

JOURNAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Ernestine C. Briggs, PhD

Journal Highlights informs readers of current research on various aspects of child maltreatment. APSAC members are invited to contribute by sending a copy of current articles (preferably published within the past 6 months) along with a two- or three-sentence review to Ernestine C. Briggs, PhD, Duke University Medical Center, Trauma Evaluation, Research and Treatment Program, Center for Child and Family Health—North Carolina, 3518 Westgate Drive, Suite 100, Durham, NC 27707 (Fax: 919-419-9353).

SEXUAL ABUSE

Impact of maternal depression on sexually abused children's adjustment

The purpose of this study was to determine whether maternal depression would impact children's adjustment to sexual abuse. It was hypothesized that depressed mothers would report more behavior difficulties for their sexually abused children than nondepressed mothers. Participants were 58 children (and their mothers) who were referred for trauma symptoms related to sexual abuse. Results reveal that depressed mothers reported more conduct problems, inattention/immaturity, and psychotic behavior than nondepressed mothers. Differences were not observed for mothers' reports of depressive or anxious behaviors across groups. The children of depressed mothers reported increased levels of depression, but not anxiety, when compared to children of nondepressed mothers.

Kelly, D., Faust, J., Runyon, M. K., & Kenny, M.C. (2002). Behavior problems in sexually abused children of depressed versus nondepressed mothers. *Journal of Family Violence, 17*(2), 107-116.

Relationship among abuse, chronic fatigue syndrome, and psychiatric disorders

Researchers examined the role of sexual and physical abuse history and its relationship to chronic fatigue and psychiatric disorders. Specifically, 18,675 individuals, 780 of whom reported chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), completed interviews and questionnaires concerning psychiatric disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, and sexual and physical abuse history. Among CFS subjects, childhood sexual abuse and the total number of different childhood abuse events significantly predicted fatigue outcome. Similarly, sexual abuse during adolescence or adulthood significantly predicted other anxiety disorders among individuals with CFS.

Taylor, R. R., & Jason, L. A. (2002). Chronic fatigue, abuse-related traumatization, and psychiatric disorders in a community-based sample. *Social Science & Medicine, 55*(2), 247-256.

Childhood experiences associated with risk for adult sexual victimization

This study examined childhood experiences associated with risk for sexual assault victimization in adulthood. In the study, 277 female outpatients retrospectively reported family composition and cohesion, childhood maltreatment experiences perpetrated by adults and peers, and adulthood victimization. Results show that early sexual experiences with peers, childhood sexual abuse by adults, the absence of a father or father figure in childhood, perceived level of closeness to father in adolescence, and neglect by mother posed significant risks for subsequent adult victimization.

Stermac, L., Reist, D., Addison, M., & Millar, G. M. (2002). Childhood risk factors for women's sexual victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 17*(6), 647-670.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Utility of cognitive retraining in child abuse prevention program

This investigation tested the incremental utility of cognitive retraining as a component within a program designed to prevent child maltreatment. High-risk families (N=96) were randomly assigned to a control condition, home visitation that was modeled after the Healthy Start program (unenanced home visitation) or a home visitation that included a cognitive component (enhanced home visitation). Mothers were identified during late pregnancy or soon after birth, and their participation continued for 1 year. Lower levels of harsh parenting were found among mothers in the enhanced home visitation condition than among mothers in the unenhanced home visitation or control conditions. Prevalence of physical abuse during the first year was 26% in the control condition, 23% in the unenhanced home visitation condition, and 4% in the enhanced home visitation condition. Benefits were greatest in families that included a medically at-risk child. A linear pattern of benefits was found for child health; as program features were added, benefits for child health increased.

Bugental, D. B., Ellerson, P. C., Lin, E. K., Rainey, B., Kokotovic, A., & O'Hara, N. (2002). A cognitive approach to child abuse prevention. *Journal of Family Psychology, 16*(3), 243-258.

History of physical and sexual abuse associated with anxiety disorders

This study examined the prevalence of self-reported childhood physical or sexual abuse in a sample of 149 adult patients presenting for treatment of panic disorder, social phobia, or generalized anxiety disorder. Subjects were interviewed on their childhood history. As a part of this interview, physical or sexual abuse was assessed. Subjects with panic disorder had significantly higher rates of past childhood physical or sexual abuse than did patients with

social phobia. Individuals with generalized anxiety disorder had intermediate rates of past physical or sexual abuse that were not significantly different from the other two diagnostic groups. Anxiety disorder subjects with a history of childhood abuse were also more likely to have comorbid major depression than those without. These findings are discussed in terms of biological and behavioral factors that may influence the development of anxiety disorders after the experience of a traumatic event.

Safren, S. A., Gershuny, B. S., Marzol, P., Otto, M.W., & Pollack, M. H. (2002). History of childhood abuse in panic disorder, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder. *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 190(7), 453-456.

Does attachment mediate the impact of family violence on adolescent relationships?

Researchers examined the impact of domestic violence, child abuse, and attachment style on adolescent mental health and relationship functioning. Data were collected on 111 adolescents (aged 14-16 yrs) and their mothers. Results indicate that both attachment and family violence experiences negatively impact mental health. In addition, family violence significantly predicted attachment style. Significant protective and vulnerability factors included maternal psychological functioning, maternal positive parenting, and perceived social support from friends. However, it is stated that findings provide only limited support for the model of attachment as a mediator of the impact of family violence on adolescent relationships.

Levendosky, A. A., Huth-Bocks, A., & Semel, M. A. (2002). Adolescent peer relationships and mental health functioning in families with domestic violence. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 31(2), 206-218.

OTHER ISSUES IN CHILD MALTREATMENT

Perceptions, attributional style, and behavioral problems in maltreated children

This study examined relations among perceptions of mothers, attributional style, and counselor-rated behavior problems in 187 school-age children (aged 8-14 yrs; 88 maltreated, 99 nonmaltreated). Hypotheses regarding the presence of higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in maltreated children were confirmed. Attributional style was found to function as a moderator of externalizing behavior problems, suggesting that attributional style exerts a protective role against the harmful effect of child maltreatment. Perceptions of mothers were found to operate as a mediator of both internalizing and externalizing symptomatology, with maltreated children with less positive perceptions of their mothers exhibiting greater internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. These findings advance

knowledge of how cognitive processes contribute to behavior problems in maltreated children and possess implications for prevention and intervention efforts.

Toth, S. L., Cicchetti, D., & Kim, J. (2002). Relations among children's perceptions of maternal behavior, attributional styles, and behavioral symptomatology in maltreated children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 30(5), 487-501.

Family disorganization, social service placement, and criminality

The extent to which family disorganization moderates the effect of social service placement on juvenile and adult arrests was examined. The authors tested hypotheses relating to two measures of family disorganization: family separation and family moves. Removing an abused or neglected child from the home increased the likelihood of adult arrest for children who experienced a recent family separation. Placement reduced the likelihood of arrest for males who experienced frequent moves and increased the risk of adult arrest for females who experienced frequent moves. The authors concluded that gender differences in placement outcomes should be explored, and they discussed the implications of this research for social service agencies.

McMahon, J., & Clay-Warner, J. (2002). Child abuse and future criminality: The role of social service placement, family disorganization, and gender. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17(9), 1002-1019.

Methodological lessons from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being

The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being is a national probability study of children investigated for child abuse and neglect. This core study is complemented with a national probability study of children who have been in foster care for approximately 1 year. Plans and efforts to recruit 105 county agencies, more than 6,000 children ages 0-14, and a total of nearly 25,000 respondents associated with the child are described. Several advances in survey methodology help to manage the process in a cost-efficient and scientifically rigorous manner. Lessons from the planning stages and from the early weeks of fieldwork are presented. The sampling and instrumentation techniques are discussed alongside other methodological issues.

Barth, R. P., Biemer, P., Runyan, D., Webb, M. B., Berrick, J. D., Dowd, K., Griffith, J., et al. (2002). Methodological lessons from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being: The first three years of the USA's first national probability study of children and families investigated for abuse and neglect. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 24(6-7), 513-541.



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Links among childhood adversities, interpersonal difficulties, and risk for suicide

Data from a community-based longitudinal study were used to investigate the association among childhood adversities, interpersonal difficulties during adolescence, and suicide attempts during late adolescence or early adulthood. In 1975, 1983, 1985 to 1986, and 1991 to 1993, researchers interviewed 659 families. Results suggest maladaptive parenting and childhood maltreatment were associated with an elevated risk for interpersonal difficulties during middle adolescence and for suicide attempts during late adolescence after age, sex, psychiatric symptoms during childhood and early adolescence, and parental psychiatric symptoms were controlled statistically. A wide range of interpersonal difficulties during middle adolescence were associated with risk for suicidal behavior after the covariates were controlled. Maladaptive parenting and childhood maltreatment may be associated with a risk for severe interpersonal difficulties during adolescence. These interpersonal difficulties may play a pivotal role in the development of suicidal behavior.

Johnson, J. G., Cohen, P., Gould, M. S., Kasen, S., Brown, J., & Brook, J. S. (2002). Childhood adversities, interpersonal difficulties, and risk for suicide attempts during late adolescence and early adulthood. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 59(8), 741-749.

Attachment: Theory, research, and clinical considerations

This article presented a selective review of attachment theory and research that has contributed knowledge about dynamics underlying early trauma, mechanisms by which maladaptive responses to trauma may be transmitted between generations, and trauma-related risk factors for psychopathology in children, adolescents, and adults. First, the foundations of attachment theory, including the biological basis of and individual differences

in infant attachment behavior, were discussed. The second section examined the connection between frightening experiences and disorganized attachment. Infants who are regularly and seriously frightened by aspects of their caregiving environment are believed to be at risk for "unsolvable fear," in which organized attachment responses to fear are impossible. The behaviors and representations characteristic of disorganized children and their parents were described. Next, the authors reviewed recent research on the relations among attachment, trauma, and psychopathology across the lifespan. Finally, the article discussed implications of these findings for clinical practice.

Cassidy, J., & Mohr, J. J. (2001). Unsolvable fear, trauma, and psychopathology: Theory, research, and clinical considerations related to disorganized attachment across the life span. *Clinical Psychology-Science & Practice*, 8(3), 275-298.

Should child advocacy centers screen for domestic violence?

This article presented preliminary data gathered from the pilot study of a domestic violence-screening tool conducted at a child advocacy center, in which 59 female caretakers of children who were being evaluated for sexual or physical abuse were screened. Of the caretakers, 67% reported a history of emotional abuse, 64% physical abuse, and 47% sexual abuse. Also, 20% of the women reported physical abuse during pregnancy, 8% reported sexual abuse, and 40% reported emotional abuse. The authors concluded that given the high incidence of the coexistence of child abuse and domestic violence in these families, child abuse evaluations need to assess for family safety.

Pulido, M. L., & Gupta, D. (2002). Protecting the child and the family: Integrating domestic violence screening into a child advocacy center. *Violence Against Women*, 8(8), 917-933.

