

Inevitable Memories – The Re-lived Experience of Sexual Abuse During Dental Appointments

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Abstract:

The aim was to describe how persistent psychological and bodily memories of sexual abuse are experienced during dental appointments. The participants comprised of three sexually abused women, who recalled and expressed these experiences during a dental appointment. They were in the interviews encouraged to describe, in detail, aspects of the appointment which triggered memories of the sexual abuse. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method.

Five constituents were identified as necessary for the invariant, general structure of the phenomenon: 1) physical expression of re-living, 2) failed and misdirected escape, 3) lowered self-esteem, 4) inevitable powerlessness, 5) dental care provider – a deteriorator or facilitator. The lived significance of mind and body remembrance during dental encounters comprised immediate, delayed but also remaining psychological and bodily effects. Dental care providers can, for better or worse, modify these effects. For patients, there must be trust, in order to have the strength to remain in reality and not go into the destructiveness that re-living past violations entailed.