

Ethical Response to Past Child Sexual Abuse

• **Pat O'Neill & Alexander Tymchuk**

The Situation: *Two psychologists who are experienced in working with child sexual abuse on an individual basis team up to form a group of adolescent girls who have suffered abuse. In the third session, two 16-year-old girls tell the group about abuse that, although no longer on-going, has not been reported before, committed by perpetrators who have not previously been identified and charged. What, if anything, should the group leaders do?*

TYMCHUK: Child sexual abuse, whenever detected, must always be dealt with by those who detect it. Psychologists have both an ethical as well as a legal obligation to report these statements to the authorities who have experience in interviewing child witnesses and especially about historical events, in determining information about the perpetrators while providing adequate protections during the investigation and in bringing criminal charges if deemed appropriate. While the actual events of sexual abuse occurred sometime in the past and are no longer occurring with these young women, the perpetrators may be sexually abusing other girls. The authorities, in their assessment, would have to move speedily to be assured that this is not happening.

Because there are many possible ramifications to the girls, to their families and to the psychologists of reporting these events, including the possibility of an additional trauma to the girls, the

determination that a family member was involved or knew about the occurrences and the psychologists may become enmeshed in legal proceedings as well as seeing their closeness to patients endangered; all psychologists must be well trained in child abuse. In particular they must follow the CPA's ethical decision making process *proactively* in developing alternative modes of actions for occurrences of common events such as this.

O'NEILL: The majority decision in the well-known *Tarasoff* case articulated the maxim: "The protective privilege ends where the public peril begins." But in a less famous dissent from the majority decision, Justice Clark asked where troubled people can go for help if everyone in whom they confide their problems is under a legal obligation to break confidentiality for some presumed public good. That question, as much as the question of strict legal liability, ought to concern mental health professionals who undertake such work as helping abusers or victims of abuse.

In the case described, the adolescent girls are the clients of the psychologists. The therapists must weigh their responsibility to their own clients against responsibility to an unknown group that may or may not be at risk. If breaking confidence jeopardizes their ability to help their clients, why should the right of the clients to a healing process automatically be sacrificed because of possible risk to others —e.g. the public at large? If the sort of work they have undertaken is worth doing at all, can it be done without putting the client first? As the California State Psychological Association, in the wake of the *Tarasoff* case, summed up the problem:

"We live at a time when governmental agencies have become too inquisitive about personal characteristics, thoughts and actions; and radical means are being sought to identify and to deter those who would commit violent behaviour against others. Buffeted by these winds of change, the psychotherapist trudges along, a lonely pilgrim."

TYMCHUK: Lorsque des cas d'abus sexuel sur des enfants nous sont révélés, nous devons toujours agir. Les deux psychologues en question ont l'obligation à la fois éthique et juridique de signaler l'histoire de ces jeunes filles aux autorités compétentes en matière de techniques d'interview d'enfants témoins de tels actes. Plus particulièrement, nous devons faire appel à des experts capables de mener une enquête tout en protégeant les jeunes filles et de déposer des plaintes contre les coupables, si nécessaire. Quoique les actes d'abus sexuel dont parlent les jeunes filles aient eu lieu dans le passé et qu'ils aient cessé, il est possible que les coupables continuent à abuser sexuellement d'autres jeunes filles. En faisant leur évaluation du cas, les autorités devraient agir rapidement afin de s'assurer que de nouveaux cas d'abus ne se produisent pas. Le fait de signaler ces événements a des conséquences multiples et complexes pour les jeunes filles et leur famille, ainsi que pour les psychologues. Par exemple, en essayant de déterminer si un des membres de la famille participait à l'abus ou en avait connaissance, on peut exposer les jeunes filles à de nouveaux risques. Les psychologues peuvent, par conséquent, se retrouver impliqués dans des poursuites qui pourraient compromettre la confidentialité de leur relation avec les patients. Néanmoins, tous les psychologues devraient

• **Voir Situations, à la page 14**

Les révélations récentes de cas antérieurs d'abus sexuel sur des enfants: une approche déontologique

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La situation: *Deux psychologues qui ont beaucoup travaillé individuellement dans le domaine de l'abus sexuel commis sur des enfants décident de s'associer afin de créer un groupe d'aide pour jeunes adolescentes victimes d'abus sexuel. Au cours de la troisième session, deux jeunes filles de seize ans racontent au groupe des expériences d'abus qui ont eu lieu dans le passé mais qu'elles n'ont jamais signalées auparavant. Les auteurs de ces abus n'ont jamais été identifiés ni accusés. Que devraient faire les dirigeantes du groupe?*



Scott Library, York University

Accreditation Panel Update

• **Dr. Karen R. Cohen**
Registrar

New CPA Accreditation

Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology at York University - (Dr. Shake Toukmanian, Head of Clinical Training) Provisional Accreditation for 3 years.

Convention Activities - Site Visitor Workshop

We are pleased to report that the 1992 site visitor workshop in Québec City was well attended and well received. On behalf of the Accreditation Panel, I would like to formally thank Dr. Henry Edwards who contributed greatly to the workshop's success in his role as invited speaker and workshop leader. I would also like to thank

Accreditation Panel

On behalf of the Accreditation Panel, I would like to thank outgoing chairperson, Dr. Lise Chislett for her dedication and hard work during her tenure on the Accreditation Panel. I would also like to thank outgoing members Drs. Jeanette Amdur and Donald Stuss for their participation and important contributions to accreditation.

The Panel is pleased to announce the appointment of three new members whose three year terms begin in 1992-1993. They are Drs. William Borgen, Joyce D'Eon and Jean N. Ridgley. The Panel is also pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Keith Dobson as chairperson of the Panel for 1992-1993.

The next meeting of the Accreditation Panel will be held on October 17, 1992.

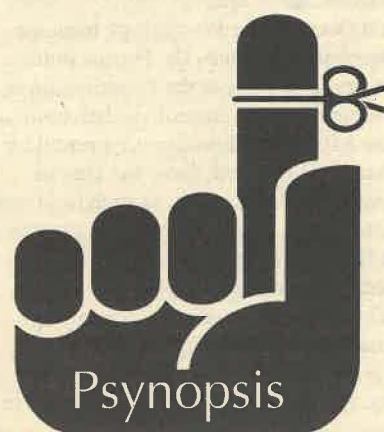
Zubek Memorial Award—Call for papers

Student papers on any topic related to restricted environmental stimulation (REST) are invited for the 1992 competition for the John P. Zubek Memorial Award. Papers must be submitted by a faculty nominator and may deal with theory, application, experimental or field research in areas such as laboratory stimulus restriction, polar psychology, psychological aspects of space or undersea habitats, etc. **Deadline for the 1992 competition is December 31, 1992.** The Award consists of a plaque and the sum of approximately \$500 contributed by the Department of Psychology, The University of Manitoba and the International REST Investigators' Society. Submissions should be sent to:

**Peter Suedfeld, Department of Psychology,
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.,
Canada, V6T 1Z4.**

Next deadline

Prochaine date de tombée



September 15
15 septembre

CALL FOR PAPERS

**Special Journal Issues
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Research
on Adolescence**

The *Journal of Adolescent Research* and the *Journal of Early Adolescence* are soliciting manuscripts for the inaugural issue of a recurring special issue series devoted entirely to Canadian research on adolescent development.

**The submission deadline for the inaugural issue(s) is
December 1, 1992.**

Please address any questions concerning this project to Dr. Daniel Lapsley or Dr. Barbara phone: (204) 727-9677 FAX: (204) 726-4573.