

Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse by Lynn Heitritter and Jeanette Vought (2006) Published by Bethany House, Minnesota.

Jointly written by the founder of BECOMERS Sexual Abuse Support Group (Heitritter) and the founder of the Christian Recovery Centre (Vought), this book is aimed at equipping Christians with an understanding of the issue of child sexual abuse and sharing a step by step recovery programme used for adult survivors. Section one of the book, covering four chapters, identifies through various case studies the experience of child sexual abuse, its physical, emotional and spiritual consequences. Usefully, the book also dedicates a section to revealing indicators of abuse in the absence of a victim 'telling'; these cover possible symptoms shown in children, adolescents and adult survivors of abuse. A section covering spiritual damage is important in understanding the effects of abuse on Christian children.

Section two covers the sexual abuse of children within the family context-incest. In particular it covers the issue of incest within Christian families. Ideas about the nature of such families, drawing upon a 'family systems' approach, are reviewed, including issues such as dysfunctional communication. The chapter identifies a range of treatment goals with the aim being to reconcile the family members, where appropriate.

Why people become offenders is outlined in section three. Christian offenders are understood in terms of psychological and spiritual factors; the former relating to 'neediness' and 'need for control', the latter to 'The World, the Flesh and the Devil'. Section four covers ten chapters, nine of which represent the nine steps developed to aid recovery for adult survivors of child sexual abuse. The steps themselves give interesting insights into the various hurdles that victims must overcome; for example, looking to God for healing and honesty in sharing feelings with others and God.

The final section of the book relates the authors reflections on ministry expansion which includes developing better resources for male victims, improving resources for the church so that ministry to those who have experienced sexual abuse can be better informed and the need to develop strategies to prevent child abuse.

Generally, this is a useful book. It is, however, heavily weighted towards psychological insights with some; I don't believe always valid, attempts to link these with scripture. The 'steps' to recovery are more focussed upon centralising God in understanding and dealing with abuse however and it is useful that the authors state their claims with multiple references to abuse victims that they have worked with. This is not a book for a non Christian victim since it gives no clear view of the gospel. It is slanted towards understanding and responding primarily to victims who are either believers or who were/are part of a Christian family. It is therefore of more use for those working with Christian victims. The

authors' ideas for expanding ministries are, I believe, equally valid in the UK. The book is available through Amazon UK priced £8.99