



Pathology Biology Section – 2007

G112 Sexual Abuse: Hymenal Findings in Girls With a History of Vaginal Penetration

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that hymenal lesions at colposcopic examination are seldom seen in late disclosure of sexual abuse in children with vaginal penetration.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by assisting professionals in understanding that hymenal lesions are seldom seen in sexually abused girls who report vaginal penetration.

The Institute of Forensic Medicine, University of Aarhus, at the request of the police, performs colposcopic examination of children suspected of being sexually abused.

From January 1, 1996, to September 2002, 482 children living in Jutland, Denmark, were investigated (1.48/10,000 children from birth to 16 years).

This study focuses on hymenal findings in cases of a history of vaginal penetration given either by the child or by the perpetrator or both.

Results: Two hundred twenty-six girls reported vaginal penetration at least once, and of these 116 were penile penetration.

The median age of the girls was 12 years (range 2-14 years).

Forty-nine girls (22%) were examined within 24 hours after the last sexual assault, 27 (12%) less than a week and 116 (51%) more than a week later; and in 34 cases (15%) the time since the alleged penetration was unknown.

The hymen was normal in 155 girls (55%), showed erythema in 18 (8%) and lesions in 20 (9%); the rest had other irrelevant findings or were unknown.

Hymenal clefts were found in 50 girls (25%), but only 17 girls (38%) had a complete hymenal cleft and of these 15 were above 12 years of age (median age 14 years). In a nine-year-old girl an anteriorly located cleft was observed.

The incidence of hymenal clefts (both incomplete and complete) in the 426 girls investigated increased with increasing age. Thus, 78% of the clefts were found among the oldest girls (above 11 years).

Eight of the girls with a hymenal cleft had used tampons on a regular basis. One hundred and nineteen cases were prosecuted and of those 102 suspects (86%) were convicted. Eight perpetrators admitted vaginal penetration, and the victims in these cases all had a complete posterior hymenal cleft.

No significant correlation was found between hymenal clefts and appearing at court or being convicted, nor between complete clefts or conviction at court.

There was, however, a relationship, although non-significant, between the age of the girls and the probability of the perpetrators to appear at court; the age of the girls in cases resulting in a conviction was significantly higher than in those resulting in acquittal ($p=0.02$).

Conclusion: In cases of late disclosure of sexual abuse, the history from the child and the perpetrator, not physical findings, remains the single most important feature in evidence of sexual abuse.

Child Sexual Abuse, Vaginal Penetration, Hymenal Lesions