

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.



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Dear Colleague,

This month's research paper looks at the impact of non-sexual abuse (physical and emotional abuse and neglect) on the development of sexualized behaviors in children. The research acknowledges that all children display some sexual behaviors while growing up, but some more problematic behaviors may or may not be linked to a history of sexual abuse. It is essential that the adults surrounding an abused or neglected child understand the complex realities of abuse. This article points to an interesting dynamic where the same coping strategies created by children may also create an opportunity for intervention and healing.

Also this month, we are highlighting NEARI's newest publication, RESPECT, by Tom Keating. This clinician manual and student workbook offer a unique approach to treatment that truly takes in the whole person. Probably the best description is from a parent who said, "*This program has helped my son face up to*

The Impact of Physical and Emotional Abuse and Neglect on the Development of Sexualized Behaviors

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

The Question

Even without a history of sexual abuse, would child neglect, physical as well as emotional abuse, predict problematic sexual behaviors in young children?

The Research

Merrick, Litrownick, Everson, and Cox studied a sample of 690 children in multiple sites who had reported non-sexual abuse (physical, emotional, neglect) to determine if such other abuse was predictive of problematic sexual behaviors in children. Using a variation of the Child Sexual Behavior Inventory-II (approved by its original author, William Freidrich) five CSBI domains were identified as problematic:

- Boundary problems
- Displaying private parts
- Sexual interest
- Sexual intrusiveness
- Sexual knowledge

These researchers conducted extensive record reviews and interviews with all participants and their families. Further, they examined the type of abuse (i.e., physical, emotional, neglect), the timing of that abuse (i.e., age of children at time of abuse, <4 years was considered early; 4-8 years was considered late), and the gender of the child being abused.

Their research found a relationship between non-sexual abuse and

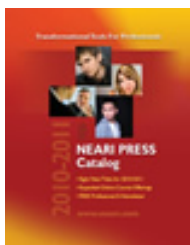
his actions. He is learning to understand and accept the consequences of his choices. He now owns his reality." For more information, see the description and link below, under NEARI Resources.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue in an upcoming issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES NEW!

RESPECT: Clinician Manual and Student Workbook



by Tom Keating

Few approaches to sex offender management/treatment attempt to be truly transformative. Tom Keating has chosen to challenge his clients to learn how to manage their behaviors and transform

problematic sexual behavior in both boys and girls with the type of abuse, gender and age of onset, influencing the types of inappropriate sexual behavior identified. More specifically, the researchers found that early and late reports of physical abuse and late reports of emotional abuse consistently increased the odds of engaging in problematic sexual behavior. Boys in the study tended to display more externalized sexual behaviors while girls tended to show more subtle, internalizing behaviors.

They also recognized that while the participants chosen for the study did not have any known sexual abuse history, it was possible that sexual abuse had occurred and that in some participants it might have explained their sexualized behaviors. Further, the authors speculated that some of these sexual behaviors might be related to attempts at self-soothing in children or as a marker of other family characteristics (e.g., family nudity, poor boundaries, family chaos), although they did not study these correlations directly.

Implications for Professionals

Our field has accepted the need for more holistic approaches to intervention and treatment for children and youth in recent years. Exploring and resolving the traumatic impact of sexual abuse can be paramount to successful treatment. This study helps clarify the relationship between other forms of trauma and the problematic sexual behaviors we are working to extinguish. While limited to children (8 year olds), the study has implications for older youth as well, whose inappropriate sexual behavior may have started at an earlier age and may have been related to other non-sexual types of trauma. Professionals can help children and adolescents by exploring all aspects of sexual and non-sexual abuse, as well as their relationship to the onset and development of inappropriate sexual behavior. Furthermore, when working with younger children, we should take into account that there can be healthy intentions around inappropriate sexual behaviors (e.g., self-soothing). In these cases, it is essential that the interventions we recommend help the child develop healthy alternatives to the problematic sexual behaviors.

Implications for the Field

This study contributes to the growing body of research about the origins of inappropriate sexual behavior in children. It suggests the need to develop ever-stronger clinical skills to identify ALL types of past trauma/abuse and to design treatment interventions consistent with those findings. Although it would be inappropriate to burden child trauma victims or their families with the fear that inappropriate sexual behavior may develop, this research suggests an opportunity to find universal ways to inoculate children who have experienced such abuse. When children develop sexual ways to cope with the impact of their trauma, professionals need to create interventions that offer the child clear alternatives to reinforce healthy interactions and focus on prevention.

Abstract

the way they approach life. RESPECT is both a philosophy of living and a specific set of exercises to help youth and young adults who have sexually abused move to abuse-free lives.

For more information, click a title below or go to the NEARI Press Bookstore at <http://bookstore.nearipress.org/>.

[RESPECT: Professional Manual](#)

Paperback (full color)
ISBN: 978-1-929657-46-9
Catalog Number: 9891
Cost: \$39.00 + S&H

[RESPECT: Student Workbook](#)

Paperback
ISBN: 978-1-929657-48-3
Catalog Number: 9890
Cost: \$19.00 + S&H

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About the Editor:
David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

An internationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is a Past President of ATSA and is currently Clinical Director for the Becket Programs of Maine, overseeing inpatient and outpatient services for juveniles.

Beyond Sexual Abuse: The Impact of Other Maltreatment Experiences On Sexualized Behaviors. Melissa T. Merrick, Alan J. Litrownik, Mark D. Everson, and Christine E. Cox

This study sought to broaden research findings linking maltreatment to sexualized behaviors by investigating whether maltreatment experiences other than sexual abuse predict such behaviors. The sample included 690 children without reported sexual abuse histories who are participants in the LONGSCAN Consortium, a prospective multisite investigation of childhood maltreatment. Child Protective Service reports before age 8 years and caregiver reports on the Child Sexual Behavior Inventory-II at age 8 years were used to examine the relationship between maltreatment timing and type, and sexualized behaviors. Logistic regression analyses suggested that early (< 4) and late (4-8) reports of physical abuse were associated with more sexualized behaviors (odds ratios = 1.9-2.6). The pattern differed by gender, with physical abuse predicting sexual intrusiveness and displaying private parts in boys, and boundary problems in girls. Findings suggest that maltreatment other than sexual abuse, and the developmental periods in which it occurs, may be linked to the development of sexualized behaviors.

Citation

Merrick, M., Litrownik, A., Everson, M., & Cox, C. (2008). Beyond Sexual Abuse: The Impact of Other Maltreatment Experiences on Sexualized Behaviors. *Child Maltreatment*, 13(2), 122-132.

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