



Suffering in Silence: The Legacy of Unresolved Sexual Abuse

Ghislain Devroede, Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger

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The body remembers sexual abuse and keeping family secrets causes illness. Unwittingly and unwillingly, our parents and grandparents and ancestors often leave us the legacy of their unfinished mourning, their "undigested" traumas, and the hidden shame of their secret family history. Sexual abuse and other traumas experienced in the family's past create insurmountable or unresolved emotional wounds that leave their mark on future generations. If these emotions are not expressed consciously, they get repressed. The pain then persists unexpressed in the unconscious and is handed down to the children in the next generation. When traumatic things are not talked about at the time, the body is left with the job of expressing this unexpressed pain. This is what we call somatization. If such is the case, the child's body can become a physical expression of the withheld emotional pain for the wounded parents or grandparents or great-grandparents, indeed, as a physical "acting out" of their unexpressed emotional pain. As a result, it becomes necessary to get the "family skeletons out of the closet" to reveal and heal the repressed historic wounds and free the child's body from the inherited "secret chill." In effect, these secrets are often carried down as an intestinal disturbance in the child's body until someone in the family line actually admits the secret, feels the emotional pain and gets the withheld pain released from the child's body by talking about it to the clinician.

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