

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



Volume 6, Issue 8

August 2013

Dear Colleague,

This month's NEARI News considers the lingering question for many parents, professionals and community members: Does childhood sexual abuse lead to sexual abusing behaviors later in life? The short answer is "no."

In this powerful article, Wesley Jennings and his colleagues acknowledge that previous research may have uncovered many factors other than being abused that are disproportionately present for those children who are abused (e.g., low self-control, and involvement with risk behavior and risky peers). However, this study did not establish causality between either experiencing or witnessing sexual violence as a child and adult victimization or perpetration.

As part of NEARI Press' efforts to prevent anyone from abusing others, please consider becoming a sponsor of our exciting new 2013-2014 NEARI Press Webinar series. We will continue to feature nationally recognized authors including, but not limited to: David Prescott, Rob Longo, Kevin Creeden, Robin Wilson, and Robert Kinscherff. To launch the series in September, we need your help. It helps us and will help you--we guarantee your seat in the webinar, we do all of the work to sign you up each month, and we offer you two free books for your support. It really is a win-win situation for all of us.

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Linkages Between Childhood Abuse and Later Perpetration of Abuse

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

Question

What makes the difference between those who experience or witness abuse during childhood and go on to abuse others and those who never become abusive?

The Research

Wesley Jennings and his colleagues sought to find the causal factors that might differentiate people who were abused as children and live healthy lives from those with the same experience but then abuse later in life. The authors first explored various studies that relied primarily on social learning theory (e.g., experiencing abuse "teaches" that violence is a means to solve problems or gain control). They also explored research about risk factors for non-violent crime that are linked to such aggression, (e.g., witnessing interparental aggression or having higher levels of impulsivity and irresponsible behaviors that lead to partner-violence perpetration).

The authors attempted to separate out the causal variables by administering a number of tests to college students from a large southeastern university and then matching those students with various propensities for violence and a victimization history with those who did not share that history. Using this method to establish causality, the authors concluded that there was no significant causal link between a history of sexual abuse and those who go on to abuse. The authors acknowledge that previous research may have uncovered many other factors that are disproportionately present for those children who are abused (e.g., low self-control, and involvement with risk behavior and risky peers). However, this study did not establish causality between either experiencing or witnessing violence as a child and adult victimization or perpetration.

Implications for Professionals

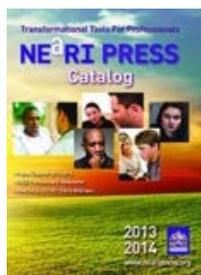
While Jennings and his colleagues examined violence in general and did not intend to look exclusively at sexual violence, their methodology and conclusions raise important points for professionals to consider.

- Which historical factors actually drive a person to abuse?
- As professionals we need to remember our limitations in "predicting" whether a given youth with a particular background and known risk factors will become abusive.
- This forces each clinician to carefully consider which risk

up, please contact Diane Langelier at 413.540.0712 x14.

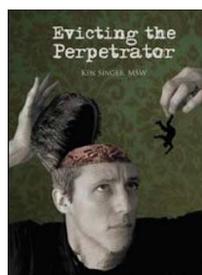
As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413-540-0712, x14.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis



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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



[Evicting the Perpetrator: A Male Survivor's Guide to Recovery From Childhood Sexual Abuse](#)

by Ken Singer

Ken Singer's book for male survivors offers a unique perspective about moving past the ways abusers can control a survivor's life for years after the abuse. Through exercises and assignments, survivors will learn how to retake control of their lives. Singer offers clear insights and useful advice about how to support a victim's recovery. Professionals working with survivors (and perpetrators who were sexually abused) and their families will find this a useful addition to their library.

Paperback, 334 pages
ISBN: 978-1-929657-46-9

factors are most helpful in focusing our treatment approaches.

For many years, we assumed certain risk factors were critical for our attention (e.g., denial); only to learn there was little correlation and certainly no established causality between that factor and future offending. More importantly, Jennings and his colleagues' research leads us back to the observation that much research is about groups of people and does not tell us what will or will not happen to a particular individual in the future. Correlation and propensity are not the same as causation. Deeply understanding multiple risk and protective factors and intervening with the right approach with the right client will likely go further in preventing sexual abuse.

Implications for the Field

As we gain greater knowledge of the trajectory that leads from childhood experiences, vulnerabilities, strengths, and deficits to future safe or sexually abusive behaviors, this research guides us in new directions. First, our field needs to continue exploring the general delinquency literature and general criminal factors. These can differ from sexual abuse risk factors and may help to guide effective treatment planning. Second, it is vital to differentiate between correlations and causality carefully as we deepen our understanding of resiliency and how best to intervene. Finally, this research supports one promising prevention strategy: to intervene early in a young person's life, especially those with multiple risk factors, and engage them in healthy lifestyle and skill building programs that focus on pro-social activities.

Abstract

There has been a considerable amount of published research investigating the link between experiencing child abuse and later offending and victimization. Most of the evidence gleaned from these studies demonstrates support for a cycle of violence. However, prior research has overwhelmingly been based on correlational observations.

Considering this limitation, the current study uses a rigorous, quasi-experimental research design to assess the causal effect of experiencing child abuse on adult dating violence perpetration and victimization. Relying on data from a large sample of college students and utilizing a propensity score matching approach, the results indicate that the link between child abuse and adult dating violence victimization and perpetration is spurious. Study limitations and implications are discussed.

Citation

- Jennings, W.G., Richards, T.A., Tomsich, E.A, Gover, A.R, and Powers, R.A. (2013). A critical examination of the causal link between child abuse and adult dating violence perpetration and victimization from a propensity score matching approach. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 23, 167-184.

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