfriends, and schoolteachers. In 8 cases (4.7%), the perpetrators were relatives: fathers, brothers, uncles, and male cousins. The other 25 (14.6%) were victimized by colleagues at a part-time job, by a driving instructor, by a taxi driver, by a friend's brother, and so on. There were a few victims who could not identify the perpetrator. Only one victim was abused by a female perpetrator; this victim was touched sexually by a female friend when she was 12 years old, and it took more than 5 years to disclose this to her friend.

We examined the relationship between the number of victimizations and the perpetrator. More nonrepeated victimizations were found if the perpetrators were strangers,  $\chi^2(1) = 18.86, p = .00$ . On the other hand, if the perpetrators were schoolteachers or classmates, victims were more likely to be victimized repeatedly (Fisher's Exact test  $p = .041$  and  $.00$ , respectively).

One of the 2 women who was sexually abused by schoolteachers described the event as follows:

My teacher touched my private parts. At first, I thought that my teacher's hand touched me by accident. As this person was the teacher, I never doubted this. I did not resist at all, so I think the teacher's act escalated.

The victim disclosed partially to a friend within 1 year. This seems to be a typical process in children who want to believe in the person in charge. The student placed a reasonable explanation on the action and tried to deny the actual sexual meaning. This led to the delay of the disclosure.

Two women were victimized by their fathers and 2 by their brothers. The women in these cases were victimized more than once, indicating that intrafamilial sexual abuse is more likely to happen repeatedly. These results suggest that if the perpetrators are not strangers, victimizations are more likely to happen repeatedly, particularly if the victims must rely on the perpetrators.



**Table 2**  
**Perpetrators of the Negative Sexual Experiences**

	Stranger	Acquaintance	Senior	Boyfriend	Classmate	Male Relative	School teacher	Male Sibling	Father	Other	Total
Sexual talk to me	7	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	3	15
Sexual magazines or pictures	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sneaked a shot of me	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	19
Sexually touched	35	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	6	47
Kissed or hugged	12	0	2	2	3	1	0	0	0	5	25
Touched my genitals	4	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	8
Exhibited his genitals	31	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	33
A sexual act in front of me	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Made to touch the genitals	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Made to perform simulation behavior	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	7
Almost raped	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	6
Raped	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Total	112	1	4	6	12	4	3	2	2	25	171
%	65.5	0.6	2.3	3.5	7.1	2.3	1.8	1.2	1.2	14.6	

Note: N = 171. Other includes colleagues at a part-time job, driving instructor, taxi driver, and friend's brother.

Another important facet related to the nature of the perpetrator is power. A participant was interrogated by the judge at a family court because she had committed juvenile delinquency.

At the interview, I was asked about my sexual experiences in detail: the age of having my first sexual experience, the frequency of having sex, the names of the boys with whom I had sex, and the places where we had sex. It was disgusting. Now I can say that I do not understand why I was asked such questions, which were irrelevant to my delinquent behavior. Is it common to ask such question in court? I sometimes remember this and feel unpleasant. I am angry with myself, because I wonder why I did not ask why I was being asked these questions. Did the judge think this was the penalty for my misdeed? It is still questionable.

In this case, the woman was placed in a weaker situation, and a judge, an authority figure, harassed her. These factors may have suppressed her recognition of the negative event at the moment.

## The Disclosure

Detailed information about the disclosure of victimization was given by 168 students. Among them, 16.7% of respondents ( $n = 28$ ) reported that they had never disclosed the victimization, whereas 83.3% ( $n = 140$ ) had disclosed the victimization during the course of life. Of these, 97 (69.3%) women fully disclosed the victimization, whereas 43 (30.7%) did so partially.

We did not observe any trend of a particular type of NSE to be disclosed or not disclosed. The relationship between the disclosure and the age at onset was examined. Among 97 students who fully disclosed the victimization, 2 did not answer the age at onset, and among 43 who disclosed it partially, 2 did not answer the age at onset. There appeared to be a significant trend that older victims were more likely to totally disclose and younger victims were more likely to refrain from disclosing (Table 3).

The relationship between the disclosure and the perpetrator was examined. Among 97 students who fully disclosed the victimization, 2 did not answer the relationship to the perpetrator; among 43 who disclosed it partially, 2 did not answer the relationship to the perpetrator; and among 28 who did not disclose the NSE, 2 did not answer the relationship to the perpetrator. When the perpetrator was a stranger, 68% of the women disclosed the victimization (Table 4). Of the 7 cases in which the perpetrator was a relative, namely, male relative, male sibling, and father, only 2 (28.6%) participants disclosed the victimization totally, 2 (28.6%) disclosed partially, and 3 (42.9%) did not disclose at all. In the two cases in which the perpetrator was a schoolteacher, the victims disclosed partially. One victim was abused by her brother more than nine times. She described the events as follows:

My breast was touched by my brother after my clothes were taken off. I disclosed this partially to my friend after more than five years, but she said it was a wrong conviction. I began to believe that one's feelings may never be understood by others.

**Table 3**  
**Age at Onset and Victimization Disclosure**

Age at Onset (Years)	Total Disclosure <sup>a</sup>		Partial Disclosure <sup>b</sup>		Nondisclosure <sup>c</sup>		Total <sup>d</sup>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Younger than 6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1
6-9	3	33.3	1	11.1	5	55.6	9
10-12	8	42.1	6	31.6	5	26.3	19
13-15	10	52.6	7	36.8	2	10.5	19
16-18	38	65.5	17	29.3	3	5.2	58
19 and older	36	62.1	10	17.2	12	20.7	58

a. *n* = 95.

b. *n* = 41.

c. *n* = 28.

d. *N* = 164.

**Table 4**  
**Perpetrators and Victimization Disclosure**

Perpetrator	Total Disclosure <sup>a</sup>		Partial Disclosure <sup>b</sup>		Nondisclosure <sup>c</sup>		Total <sup>d</sup>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Stranger	72	67.9	23	21.7	11	10.4	106
Acquaintance	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1
Senior	3	60.0	1	20.0	1	20.0	5
Boyfriend	2	33.3	1	16.7	3	50.0	6
Classmate	1	10.0	7	70.0	2	20.0	10
Male relative	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	75.0	4
Schoolteacher	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Male sibling	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Father	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1
Other	15	60.0	5	20.0	5	20.0	25

a. *n* = 95.

b. *n* = 41.

c. *n* = 26.

d. *N* = 162.

The victim attributed these events to her parents. “My parents raised my brother in an oppressive way, and he did not know how to express his frustration.”

We did not find any specific relationship between the frequency of any NSE and the type of disclosure.

Of the 7 women who were targets of violence, 2 (28.6%) disclosed totally, 3 (42.9%) disclosed partially, one (14.3%) did not disclose, and one did not answer the disclosure related questions. Of the 23 women who were forbidden to disclose, 8

**Table 5**  
**Time Lapse Between the Negative Sexual Experience and Disclosure**

Time Lapse	Total Disclosure <sup>a</sup>	Partial Disclosure <sup>b</sup>	Total <sup>c</sup>
Immediately	78	17	95
Less than 1 week	13	9	22
Less than 1 month	1	4	5
Less than 1 year	0	5	5
Less than 5 years	2	6	8
5 years and longer	2	1	3

a.  $n = 96$ .

b.  $n = 42$ .

c.  $N = 138$ .

(34.8%) disclosed totally, 7 (30.4%) disclosed partially, 4 (17.4%) did not disclose, and 4 did not answer the disclosure-related questions.

The relationship between the type of the disclosure and the latency before the disclosure was examined. Among 97 students who fully disclosed the victimization, one did not answer when she disclosed it, and among 43 who disclosed it partially, one did not answer when she disclosed it. We then compared those who disclosed totally and those who disclosed partially. The women who disclosed the NSE totally were more likely to do so immediately (Table 5). One sixth of the women who disclosed the NSE partially took a year or longer to do so. There were 5 women who recanted after the disclosure; all of these women experienced the event at the age of 17 years or older. Of these 5 women, one was nearly raped by her classmate and one was raped by her boss at a part-time job. Both of these women were subjected to violence. The other 3 women were touched, kissed, or hugged sexually, and one of them was forbidden to disclose.

When disclosing the NSE, women tended to choose their friends as confidants (Table 6). Friends were followed by mothers and boyfriends. Younger children tended to disclose to their mothers,  $\chi^2(4) = 11.60, p = .021$ .

### **The Reaction of the First-Disclosure Receiver and the Victim's Perceptions**

Among 140 victims who disclosed totally or partially, 101 answered the questions about the reaction of the first-disclosure receiver appropriately. Of the 101 victims, 9 (8.9%) were disappointed with the reaction of the first person to whom they disclosed the NSE, 69 (68.3%) were satisfied, and 23 (22.8%) were neither satisfied nor disappointed.

Two of the 9 disappointed women were disappointed because the incident was not taken seriously. One was disappointed because she was criticized for being careless. The woman who was sexually abused by her brother was disappointed after disclosure to her friend. Her friend said that it was misrecognition and did not believe the story.

**Table 6**  
**First-Disclosure Receiver**

First Person	Total Disclosure <sup>a</sup>	Partial Disclosure <sup>b</sup>	Total <sup>c</sup>
Mother	21	7	28
Father	2	0	2
Sibling	3	1	4
Grandmother	1	0	1
Friend	46	24	70
Boyfriend	6	3	9
Schoolteacher	3	1	4
Police	1	0	1

a. *n* = 83.

b. *n* = 36.

c. *N* = 119.

One person was satisfied because her friend took action after being told that the victim was forced to touch the perpetrator’s genitals. However, the contrary reaction was also observed. One woman reported,

When I was 19 years old, I was hugged by a stranger. I told my friend within one week. She said it was common and not serious, so I was relieved. I thought I was partially responsible for that event because I was drunk.

Another woman said,

When I was nine years old, my private parts were touched by a stranger. I disclosed this to my friend and she did not take it too seriously, so I was rather relieved.

Although criticized, one woman was satisfied by the reaction of the disclosure receiver, who listened to her kindly and gave her advice. Sharing a similar experience had a positive effect:

During the age of 18 to 19 years old, a driving instructor touched me sexually. I told my friend, who said that she had been touched by the same instructor. So I thought he was this kind of person.

Instrumental support is not always supportive. For example, a woman was raped by a schoolmate and disclosed it to her friend. For this woman, being listened to with empathy by the friend was sufficient; she did not want her friend to make a big deal of the event. This woman was disappointed when her friend took action.

One person wrote a very important note to professionals who have the chance to meet victims of sexual abuse.

When I confided my negative sexual experience to a schoolteacher, he listened to my story closely and I felt that my distress was healed. However, he reported my story to the police without asking what I wanted. I was quite disappointed with his action. Sexual victimization had been beyond my imagination until I experienced it. When I became a victim, I realized how shocking it was and how difficult it is to disclose it to others.

This case shows that what we think is good for a victim is not necessarily good for the victim. Before taking practical measures, we should listen to the victims and determine what they expect us to do.

## Discussion

In our study, more than a third of the participants experienced at least one NSE. Severe cases, such as rape and attempted rape, were more likely to be accompanied by the use of violence. Furthermore, the victims who were subjected to violence were more likely to be forbidden to disclose the event and to know the perpetrator well.

Most of the perpetrators in our study were strangers. Of 47 women who reported that they were sexually touched, 35 were victimized by strangers. In our study, we did not ask the respondents about where and how they experienced it. Some victims may have been victimized while riding public transportation, such as a train or bus or street car. In Japan, to protect women from those NSEs, some bus companies have women-only buses, and railroad companies have women-only trains during rush hour to make female commuters feel comfortable.

If the victim knew the perpetrator well, the victimization was more likely to be repeated. This is probably because the victim could not avoid the perpetrator, tried to negate the sexual meaning of the abuse, or refrained from disclosing the victimization for the purpose of adapting to the situation. This led to delays of intervention.

In our study, the majority of the women disclosed totally. Many of them disclosed the events to mothers and friends; this is consistent with the results of previous studies (Smith et al., 2000). The older the victim, the more she disclosed the event to others, probably because older children are better able to understand the sexual meaning and construct a story. As younger children sometimes do not understand the event as sexual victimization, adults should be more responsible for protecting them. Jonzon and Lindblad (2004) reported that the most common first-disclosure receivers in childhood were mothers and the most common first-disclosure receivers in adulthood were therapists and partners. In our study, nobody disclosed NSEs to mental health service providers. This difference may be attributed to sample differences and methods. Because Jonzon and Lindblad's sample was collected by advertisement in magazines and face-to-face interviews were carried out, the participants in the study were more willing to disclose NSEs to people they did not know. However, in our study, participation was solicited from students at five universities, and the questionnaires were

anonymous. Respondents may have been less motivated to disclose details to the researchers or medical health service providers.

As noted in the introduction, there may be several reasons for partial disclosure. A first reason may be that these women had established the relationship with the perpetrators before the NSE. In that case, the victims may be afraid of being blamed by the disclosure receivers. Victim-blaming attitude is higher in acquaintance rape than stranger rape (Abrams et al., 2003; Check & Malamuth, 1983). Therefore, some victims who were victimized by the acquaintance were reluctant to disclose totally. A second reason is that the perpetrator used to be a person they trusted or respected. Victims do not want to betray the perpetrators by telling everything about the NSEs. In our study, all victims who were sexually abused by schoolteachers and brothers made partial disclosures. Thus, several psychological conflicts such as fear and anxiety may exist behind the partial disclosure. This interpretation is endorsed by the evidence that, compared with the women in the total disclosure group, the women in the partial disclosure group were more likely to have a longer latent period before they disclosed. If our clients confide in us their NSEs in a clinical setting, and if we feel that they do not tell us everything they experienced, we have to be aware that they may have some anxiety and fear about the consequence of disclosure. We have to pay attention not only to what is told but also to the probability that there is something that is not told. Older children were more likely to disclose the event totally. This may be because their linguistic capacity is higher than that of younger children and they do not appreciate the event.

Of particular interest is how the victims felt about the responses of the first-disclosure receivers. In this study, the majority of victims were satisfied with the reactions of such people. This may be because the participants were university women and are thus healthier than a hospital-based population and have the ability to establish stable interpersonal relationships. In contrast to previous studies, being viewed less seriously or being criticized was not always perceived as a negative response by the first-disclosure receiver. For some women, the expression "It would not be much of a problem," was perceived as comforting. Minimizing the victimization has been considered a negative reaction. However, for some women, minimizing the victimization may be helpful maybe because they do not have to degrade their own self-esteem. Even some women were criticized by the first-disclosure receivers; they could accept the criticism probably because the women had already attributed the victimization to their actions but not to their entire self. Furthermore, we inferred not only that they were satisfied with the reactions by the first-disclosure receiver but also that it may have increased their self-efficacy. How the victims want to be treated is also different from one individual to another. Among mental health service providers, there may be shared recognition that the disclosure of sexual victimization should be dealt with as a serious event, deeply empathized with and intensively treated. For some women, instrumental support was not effective. This may be related to the Japanese people's sensitivity to the shame. Japanese people sometimes feel very ashamed to be exposed to the public gaze, though

they do not hesitate to tell their private experience within small group (Lebra, 1983). Although the victims are able to disclose their NSEs within close, dyadic, reliable relationships, it is very shameful to be reported to the police and formally treated as a victim of sexual victimization. In Japan, almost all universities have a counseling staff. They should not treat the clients as victims of NSEs and provide instrumental support but should try to establish a reliable, close relationship with them and listen to their story. These professionals' attitudes will help them to disclose their experience comfortable.

Some women were disappointed with the reaction of the first-disclosure receiver. We cannot attribute this only to personality, the nature of the incidents, or the lack of understanding toward sexual victimization because sexual victimization cannot be explained outside of a cultural context. If these victims come to our clinic, we have to listen to their disappointed feeling and hear about their NSE. The whole process following the NSE should be treated by professionals. These professionals' attitudes sometimes may be effective in establishing a good relationship, which will help the victims to overcome the whole past negative experience.

Several limitations should be considered. First, the sample was neither hospital based nor institution based, and the prevalence of incest or rape was quite low. Thus, it was not possible to examine disclosure-related issues restricted only to severe sexual victimization (i.e., rape and attempted rape). Second, there was only one woman who experienced an NSE before entering elementary school. However, the actual prevalence of pre-school NSE may be higher because some children do not remember experiencing the NSE or they do not perceive the perpetrator's sexual motivation. Third, we had no means to determine whether conscious satisfaction could directly affect later good mental health. Evidence that verifies this hypothesis should be sought. Participants were asked about the first-disclosure receiver but were not asked about following disclosures made to other people. Second-disclosure receivers or third-disclosure receivers may modify the perception of the first receiver's reaction.

This study has shown that NSEs are prevalent among young Japanese women. Their characteristics are not different from what we expected from the previous studies conducted mainly in Western societies. The reaction of the first-disclosure receiver influences the attitudes of the victims, but not in such a uniform way as we took for granted from the clinical convention.

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