

A critical examination of investigative methods in fifteen cases of alleged child sexual abuse in Sweden

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Abstract

The purpose is to examine investigative work in cases of sexual abuse in Sweden. A systematic search for common problem areas in the investigative process was made in 15 cases with extensive documentation. In at least two thirds of the cases four problem themes were found to be important:

I. Investigation strategy and generation of data, II. Documentation of data,
III. Analysis work, IV. Ethics.

The main conclusion is that there are serious defects in the investigative methods in all cases reviewed. The investigative methods are biased and incompatible with the objectivity principle stated in Swedish laws. There is a need for critical and scientific thinking in investigative work.

Introduction

The accuracy of court decisions depends on the quality of investigative work produced prior to the court proceedings. Of course, it also depends on the quality of the analysis performed by the court. Not only prosecutors and police officers engage in investigative work, but also medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and other professionals. In social agency cases concerning compulsory care of young children, compulsory care of alcoholic or drug addicts and custody disputes between parents, social workers perform most of the investigative work.

In a substantial proportion of cases critical judgement and adequate investigative work could eliminate any need for court proceedings. In a number of cases where the charge has been removed, a more thorough and objective investigation could have led to the decision by the prosecution to try the case in court. Hence, inadequate investigative work may result both in innocent persons being tried and in guilty persons not being tried.

The Swedish legal system consists of two parallel systems, one handles criminal trials and civil suits, while the other handles administrative topics, inter alia those involving the social service authorities. Each system consists of a lower local level (the district court and the county court respectively). Each system also includes two appellate levels. Sometimes essentially the same case may be handled by both legal systems, and not infrequently these may arrive at different decisions. For instance, a father may be acquitted of sexual abuse by the district court, yet the child will be taken into compulsory care by the

administrative court because of the very same sexual allegation. The explanation often provided for this inconsistency is that less evidence is requested for decisions by administrative courts. But my view is rather that the quality of the investigative work is significantly lower within the social agencies and child psychiatry and child psychology. It is a paradox that the more training investigators have, the poorer and the more confused are their investigative methods and their documentation of the facts. There may be a few exceptions to this rule.

So, in actual practice some individuals are seen as being both innocent and guilty, depending on the kind of professionals and courts evaluating the same allegation. In the worst cases gossip, rumours, subjective suspicions and evidence fabrication seem to constitute sufficient proof.

Critical thinking

During the last decades the concept of critical thinking has been widely discussed in international books and periodicals, frequently in relation to education (see Paul, 1993, e.g.), and I will not pursue this discussion. In the present context critical thinking refers to the basic rational operations performed within scientific research, and rational investigative work should apply the same operations. Unfortunately, in actual investigative work much irrationality can be found.

To be more precise, what I have in mind are operations such as systematic and careful registration and documentation of data, of sources and of exact times of events. I am also thinking of operations such as the generation of hypotheses and correct ways of testing them, valid logical reasoning, and awareness of underlying assumptions, of contextual influences, of sources of error, of biases of thinking. A clear presentation of methods and data must be supplied, and neither data nor crucial aspects of methods should be withheld. What takes place during the investigative process must be made explicit to both the investigator and the decision makers. A well conducted investigative process must also be expansive, i.e. it must aim at broadening and deepening the analysis, and it must be creative, i. e. generating and searching for new ideas. It should be dialectical in the sense that it should include a continuous activity to call into question the assumptions made, the formulation of questions to be answered, methods, processes, data, interpretations and conclusions.

Important legal basis

According to the Swedish Constitution (chapter 1, §9) courts and other public organisations are required to be "objective and impartial" in their activity and decisions. In the Law of Legal Proceedings (chapter 23, §4) a more precise principle of objectivity is formulated specifically related to inquiries produced by prosecutors and the police.

"While performing the preliminary investigation, not only circumstances unfavourable for the suspect should be taken into account, but also circumstances favourable for him. And evidence advantageous to him should be secured. The investigation should be performed in such a way that no one is unnecessarily exposed to suspicion, costs or inconvenience."

However, the law states no punishment if the objectivity principle is not respected. So, certain investigators can repeatedly reveal a biased attitude and lack of objectivity.

In the courts one primary rule is the principle of immediacy as regards the evidence, i.e. that the decision must be based on what has been presented during the oral proceedings. There are a few exceptions to this rule, e.g. video-recordings of interrogations of children can be shown in the court.

Purpose and method

My purpose is to critically examine the investigative process in a set of cases of allegations of sexual abuse in children, in order to disclose whether they involve problems related to critical thinking and, if so, to define the nature of these problems. The upper age limit for the alleged injured party is 18 years of age. Because of the considerable amount of work needed for carefully scrutinizing documents often comprising several hundred pages in each case, a non-random sample of cases already analyzed was used. Twelve cases were selected from my own files, all cases from the nineties which included extensive documentation and extensive expert witness statements by myself. Three cases were added that had been analyzed in reports by my students. Hence, the total number was 15 cases. The expert statements and reports comprised 40-120 pages in each case. The cases come from different geographic areas of Sweden.

All problems related to investigative methods which I considered essential were extracted from each case. The problems were classified in themes and subthemes in all 15 cases. Certain kinds of problems were present in all or nearly all cases. A list was compiled of the most frequent problems, i.e. those present in ten or more cases.

Of course some important or even decisive investigative problems were encountered in only one, or a few, or a moderate number of cases. These problems will not be considered in this survey.

It is possible but not certain that inadequate investigative procedures are more frequent in this sample than they would be in a statistically representative sample - if we can agree on how to select such a sample.

My study is an attempt to disclose what are the most common problems in cases involving substantial investigative work and documentation. My cases include no case with confession by the alleged perpetrator and there may be problems that are specific for cases with confessions. I may of course have missed important common problems in my sample.

Description of the sample

In my 15 cases 14 males and 2 females were accused. No one had confessed, but one male had confessed to sexual touching with his hands, an act which was not reported by the injured parties. Among the 14 males 8 were biological fathers, 1 the stepfather, and the remaining 5 men were relatives or close friends of the family, and 1 of them the leader of a youth project. The two accused females were mothers of the children in two of the cases.

Not one of the females were prosecuted. One of them was the wife of a male who was prosecuted.

Among the accused males 10 were tried and 7 were convicted by the district courts. Two of these were acquitted by the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court has decided to re-open a case where the conviction was upheld by the Court of Appeal.

The case of another male was sent to the court, but the prosecutor removed the charge three weeks before the trial.

Two fathers, one who had been acquitted by the district court and one who was not even tried, had to go through long-standing legal suits against the social agency (six years for one of them), to have their children returned from compulsory care. As regards another of the fathers not prosecuted and one of the mothers, contact with the children was restricted and only supervised contact permitted, despite lack of evidence supporting allegation.

The total number of children involved in the allegations were 18 girls and 2 boys. At the time of the alleged abuse 14 children were at most 10 years old and the youngest was three and a half years old.

Six children were 11-16 years old. In two cases the allegations were made by two girls 8-10 years after. The time limit for prosecution in Sweden expires after 10 years.

There are wide differences between the social situation of the alleged perpetrators. All social strata are represented: the chief executive of a large enterprise, a physician, a clergyman, two school teachers, a social worker, an assistant nurse, several factory workers and recipients of welfare.

Results: Four themes related to problems during the investigation process

The problems with a high frequency were classified into four general themes as follows.

Theme I. Investigative strategy and generation of data

This theme comprises strategies applied during the investigation as well as closely related work procedures that often appear to result from the strategy, e. g. biased interrogations.

Lack of statement analysis strategy

There is a lack of interest for clarifying the origin of the central statements and their development during statement generations subsequent to their first occurrence. Circumstances before or concurrent with the statements are not clarified, e.g. prior remarks, the social context and social conflicts, social pressure, perceptual conditions etc.

Lack of an objective hypothesis work strategy

Alternative hypotheses concerning the reported human phenomena are not formulated. Not even the allegation of sexual abuse is viewed as an hypothesis, but is adopted as an assumed truth in all cases except one. This rigid assumption leads to confirmation bias, i.e. one-sided search for evidence or pseudo-evidence aimed at confirming, not at testing or refuting the assumed truth. Falsifying information is not actively sought, is avoided, and when it has emerged its falsifying nature is often not acknowledged, even if the latter is highly evident and decisive. Answers given during interrogations as well as other signs are often interpreted as confirming the assumed truth, and no alternative interpretation is considered.

The assumption is taken to be confirmed in one way or another. This circular logic is a standard pattern in many Swedish investigations concerning sexual abuse allegations.

The assisting strategy: Lack of critical examination of the statements made by the alleged injured party.

Typically, some effort is made to critically test the statements by the alleged perpetrator. But effort is seldom directed against testing the allegations themselves or other statements by the alleged injured party.

The effort is devoted to assist the alleged injured party to construct a plausible story and to supply additional information, i.e. to provide a more precise description. But whether an unlawful act has taken place is not called into question.

Instead, the interrogator repeatedly suggests that something has happened, and that something more also has happened. By contrast, the alleged perpetrator is not believed and is often urged to confess, even if the allegation by the injured party is vague, derives from the interrogator, and is questionable in itself.

In some cases a considerable amount of work in assisting story construction is conducted by social workers and psychologists prior to or during the same time period as the police interrogations.

The fault seeking strategy

Investigative work around the alleged perpetrator often includes the strategy to search for and document irrelevant faults and gossip.

The aim is to show that he is a bastard that could easily commit the alleged crime. Within the social agencies and child psychiatry fault seeking is a standard strategy in Sweden.

Lack of handling the question of truth

In not one of the video-recordings in these cases is there at the start any discussion between the police interrogator and the injured party about the importance of telling the truth and only the truth, and not to withhold information.

In a few cases the interrogator adds a general leading question at the end of some of the last interrogations, e.g. "Have you told the truth?" In one case the interrogator asks at two occasions whether the child is joking, and at both occasions the child answers yes. But she does not ask this question about many other questionable answers.

Lack of information to the child about the intended use of information from the interrogation

In not one of the interrogations is a child told about the intended use of the interrogation information, e.g. that the video recording could be shown in court.

Recurrent and serious defects of questioning behavior

The 15 cases contain 32 dialogue transcriptions of police interrogations with children. As regards the objectivity principle not one of the dialogues is objective. But some interrogations with other persons than the children seem more reasonable. Most questions have faults. There is a large proportion of presupposing, leading and pressing questions. Questions are often repeated, in particular if the first answer is not to what the interrogator expected. Powerful hammering techniques are applied in some interrogations, i.e. a popular Swedish word for penis was used 78 times by the interrogator with a young girl. After that she was drawing ghosts with a penis for about one week and that was interpreted as evidence for sexual abuse. Interrogators often try to maximize the extent of the alleged abuse by means of maximizing techniques, e.g. by asking "This happened every time you saw him?" or by telling the child how bad the child must feel.

There are also instances in which the interrogators dispute unwanted answers and express ideological, theoretical or personal statements. Moreover, they refer to information received from other persons, and refer to what the child has previously said, a technique which makes it more difficult for the child to make contradictory statements. Sometimes counterfactual statements are used, e.g. "You said X" when either no one said X or X was said by the interrogator. It can be seen in the dialogues that the interrogator's recollection of the conversation from one time point to another is not reliable.

Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that summary protocols or case-notes of interrogations - often the only form in which an interrogation is preserved - is neither reliable as to what was said or done (cf. Jönsson, 1988).

In a few cases techniques are applied such as physically touching the child, erroneous use of anatomical dolls, trying to make friends with the child, and promising rewards.

For instance, a child can be permitted to go and pee or to go and play only after he has answered a number of questions.

In some cases interrogation also takes place when the child is sucking a pacifier, is lying down, is obviously exhausted, is playing etc. The interrogators do not seem to realize that certain answers come from altered states of consciousness, e.g. playing, being exhausted, disinterested, experiencing a crisis, regressive states, being subject to strong suggestion etc. Positive reinforcement is supplied when answers go in the intended direction. Unwanted answers are sometimes discounted - the interrogator proceeds with her own conceptions without listening, e.g. by continuing to ask about sucking the father's penis, although the child clearly said that he sucked the penis of a schoolmate.

In some cases mothers, foster home parents, day care personnel and hospital personnel are permitted to be present and even to ask some questions and make suggestions.

In two interrogations in the same case a dominant mother completely takes over the interrogation from the interrogator and presses her own child by applying an entire repertoire of manipulatory techniques. In two other interrogations the child arrives with candy from her mother and is primarily interested in the candy - sort of an altered state of consciousness.

Some interrogations are too long and exhausting - in two cases with preschool children up to two or three hours on the same day.

In a few cases there are turning points, after which the exhausted children start to give short affirmative answers

even on questions they had previously answered in the negative. In one case the interrogator was told false gossip prior to the interrogation, viz. that the father had previously been convicted of sexual abuse in another case. In one case the interrogator repeatedly brings in the father, when he is asking the child about a fabricated story about an abusive man. This example illustrates the application of a pressing, contaminating shift technique.

An error in some of the interrogations of the defendant is that he was not informed about the details of the allegations of the alleged injured party. In the case where the defendant confessed to some touching of the girls, the latter were not at all informed about what he had said.

Gender of the interrogator

In 11 cases the interrogator of the child was a woman and in 4 cases a man. No gender differences were detected as to the quality of the interrogation. But the perspective of the absent gender may be insufficiently represented in the interrogations.

Theme II. Documentation of data

The documentation of the data obtained by the police is of a mixed quality. Most interrogations of the children are recorded on video tapes and transcribed. But other important interrogations of the children are not recorded and are only preserved in summary account written by the interrogator. Some

interrogations are recorded but not transcribed. Such recordings often contain evidence which runs counter to the allegation and, hence, are of no interest within the confirmation bias oriented investigative research strategies. For about 25 per cent of the police interrogations with the children there are neither recordings nor transcripts. As a result important information is not taken into account, e.g. by the social service authorities where files on the father or mother and child will continue after the end of the criminal case. As regards interrogations or conversations sometimes taking place at the social agency or within child psychiatric clinics no recordings, transcriptions or even objective summary accounts exist - only selected non-verified fragments from an extensive interaction, and these fragments have been subject to errors of perception, thinking and memory.

Most video transcriptions of the police interrogations are not certified, i.e. not signed, by the interrogator. And minor errors are common in transcripts. In at least two cases substantial parts of the recording had been deleted without any indication in the transcript. At least one of these cases was a clear-cut forgery by the police, in which sections indicating unreliability had been systematically erased. Another probable instance of a forgery was a copy of one recording which ended in an abrupt way. As for one more instance there was a notation that the interrogation had been video-recorded. But when the father asked for it, it had been transformed into an audiotape. This forged audio-tape contained strong emotional reactions by the child against the interrogator. Evidently, further sections could easily have been cut out when the copy was made. If there are no transcriptions video copies can easily be subjected to censorship.

Only in two cases are interrogations of the defendants recorded and transcribed, and summary statements are sometimes not shown to the defendant.

Important paralinguistic signs, i.e. yawnings and strong emotional reactions to questioning as well as non-verbal behaviours like sucking a pacifier, sitting on the knee of someone, lying down, playing, walking around etc were good as never noted in the transcripts. In a few cases a certain sign, e.g. weeping, that seemed to support the interrogator's assumed truth, was noted.

In those cases that include observational data from e.g. the child's day care or the child's psychiatric clinic these data are not documented in any objective way. Often there is no indication as to who was the source, nor of the situational context. These data are also biased, i.e. their sole aim is to find suspicious occurrences and signs.

Theme III. Analysis work

Prosecutors use the data generated by the police under their supervision and may also use data from experts. Police investigators do not analyze the data explicitly in writing, but they may of course have views about the data. In three

cases police investigators are witnesses in the court and are asked about their work. From the written dialogues it is apparent that they do not understand the objectivity principle in the Law of Legal Proceedings. In not one of my fifteen cases the prosecutor engaged a witness psychologist or researcher to assist in analyzing the data. Prosecutors produce no written analysis as a basis for their decision to try a case in court. One prosecutor told me that he based his decision to prosecute upon looking one or two times at the video-recordings with the child. This is the same method that is applied by the courts. In other cases it could be seen from the documents that the child psychiatrist or psychologist had applied the same "looking" method. If the aim is to disclose the implications of the data, this method presupposes a capacity far beyond that of the human brain. In their application for a summons prosecutors only write a few statements that describe the alleged criminal behaviour.

Courts are requested to quickly analyze the data that is presented during the proceedings.

On the basis of court documents, audiotapes, transcriptions of court testimony and my own experience as an expert in courts some of the problems concerning the analysis of data may be outlined.

The most frequent problems are the following.

- Analysis of the origin, development and context of crucial statements are not performed or is often ignored.
- Contradictions and instability in and between data generations are often overlooked.

For instance, the statements by the injured party have frequently changed considerably from the first indication and during the police interrogations to the district court and even in the Court of Appeal.

- Counter evidence is frequently ignored and may even be concealed or blocked, e.g. by refusing the defendant to call witnesses to testify in the court. I myself was refused to testify in two of the cases - cases that do not differ from the others in the sample.
- Time relations of the data are often ignored, relations of possible, probable or established dependence are ignored, and the order of the alleged occurrences may not be possible or lend support to an alternative hypothesis.
- In most of the cases more or less intense social conflicts are present, but they are largely ignored.

Some data seem to be generated because of conflicts, e.g. through errors of perception, thinking and memory and by lying and persecution.

- Naive and popular beliefs contaminate not only the police investigations but also the trial and the judicial decision process.

Examples are erroneous conceptions of the functioning of human memory, deficient factual knowledge of normal child sexuality and of sexual abuse, and the belief that it is possible to judge the truthfulness of a witness from behaviour in court. Such beliefs have often been refuted by scientific results.

- There are fallacies in the thought process. The most important seem to be confirmation bias and neglecting to take into account alternative hypotheses or

alternative interpretations. Another fault is overconfidence in one's judgement and conclusions.

- In most cases, statements about the extent and seriousness of abuse follow two general patterns: decreasing or increasing pattern.

In one subgroup the allegations start on a high, sometimes counterfactual level, e.g. sexual abuse three times a week during the entire summer, when the objective evidence reveals that it was not possible more than a few times. In this high start group the allegations are typically reduced during the police interrogations, where tangible descriptions are requested. In the other subgroup of cases the allegations increase during the investigation process. Both patterns may also combine into a decrease-increase-pattern. The significance and implications of these patterns of data which are often counterfactual, is largely ignored by the police and the court.

- To some witnesses there are a career interest, a treatment relation, a friendship relation, or strong economic interests in the case, e.g. a foster home that is paid by the social service authorities who believes that sexual abuse has occurred in this case. Such interests or relations may be a contributing cause of certain curious data provided by such witnesses. These curious data often seem to have emerged from commonplace occurrences among children.

Such circumstances are not critically evaluated in the analysis.

Even a witness psychologist may have strong economic interest in being engaged in further cases by courts or prosecutors. This goal is easier to obtain if he does not criticize police investigation methods, but praises them instead, and often reaches the same point of view as the prosecutor. In some cases courts seem to disapprove of an energetic defence counsel by considerably reducing his fee and by writing critical comments about his work in the judgement.

- Questions about symptoms are frequently asked during police interrogations and the trial. The counsel of the injured party always asks for symptoms. Symptoms often seem to increase from the first police contact to the court proceedings. Symptoms often seem to be perceived as evidence of sexual abuse, and alternative interpretations are ignored.

- The injured party advances claims of substantial damages. Damages can be further raised if more sexual abuse and more symptoms are alleged. A part of the increase of both may be explained by the claim for damages. Two of the cases contain data from witnesses revealing that the alleged injured party was lying in order to obtain substantial sums of money. Monetary motives may have been important also in several other cases. If the defendant is unable to pay the state will contribute the damages.

It is not sufficiently taken into account that monetary motives contaminate data.

In Sweden the court must produce an extensive written judgement in which the verdict and the sentence is extensively motivated. The analysis presented in these judgements is sometimes critical and rational. But too many court judgements reveal biases and errors in regard to the facts of the case, and also in relation to scientific knowledge and logic.

The outcome seems to a large extent to depend on the competence of the judges and the defence counsel.

IV. Ethics

In most cases children are forced to participate in interrogations. Several teenagers absolutely did not want any involvement of the police, yet this was not respected.

In most cases serious psychological maltreatment of the child or the children took place. Recurrent occurrences are separation from one or both parents for months or years, brutal and persistent interrogation methods, humiliating and offending medical examinations, deterioration because of therapy, and suicidal attempts following interrogation or therapy.

Investigative work, the work of social workers and psychologists and court proceedings lead to extensive psychic costs in many of these cases.

For instance, one case was probably an instance of a false allegation after extreme pressure at a child psychiatric clinic. When the Supreme Court decided to grant the convict a new trial, the girl did not have sufficient psychic strength to come to court. She had in the beginning been against involving the police, and she attempted suicide on the day after the first police interrogation.

One must seriously question whether many of the procedures applied are rational and ethically sound, and whether the human suffering inflicted is so.

In at least some cases no sexual abuse occurred, and no one except the authorities committed any abusive behaviour. In some alleged cases the harm inflicted by the alleged perpetrator seems to be less serious than the harm inflicted by the authorities. Even when a perpetrator has done much harm additional suffering caused by the authorities seems questionable.

Over and above the suffering of the children involved comes sufferings of the alleged perpetrator and of the children's families, both of which in turn leads to further suffering for the children. For instance, some children actually lose their father. The human costs for the biased and unlawful investigation methods seem to be too high.

Conclusions and discussion

Indisputably, there are serious defects in all 15 cases in the investigative methods. The investigative methods used are incompatible with the objectivity principle stated in the Swedish Constitution and in the Law of Legal Proceedings and there is serious psychological maltreatment of the child in most cases. But there are some differences as to the profile of defects. These defects seem to derive to a large extent from the confirmation bias oriented strategy.

The documentation shows a mixed quality and conscientiousness (cf. MacPehrson's, 1997, critical research on note-taking). The analytic work performed by the court with the material received under the principle of

immediacy is speedy and subjective. From a logical and scientific point of view some methods are untenable, and errors are often encountered in the written judgements. The social conflicts present in these cases are not taken into account.

Serious ethical problems are involved in these cases. In most of them the consequence of lack of respect for the children is psychological maltreatment and suffering for the children and others.

The most pervasive pattern in these results seem to be the view that one knows the truth already, hence it is not necessary to explore alternative hypotheses. A second pervasive pattern is lack of human sensitivity and respect for all those involved.

A third important pattern is the existence of private conflicts in the beginning of these cases. In a few cases there are conflicts between the social service authorities and the alleged perpetrator. Evidently, investigators must have sensitivity to detect and clarify social conflicts when investigating allegations of sexual abuse.

The results of this study receives support from some of the observations presented by Scharnberg (1996abcd) in his investigations of sexual abuse cases in courts, where he found many patterns of irrational reasoning. The importance of social conflicts is also supported by Larsson's et al (1973) observations about reports to the social service authorities.

The investigative procedures seem to be contaminated by a counterproductive fanaticism that seems to involve narrow-mindedness and lack of psychological sensitivity. Maslow (1963, 1969) discusses similar phenomena in terms of "fear of knowledge", "pseudostupidity" and "cognitive pathology" - the last as a phenomenon in scientific work. Edvardsson (e.g. 1984, 1996a) has proposed the concept of "organizational psychosis" to explain destructive phenomena within Swedish social service administrations. This concept means that an organization has deficiencies about relating to reality, e.g. paranoid delusions, and has no insight in its own deficiencies. An organizational psychosis should be expected to lead to erroneous investigations. Edvardsson (1996b) suggests "hunting the monster theory" as an explanation of persecutory strategies and certain other control phenomena within the Swedish social service administrations. The central aspect is that social service organizations imagine certain parents to be dangerous monsters for their children. If this fantasy is perceived as a fact, it can justify both biased investigative procedures such as evidence fabrication and withholding evidence, and brutal measures such as destroying the parent-child relationship. It is possible that some sort of "monster" conceptions are involved in the fifteen sexual abuse cases. In some interrogations the interrogator seems to conceive of the alleged perpetrator as an insatiable sexual monster, and even the alleged injured party sometimes has to considerably reduce the interrogator's fantasies.

Several factors contribute to the mental situation described. Some belong to the individual level, others to sociopsychological and organizational levels and still others belong to a societal and cultural level. The human capacity for information processing and perception of what goes on in other people's minds is limited. According to psychological research, emotional influences, altered states of consciousness and errors of perception, thinking and memory are common human conditions (see e.g. Baron, 1994; Janis & Mann, 1977; Schacter, 1995; Sjöberg, 1982). But in practical investigative work little seems to be known about such circumstances. Sociopsychological factors such as social pressure, suggestions and expectancy effects seem to be little understood. Investigative routines in other criminal cases may be partly inadequate when alleged abuse of children is involved. On the societal level there are strong political ambitions to fight sexual abuse. On the cultural level there seems to be influences from freudianism with its inclination to interpret all kinds of human phenomena as having a sexual meaning. Freudianism has also propagated repression, a popular concept which is sometimes used as support in sexual abuse cases. Freud also spread the idea that the cause is similar to the phenomena (the principle of similarity - Scharnberg 1996d), e.g. it can be read in child psychiatric records today that a child's fear of snakes is evidence for sexual abuse from its father. During the last 15 years we have seen an increasing number of sexual abuse ideologists who with no concern for the need of scientific basis argue that sexual abuse is common, that it is serious when it occurs, that it always results in symptoms and that many different kinds of signs or utterances from children reveal that they have been sexually abused (see e.g. Save the Children, 1992 and cf. scientific results in Kendall-Tackett et al 1993). This ideology is disseminated in media such as TV, newspapers, books, lectures and professionals are educated in brief courses having a weak scientific basis and that are distinguished by lack of critical thinking. Moreover, it is the career, status and economic interest of some professionals to propagate the incest ideology. They have good reason for perceiving critical thinking as a threat.

Training in critical thinking and in application of scientific principles and results are not only needed in investigative work, but also in society at large in order to counteract irrational tendencies that are dangerous for society. Investigative work should undergo thorough evaluations.

Paul (1993) argues that

"Uncritical thinkers treat their conclusions as something given to them in experience, as something they directly observe in the world. As a result, they find it difficult to see why anyone might disagree with their conclusions. After all, the truth of their views is, they believe, right there for everyone to see!"

This seems to be a description of the gist of much investigative work concerning child maltreatment and child sexual abuse in Sweden.

In the 17th century about 300 alleged witches were executed in Sweden. Children who were forced and influenced to recount certain stories were then used as witnesses and more in Sweden than in other countries in the witch processes (Ankarloo, 1971). When comparing the descriptions of these investigations with investigations in sexual abuse cases today the similarities are obvious. Also evident is the role of social conflicts in generation of the witch allegations (Hiärne, 1676). Sometimes it seems as if little has happened in investigative methods in the last 300 years.

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