

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

Characteristics of child physical and sexual abuse as predictors of psychopathology

Jonathan Adams*, Sylvie Mrug, David C. Knight

University of Alabama at Birmingham, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Physical abuse
Sexual abuse
Abuse characteristics
Psychopathology

ABSTRACT

Childhood physical and sexual abuse victims are at increased risk for developing depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in adulthood. Prior findings suggest abuse onset, duration, and severity moderate relationships between victimization and psychopathology. However, because these abuse characteristics are highly intercorrelated, their unique, individual effects on mental health outcomes remain unclear. To address this gap, the present study examined relationships between physical and sexual abuse characteristics and mental health outcomes and whether these relationships differed by sex. A diverse community sample of late adolescents and emerging adults ($N = 1270$; mean age = 19.68; 51% female) self-reported the onset, duration, and severity of physical and sexual abuse, as well as their depressive, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms. Results of a multivariate regression model (simultaneously evaluating all physical and sexual abuse characteristics) indicated that physical abuse onset in middle childhood and sexual abuse onset in middle childhood or adolescence were associated with all forms of psychopathology; and physical abuse onset at any time was uniquely linked with PTSD. Duration and severity of physical or sexual abuse did not predict psychopathology after accounting for time of onset. Multigroup analyses indicated that adolescence-onset and duration of sexual abuse respectively predicted anxiety and PTSD in females but not males, whereas sexual abuse severity predicted fewer PTSD symptoms in males but not females. Overall, results suggested that abuse occurring after age 5 may have the most deleterious impact on mental health.

Abuse is a severe threat to the physical and psychological well-being of children (Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, & Akman, 1992; Edwards, Anda, Felitti, & Dube, 2004; Norman et al., 2012). An estimated 27% of females and 5% of males in the United States will experience sexual abuse or assault prior to age 18 (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014), and approximately 11% of males and 8% of females will be physically abused prior to age 18 (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013). Child victims of either physical or sexual abuse are more likely to develop concurrent and future psychopathologies (Cicchetti, Rogosch, Gunnar, & Toth, 2010; Del Giudice, Ellis, & Shirtcliff, 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Molnar, Buka, & Kessler, 2001), including depression (Andrews, Valentine, & Valentine, 1995; Weiss, Longhurst, & Mazure, 1999; Widom, DuMont, & Czaja, 2007), anxiety (Stein, Walker, Anderson, & Hazen, 1996), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cohen, Deblinger, Mannarino, & Steer, 2004; Ehring et al., 2014).

Child abuse victims display vastly divergent mental health outcomes in adulthood (Hillberg, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Dixon, 2011), with characteristics of abuse, such as type of abuse, onset (age at first victimization), severity, and duration explaining much of this variability (Alexander, 1993; Romano & De Luca, 2001; Silverman, Reinherz, & Giaconia, 1996). While past research has

* Corresponding author at: University of Alabama at Birmingham, Department of Psychology, 1300 University Boulevard, CH 415, Birmingham, AL 35294, United States.

E-mail address: jmadams@uab.edu (J. Adams).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.09.019>

Received 4 December 2017; Received in revised form 8 August 2018; Accepted 25 September 2018
0145-2134/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

explored the effects of sexual abuse characteristics on psychopathology (Lange et al., 1999; Ruggiero, McLeer, & Dixon, 2000; Schoedl et al., 2010), few studies have addressed the role of these characteristics for physical abuse, and even fewer have examined the unique predictive roles of both physical and sexual abuse characteristics. Because child abuse victims frequently experience more than one form of victimization (Felitti et al., 1998), investigating multiple forms of abuse within the same model is necessary to pinpoint precisely which abuse characteristics are the most important determinants of specific types of psychopathology (Joiner et al., 2007). Furthermore, onset, duration, and severity are highly intercorrelated (Rodriguez, Ryan, Rowan, & Foy, 1996; Ullman, 2007); thus, studies examining only one characteristic may provide an inaccurate picture of its effects. Because various aspects of victimization have different impacts on psychological outcomes, knowledge of the unique roles of abuse characteristics is needed to optimize our theoretical understanding of victimization and its effects, as well as to guide prevention and intervention efforts (Beitchman et al., 1992; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1993; Naar-King, Silvern, Ryan, & Sebring, 2002). Finally, little research has examined whether the relationships between abuse characteristics and psychopathology differ for males and females, although prior research suggests males and females respond differently to stressful life events (Breslau, Chilcoat, Kessler, Peterson, & Lucia, 1999). To address these gaps, the present study examines the unique effects of onset, severity, and duration of both physical and sexual abuse during childhood and adolescence on mental health outcomes and examines sex differences in these effects in a large, community-based sample of young adults.

1. Type of abuse

Child victims of either physical or sexual abuse are more likely to experience psychopathology in later life. Studies exclusively evaluating the role of childhood physical abuse have found associations with depression and anxiety in both adolescence and adulthood (Carlin et al., 1994; Lansford et al., 2002; MacMillan et al., 2001; Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993; Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, & Carnes, 2007). Likewise, studies solely examining childhood sexual abuse have found that it precedes depression (Jumper, 1995; Kendler, Kuhn, & Prescott, 2004), PTSD (Cohen et al., 2004) and poorer overall psychological health in adulthood (Molnar et al., 2001).

More recent studies have examined the unique effects of physical and sexual abuse on psychological outcomes, but findings have been inconsistent. Some studies have found that both physical and sexual abuse uniquely predict depression, anxiety, and suicidality in adulthood (Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008; Gibb, Chelminski, & Zimmerman, 2007; Joiner et al., 2007; Ystgaard, Hestetun, Loeb, & Mehlum, 2004), and victims of both forms of abuse are at an especially high risk (Roth, Newman, Pelcovitz, Van Der Kolk, & Mandel, 1997). However, other investigations have suggested that sexual abuse is a stronger predictor than physical abuse of depression (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999), anxiety (Cogle, Timpano, Sachs-Ericsson, Keough, & Riccardi, 2010), and suicidal behavior (Brown et al., 1999; Lopez-Castroman et al., 2013). Meanwhile, a smaller number of studies suggest that physical abuse is actually a stronger predictor of lifetime major depressive disorder and poorer well-being than sexual abuse (Ney, Fung, & Wickett, 1994; Widom et al., 2007). With the exception of Lopez-Castroman et al.'s (2013) study, which only examined suicidality, none of these studies examined the roles of specific abuse characteristics. Accounting for these characteristics may help resolve the discordancy in prior findings (Mullen et al., 1993).

Of all studies examining both physical and sexual abuse, only one has included specific characteristics of both physical and sexual abuse as predictors of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Naar-King et al., 2002). This study found that both duration and severity of childhood physical abuse were associated with more depressive and anxiety symptoms in adolescents, but the negative impact of sexual abuse on psychological health did not vary by duration and severity. However, this study utilized a sample of adolescent psychiatric patients, limiting the generalizability of the results to the larger population of maltreated children (Lansford et al., 2002; Springer et al., 2007).

2. Characteristics of abuse

Carlson, Furby, Armstrong, and Shlaes (1997) propose that three aspects of undesirable life events make an event traumatic: the inability to control it, the perception that it is a negative experience, and its suddenness. These three themes help to explain previous findings regarding the effects of abuse onset, duration, and severity on long-term psychological outcomes.

2.1. Onset

Most research suggests that earlier onset of physical and sexual abuse is associated with more severe depressive, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms (Banyard & Williams, 1996; Kaplow & Widom, 2007; Kaplow, Dodge, Amaya-Jackson, & Saxe, 2005; Lopez-Castroman et al., 2013; Thornberry, Henry, Ireland, & Smith, 2010). Consistent with Carlson et al.'s (1997) theory of trauma appraisal, younger victims are less able to control their negative situation than older victims – that is, to prevent abuse from occurring (Keiley, Howe, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2001). Younger children are largely incapable of defending themselves or recruiting social support (Carlson et al., 1997; Ullman, 2007), and, as a result, they suffer feelings of learned helplessness and poor self-efficacy (Moran & Eckenrode, 1992; Peterson & Seligman, 1983). In addition, there is reason to suspect younger children are more likely to perceive abuse as a negative experience. The primary developmental task of early childhood is to forge secure attachments with caregivers (Cicchetti, 1989; Crittenden, 1985). Because younger children are more frequently abused by relatives than strangers or acquaintances (Ullman, 2007), they may be less likely to accomplish this crucial developmental task. Indeed, victims of early childhood abuse report feeling “betrayed” by their caregivers and suffer greater psychological distress throughout the lifespan (Freyd,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11024068>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11024068>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)