



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA
School of Psychology



HEAL FOR LIFE
FOUNDATION

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This research bulletin aims to inform those working with survivors of childhood trauma of recent research from social science and family studies journals and reports. It is produced and distributed free of charge to interested individuals and organisations. For subscription details see end of bulletin.

Advisory Group

The role of the advisory group is to suggest topics of interest for the bulletin, to offer guidance on strategies for developing the bulletin, provide feedback on its quality, scope and style, and to facilitate links between the bulletin to other organisations and publications.

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The prevalence and impact of early childhood trauma in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Synopsis

Chronic fatigue syndrome is the common name for a group of debilitating illnesses characterised by constant fatigue. The aim of this study was to assess the role that childhood trauma has on chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) sufferers' daily pain and fatigue levels. The results of this paper showed that over half (54.4%) of CFS sufferers endured some level of childhood trauma, with a vast majority (46.7%) describing emotional trauma. In addition to this, total trauma scores (measuring the severity of the trauma) significantly predicted the levels of daily pain and fatigue, even when controlled for demographic features and depressed mood.

Kempke, S., Luyten, P., Claes, S., Wambeke, P. V., Bekaert, P., Goossens, L., & Houdenhove, B. V. (2013). The prevalence and impact of early childhood trauma in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 47, 664-669.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022395613000447>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Practitioners need to be aware that chronic fatigue can be an indicator of emotional childhood trauma*

Spirituality and coping with life stress among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Synopsis

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of spiritual coping mechanisms in the current stressors of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The forms of spiritual coping that were relevant to this study are; spiritual discontent, religious forgiveness and active surrender. Spiritual discontent refers to the state of responding to current life stress with anger towards God. Religious forgiveness is the act of seeking God's help in letting go of negative emotions. Finally, active surrender is the act of handing control of the situation to God. The results of this study found that adult survivors practising negative spiritual coping mechanisms, such as spiritual discontent, were more likely to experience depressed mood. Those practicing positive spiritual coping mechanisms, such as religious forgiveness and active surrender, were more likely to experience less depressed mood and anger.

Gall, T. L. (2006). Spirituality and coping with life stress among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30 (7), 829-844.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213406001475>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Encourage acknowledgement and relationship with God or a higher power*
- *Inclusion of positive spiritual practices as a part of any therapeutic work in order to facilitate healing*
- *Important to be aware that spirituality needs to be the clients own understanding of God as opposed to the therapists belief system*

Childhood maltreatment and conduct disorder: Independent predictors of criminal outcomes in ADHD youth

Synopsis

Attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) is a common disorder in children that can result in hyperactivity, inattention and impulsivity. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect that childhood maltreatment has on the risk of children with ADHD engaging in criminality. The results of the study indicated that moderate to severe childhood maltreatment increased the risk of being arrested in adolescence. Compared to children with ADHD and no history of maltreatment, those who suffered from maltreatment are three and a half times more likely to be arrested.

De Sanctis, V. A., Nomura, Y., Newcorn, J. H. & Halperin, J. M. (2012). Childhood maltreatment and conduct disorder: independent predictors of criminal outcomes in adhd youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36 (11), 782-789.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213412001937>

Suicide attempts among men with histories of child sexual abuse: Examining abuse severity, mental health, and masculine norms

Synopsis

Men who were sexually abused during childhood are at risk of developing a variety of long term mental health problems, including suicidality. This study aimed to show the relationship between abuse severity, mental health, masculine norms, and recent suicide attempts among men with a history of child sexual abuse. The results of this study found that duration of the sexual abuse, use of force during the sexual abuse, high conformity to masculine norms, level of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation all increased the odds of a suicide attempt in the last 12 months.

Easton, S. D., Renner, L. M. & O'Leary, P. (2013). Suicide attempts among men with histories of child sexual abuse: examining abuse severity, mental health, and masculine norms. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37 (6), 380-387.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213412002566>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Important to assist men to recognise traditional coping mechanisms and their negative impact on mental health*
- *Incorporate therapeutic interventions which encourage emotional release*
- *Recognition that 'typical male coping' can be an indicator of suicidal ideation*

Child abuse and neglect, social support, and psychopathology in adulthood: A prospective investigation

Synopsis

The objective of this study was to determine whether childhood abuse and neglect predict low levels of social support in middle adulthood. The secondary objective was to understand whether social support acts to mediate or moderate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and subsequent outcomes (anxiety, depression and illicit drug use). The results of this study showed that those in the maltreated group reported significantly lower levels of social support during adulthood. The conclusions drawn from this study was that social support plays a significant role in mediating and moderating the long term consequences of childhood abuse.

Sperry, D. M. and Widom, C. S. 2013. Child abuse and neglect, social support, and psychopathology in adulthood: A prospective investigation. *Child abuse & neglect*, 37 (6), 415-425.

Deficits in short-term memory in adult survivors of childhood abuse

Synopsis

Short-term memory is the system of storing information for brief periods of time, usually when needed to complete a task. A common example is remembering a phone number from the phone book while you dial it into your phone. This study aimed to investigate the effect of childhood trauma and abuse on short term memory. The results found that presence of child abuse had a long term negative effect of verbal short-term memory, however not visual short-term memory. The severity of the short-term memory defect correlated with the severity of the childhood trauma or abuse.

Douglas Bremner, J., Randall, P., Scott, T. M., Capelli, S., Delaney, R., Mccarthy, G. & Charney, D. S. (1995). Deficits in short-term memory in adult survivors of childhood abuse. *Psychiatry Research*, 59 (1), 97--107.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0165178195028005>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Encourage clients to engage in brain games eg Lumosity to build up their short term memory*
- *Remind clients that the brain is plastic and can grow and change, and that their short term memory may be because of their abuse*

Childhood abuse affects emotional closeness with family in mid and later life

Synopsis

The purpose of the study was to examine if childhood adversity and abuse negatively influences emotional closeness with family in mid and later life. The results of this study suggested that both physical and emotional abuse predicted family closeness in middle-aged adults. Although physical and emotional abuse influenced middle-aged adults, in the case of older adults, only emotional abuse was influential. The findings of this study is that child abuse does not disappear with time, but still influences relationships well into later life.

Savla, J. T., Roberto, K. A., Jaramillo-Sierra, A. L., Gambrel, L. E., Karimi, H. & Butner, L. M. (2013). Childhood abuse affects emotional closeness with family in mid-and later life. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37 (6), 388-399.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213412002694>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Reinforces the need for healing from childhood trauma so as to positively impact family relationships*

The effects of child abuse and neglect on cognitive functioning in adulthood

Synopsis

Cognitive functioning refers to such mental processes as thinking, understanding remembering etc. The purpose of this study was to determine whether early life trauma (ELS) had an effect on cognitive defects. In addition to this, the study also aimed to conclude whether the nature and magnitude of cognitive defect differed according to the subtype of ELS. The results of this study found that there was a significant association between ELS and neurocognitive functioning and that these changes vary according to the type of trauma experienced.

Gould, F., Clarke, J., Heim, C., Harvey, P. D., Majer, M. & Nemeroff, C. B. (2012). The effects of child abuse and neglect on cognitive functioning in adulthood. *Journal Of Psychiatric Research*, 46 (4), 500-506.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022395612000064>

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Any program or therapeutic intervention needs to follow the individual clients level of understanding*
- *Provide information in a monitored manner and review regularly in order to keep pace with clients cognitively and ensure internalisation of learning*

Internalizing Problems: A Potential Pathway From Childhood Maltreatment to Adolescent Smoking

Synopsis

The purpose of this study was to examine a possible link between childhood maltreatment and adolescent smoking habits. The cigarette smoking habit was recorded via a self report measure of adolescents aged 16. The results of the study found a significantly higher rate of smoking in maltreated adolescence when compared to the control group. Within the maltreated group, 19% admitted to have smoking in the last 30 days compared to 7% of nonmaltreated youth.

Lewis, T. L., Kotch, J., Wiley, T. R., Litrownik, A. J., English, D. J., Thompson, R., Zolotor, A. J., Block, S. D. & Dubowitz, H. (2011). Internalizing problems: a potential pathway from childhood maltreatment to adolescent smoking. *Journal Of Adolescent Health*, 48 (3),247- 252.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X10003204>

Reduced orbitofrontal and temporal grey matter in a community sample of maltreated children

Synopsis

A history of childhood maltreatment has been shown to be strongly associated with an increased risk of a psychiatric disorder. The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of childhood maltreatment on grey matter. Grey matter is a key component of the Central Nervous System, consisting of cell bodies and dendrites. The results of this experiment found a reduced level of grey matter in the maltreated group when compared to the non-maltreated group. This lowered level of grey matter occurred in two key regions, the left middle temporal gyrus and the medial orbitofrontal cortex. These effected regions are implicated in decision making, emotional regulation and autobiographical memory.

De Brito, S. A., Viding, E., Sebastian, C. L., Kelly, P. A., Mechelli, A., Maris, H. and Mccrory, E. J. 2013. Reduced orbitofrontal and temporal grey matter in a community sample of maltreated children. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 54 (1), 105-112.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- *Understand that children who present with trauma are susceptible to low emotional regulation and high risk taking decisions*
- *Programs for children impacted by trauma need to include: teaching and modelling of effective boundaries, scenarios for practising effective decision making and exercises that integrate left and right brain activity*

Childhood Maltreatment: Altered Network Centrality of Cingulate, Precuneus, Temporal Pole and Insula

Synopsis

The purpose of this study was to determine whether exposure to childhood trauma (including physical, sexual, emotional abuse and physical, emotional abuse), would affect neural structures, causing certain regions to serve to a lesser or greater degree as central hubs. Magnetic resonance imaging scans were performed on two hundred and fifty six 18-25 year olds who were divided into maltreated or non-maltreated groups. The results found that maltreatment was associated with decreased centrality in regions concerned with emotional regulation and the ability to accurately attribute thoughts or intentions to others. Enhanced centrality was found in regions involved in internal emotional perception, self-referential thinking and self-awareness.

Teicher, M. H., Anderson, C. M., Ohashi, K. and Polcari, A. 2013. Childhood Maltreatment: Altered Network Centrality of Cingulate, Precuneus, Temporal Pole and Insula. *Biological psychiatry*.

Distress and Growth: The Subjective "Lived" Experiences of Being the Child of a Vietnam Veteran

Synopsis

This study is focussed around the experiences of three sisters whose father was diagnosed with combat-related post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The objective of this study was to explore the positive and negative aspects of growing up in a family where one parent is traumatised by war. Through interviews with the sisters, the following themes were found to be overarching, betrayal and neglect, like father like daughter, fragile intimate self and growthful forgiveness and self care. Betrayal and neglect involved an absent father and feelings of inferiority. Like father like daughter involved mirroring the actions of the girl's father, including; self-medicating, learning to be on alert and denial of the right to feel. A weak sense of self, feelings of shame and self-blame, participating in abusive adult relationships and taking a burden of responsibility all came under the heading of the fragile intimate self. As well as the negative aspects described above, the sisters also described positive experiences under the growthful forgiveness and self-care category. Amongst the positive experiences, the sisters described forgiveness, rejecting rejection and making an active decision to live a different life to the emotionally distant life they had grown up in.

Mccormack, L. and Sly, R. 2013. Distress and Growth The Subjective "Lived" Experiences of Being the Child of a Vietnam Veteran. *Traumatology*, 19 (4), 303-312.

Contact us

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