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" WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:
Identification and Disclosure"

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The long-term effects experienced by women survivors of childhood sexual abuse are now acknowledged and well documented in the clinical literature. Women attending social service agencies rarely reveal a history of sexual abuse unless they are prompted in some way. This thesis is concerned with finding the most effective ways of identifying women who have been sexually abused as children. The study was undertaken to test the validity of a predictive theory devised by Ellenson (1985,1986) who claimed that survivors of childhood sexual abuse displayed clearly identifiable symptoms known as the *Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome*. (PTSS).

The first phase of this study disproved Ellenson's theory. His set of predictive indicators could not be used to accurately identify whether or not a woman had been sexually abused. The second phase of the research was drawn from a series of indepth interviews with social workers and other health professionals involved in counselling women. The purpose of these interviews was to discover how practitioners identify women clients with a history of sexual abuse.

As a consequence of these two inquiries, the author then constructed an "*Index of Sexual Abuse Indicators*" which could have validity for social workers in the practice setting.

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