

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,

Welcome to the third issue of NEARI E-NEWS!

This E-News issue looks at some groundbreaking research about the percent of sexually abusive youth who are also victims of sexual abuse as well as the impact of victimization and personality characteristics on treatment decisions.

As always, if YOU have a particular question you would like us to respond to, please let us know at info@neari.com or at 413-540-0712.

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Steven Bengis and Joan Tabachnick
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Featured Website



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A New Study Looks at Victimization and Personality Characteristics of Youth who have Sexually Abused

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

Summary

A recent study by David Burton examines the contribution of personality and childhood sexual victimization to the development of sexually abusive behavior. The study found that both the youth's history of victimization and the youth's personality, context and developmental stage can affect risk and treatment outcome.

The Issue

In the last few decades, professionals working with sexually abusive youth have often failed to look at the whole child, including the impact of trauma, when assessing and treating these youth.

The Research

Burton identified 74 adjudicated youthful male sexual abusers and 53 nonsexual abusers and asked them a series of questions to look at the circumstances that may have led to the abusing behaviors. Each participant was given two tests (MACI and CTQ) to look at a number of risk and protective factors for each youth. Key findings included:

- Significantly more sexually abusing youth reported having been sexually abused (69.6%) than youth who have committed other crimes (39.6%)
- Personality characteristics (as documented in the MACI) contribute to the youth's decision to sexually abuse a younger child. Burton suggests that there are many reasons a teen may choose to abuse. The survey describes some of the reasons that youth make that choice including but not limited to meeting their own emotional needs.

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About the Author: David S. Prescott, LICSW



[David Prescott website](#)

Implications for the Field

Understanding the role of victimization in the development of sexual behavior can be a challenge. Only a small number of sexual abuse survivors actually abuse others, and fewer still become repeat sexual abusers. However, Burton's study highlights that young people understand their own victimization in many ways and that personality (as well as developmental and contextual) factors can contribute to how young people understand their world.

It is important to remember that this study is of self-reported victimization among youths in residential placement. Some studies that have examined past sexual victimization have found different rates of victimization depending on whether investigators use terminology such as "sexual abuse" or ask about specific behaviors (Simons, 2007).

Implications for Professionals

Assessments and treatment should be comprehensive and consider the entire child. Knowledge of how young people understand and act upon their life experiences is central to making treatment meaningful for youth. This study highlights the importance of how victimization and personality can combine to influence youths' relationships as well as behavior. It is not as simple as "he abused because he was abused."

Burton is careful to point out that no single "best practice" yet exists for treating trauma as a part of abuse-specific treatment. However, he notes that there is general empirical support for cognitive-behavioral approaches to treating post-traumatic stress disorder as well as sexual aggression, and that many personality variables are amenable to these methods as well.

Conclusion

An increasing number of professionals are adopting a "whole" approach to management and treatment of youth who sexually abuse. Given the significant percentage of sexually abusing youth who have also been victimized, professionals in the field need to become adept at deciding upon and delivering the best course of treatment that addresses a trauma history. A variety of techniques, including but not limited to cognitive-behavioral treatment, can be a component of the whole-child approach, and may also be appropriate for addressing the trauma of sexual abuse and many personality variables.

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Full Abstract

Scores on the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI) and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) were collected from two samples of incarcerated delinquent males: 74 adjudicated sexual abusers and 53 nonsexual abusers. In comparison to non-sexually abusive youths, a larger percentage of the sexually abusive youths indicated a history of childhood sexual victimization. The scores were then entered into a logistic regression to assess the contribution of personality characteristics to a social learning "victim-to-victimizer" etiological model. After controlling for time in treatment, the model correctly classified 76.6% of the youths. The variables that contributed significantly to the social learning model were the CTQ Sexual Abuse and Physical Neglect scales and the Submissive and Forceful scales on the MACI. Research and treatment implications of these findings are discussed.

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A nationally 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 the President of ATSA and is currently the Treatment Assessment Director at the Sand Ridge Secure Treatment Center in Mauston, WI.

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