

# Sexual abuse is a problem promoted and sponsored by the media

Newspaper article/internet, El Tiempo, 2005

**In line from January 3, 2005 to April 3, 2005**

(English version: In line from February 8 to April 3, 2005)

Thanks to María Claudia Moreno, for the translation to English.

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## Interview to Dr. Martine Delfos, psychologist and researcher from The Netherlands

Dr. Martine Delfos is Dutch. She works as a psychotherapist in her country and trains community work groups to prevent child sexual abuse in Colombia and other countries of the world. She is a psychologist and an expert in communication with boys and girls. She lives in the city of Utrecht, located southwest of Amsterdam, where she specializes in work with poly-traumatized children and adults.

She is the author of several publications that have been translated into different languages. Her books can be consulted at the website: <https://www.mdelfos.nl/books.html>. We specially would like to highlight a publication in Spanish under the title: "¿Me escuchas?, cómo conversar con niños de 4 a 12 años", ("Do you hear me? How to talk with children 4-12"). You may consult its review

at <https://www.mdelfos.nl/escuchas.html/> the book is available for consultation at the Documentation Center of Asociación Afecto Against Child Abuse.

Thanks to the cooperation of Plan Internacional, Dr. Martine Delfos attended the XII Congreso Colombiano de Prevención y Atención del Maltrato Infantil "Violencia contra los niños: ¿Quién ofende? ¿Quién defiende? ¿Quién protege?", that took place in the city of Bogota from November 30-December 2, 2004 where she was interviewed by journalist Marisol Ortega, from the newspaper EL TIEMPO.

We share with the web users of [Asociación Afecto contra el maltrato infantil`s website](#) the text of the interview with Dr. Martine Delfos, not yet published, which was facilitated by Marisol Ortega to whom we are very grateful for allowing us to publish it.

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## Marisol Ortega: What is the situation like worldwide?

**Martine Delfos:** Sexual Abuse in the world is not decreasing, but increasing. And physical abuse or maltreatment has remained at the same worrisome levels.

## MO: What is it due to?

**MD:** In part, sexual abuse is a problem promoted and sponsored by the media. Sexualization through the media: internet, computers. And that sexual abuse is the extreme. It is different from everything. Sexuality is in the streets, everywhere in the world. That means that abusers feel at greater liberty to abuse, and that sexual behavior among children and youth is not seen as abuse or maltreatment. That is not healthy.

At each age you have your own stage of development. And sexuality must progress as that development progresses. Then, if you are 3 or 4 years old, you are discovering you are a girl or a boy, but if you have the TV, the magazines, computers where you see that children are having sexual relations, that influences your own development.

When I speak at my conferences, about the media sexualizing children, turning them into sexual objects, thinking that everything is sex, with audiences like the Colombian one that has applauded me, it makes me happy to be able to raise concern about this subject in a culture I practically don't know.

### **MO: What to do?**

**MD:** I find it very impressive, and depressing that all over the world this is being done to children. I am a researcher and also a therapist and I have asked my scientific colleagues why don't we do research on the way how the media project the subject. There is very little research about this subject, but everyone identifies with the problem, feels that it is serious and bad for children.

Research is being done. For example, in The Netherlands we have an increase of very young perpetrators. When I began working, there were 13 and 14 year olds that abused other children but those cases were very rare. Now, there are cases of 9 year old children abusing other children and that is becoming a real problem that must be studied.

So I actually frame sexual abuse as part of that early sexualization problem of children.

If we look at research on the aggression that is seen through the media, we have serious research going back 30 years with follow up research. We now know that aggression seen on the media promotes every day aggression, and that there is no reason why this precept should change in the case of sex. But, we must start to do research in this field because if we don't children are going to be the ones who pay the consequences.

### **MO: How is this impact expressed?**

**MD:** I am going to give you an example. Research was done in Florence (Italy) where they discovered that children enter physical puberty much earlier. It depends on the number of hours of television they see per day, and it is not because of the radiation from television, but because of the

sexualization of the media. I said that some years ago.

### **MO: Do boys and girls react the same way?**

**MD:** Boys have a very open reaction to sex. Often, the physical reaction of women takes place more at an unconscious level. There is research that says that no reactions are detected on women who see sexual scenes, and you can see by the expression of their face, by their words that they are being honest. However, their body does have a reaction. Then, what I say as a researcher is that women are very conscious about emotions, about relations and contact and everything related to human beings, while children are more conscious about the physical effects it has on their bodies. For me it is logical that girls start to menstruate earlier as a result of sex in TV.

### **MO: What then would you like to tell the media?**

**MD:** To be very serious about this subject. I know it is not easy. I am going to give you an example. When terrorist attacks have taken place at schools and the terrible images of wounded children are shown on TV, I am asked if minors should see these scenes or not. I say no. But they ask me, isn't it reality? I answer no, it is not reality. Those cases are out of the ordinary. That does not take place normally at schools.

Then, what the media should know is that you must have criterion and not everyone should have access to the same information, especially if they are younger, if they are children, because when you are young or a child you don't know that the media is very authoritarian; they believe that what the media say is true.

What we do now is give children information that is not normal. The (media) knows it is not what happens frequently.

Let me give you another example: A child who is 13, with a good education level and who is smart, she knew about menses and was waiting for her period to come to become a woman. She had menarche and her surprise was horrible, she was very upset because she saw it was red. On TV she had seen the information and had seen that it was blue. We must understand that the media are not only entertainment, they also educate.

### **MO: They say that the main problem related to sexual abuse is that children are not believed?**

**MD:** I think that's very wrong. People have problems believing that it could be true and their minds try to put the idea away. Undoubtedly, the most difficult thing is to believe a child who tells that he/she has been a victim of sexual abuse. That is why children usually don't tell an adult about it, they tell it to another child.

I would say that children are tremendously intelligent, more than adults. They have the solutions but nobody hears them or pays heed to them. Many of them tell when they are adults, and suddenly someone tells them: "Uff, that experience must have been terrible for you".

### **MO: What are the damages of abuse?**

**MD:** It is a very serious problem. If it is within the family, the child loses his father, the paternal figure. It is less painful to lose your father because he dies or goes on a trip than to lose him because he is an abuser. That is why children who go through sexual abuse try to have some type of relationship with their father. They love him, and want him to be their father again. They try to get the father they lost back. Adults who are around the child often don't understand this. They say: "What you have gone through is horrible. How can you continue being nice to your father?" That is difficult. Children who are victims of sexual abuse have a distorted idea about what sexuality is.

A 16 year old girl, who had been abused by her father when she was 10, had no idea about the subject. She asked me about menstruation and I told her about it and about the discharges you have around the middle of your menstrual cycle. She, surprised, told me: "It's not because of my father that I have that". Every month, she thought that the white discharge were sperm that continued to come out.

One of the problems is that they can't relate easily to their parents or peers. It is a serious problem, because that is what children need. Then they begin to become isolated.

### **MO: Is there a way to prevent this scourge?**

**MD:** The first thing is to prevent the media. To do something about it. The way we are trying to prevent abuse is not a good one. What we are doing now is not honest, we are telling children: "Don't speak to men you don't know". And that is not possible. The world is full of strangers who are nice people, who don't abuse children, and whom they simply don't know. We tell children to say no. But it is not easy to say no. They feel guilty when they say no. Then, we have to understand that if they feel something sexual, then it is sexual, if they think they are doing something that is sexual, then it is sexual, and they have the right for that not to be done to them, to refuse.

Children often think that the perpetrator does not know that what he is doing is sexual and that it is not allowed, and that the child doesn't like it. They do it hiding away. That is because they know what they are doing. So it is important to tell them how abusers operate, so they know. Many, when they are adolescent or young have problems to relate. They need help to separate both things. Abuse is one thing, and a relationship is something else, then marriage and having children.

First of all: Don't be afraid of all men. That is not necessary. Most men are not abusers.

Secondly: Be aware if you have an unpleasant feeling and it seems to you that it is related to sex.

Thirdly: Even if in the beginning you didn't know what it was about, you can feel upset, and not agree with it.

Fourthly: Try to stop sexual abuse by saying it seems stupid to you and that you don't want it. You don't even have to say anything, you must simply go away. Avoid eye contact with the other person that will help you. Keeping eye contact allows the other person to have more power over you. Most abusers will stop their behavior. They are not as brave as you think!

Fifth: If something upsetting is happening, and you don't want it to happen, you can try to stop it by saying NO! or STOP! If that doesn't have any effect you can scream or kick.

Sixth. Try to tell about it to an adult you trust, like someone in your family, at school or at the sports club. That trusted person can help you so that it doesn't happen again. Don't try to solve it by yourself.

Seventh: You can be sad or angry, but never see yourself like a fool. Because the one who abuses you or wants to abuse you is the one that is the true fool.