

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

T-49

Trauma and Its Impact Among Adolescents who have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior

A Scoping Review on Trauma and Adolescents Who Engage in Sexually Abusive Behavior

Rebecca Dillard, MSW
Ohio State University

Adolescents who engage in sexually abusive behaviors have been found to often have histories of trauma or adverse experience in childhood. Juvenile sexual offending may be partially explained by sexual abuse history and other abuse or violence exposures (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). Yet, there are gaps in identifying the timing, context, and combinations of adverse childhood experiences that contribute to sexually abusive behavior in adolescence. The present review was designed to act as an synopsis of the current literature by answering one research question: What is the nature of trauma and maltreatment among youth who engage in sexually abusive behaviors with regard to the development of offending behaviors?

Article search was initiated in October of 2017 and finalized in November 2017. Articles were located using the search engine EBSCOhost, and included two databases in the final search: 1) PsycINFO, and 2) SocINDEX. A Boolean string was developed for the search: (sex offen* or sex abus* or problem sexual behavior) AND (trauma or child maltreatment or child abuse or neglect) AND (juvenile or youth or teen* or adolescent). Inclusion criteria were that the research must be empirical, have been completed within the last 15 years (between 2002 and 2017 at the time of the search), the article must be written in English, and the article must be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. The first stage of the screening protocol involved searching and screening both databases separately. Titles of all returned articles were screened, and relevant titles were saved. In the second stage, the articles saved from both databases were combined, and duplicates were deleted. Further screening occurred at the title, abstract, and full length article levels to determine relevance and inclusion status based on study design and methodology. The final sample included thirteen articles. Methodological rigor was assessed using the four tenets proposed by Timshel, Montgomery, and Dalgaard (2017): 1) whether methods were appropriate to the research question (*Yes/No*), 2) the depth of the investigation (*thorough/superficial*), 3) the sample size (*large = >100/small = <100*), and 4) whether the study reported effect size.

Visual analyses and thematic coding were employed. Thematic coding revealed six final codes: 1) *more severe developmental antecedents*, 2) *cycle of violence*, 3) *higher rates of child sexual abuse*, 4) *high rates of polyvictimization/ multiple adverse experiences*, 5)

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

etiological significance, and 6) trauma/victimization experiences present. The current review make it clear that trauma is a persistent theme of – and is indicated as a risk factor for – the development of sexually abusive behavior in adolescence. Sexually abusive youth were also found to experience developmental antecedents and victimization in multiple forms and at higher rates than delinquent and general population youth. Early sexual and physical victimization experiences are shown to be of etiological significance to adolescent engagement in sexually abusive behaviors.

Future research should explore the use of trauma-informed treatment approaches with adolescents who engage in sexually abusive behaviors, as trauma and victimization are established risk factors for sexual behavior problems. Services providers should also prioritize their clients' trauma histories as primary treatment targets, rather than initially or solely addressing the offending behaviors. Treating the trauma may eliminate criminogenic needs motivating the offense behavior, thereby improving treatment outcomes. Harmful legislation such as sex offender registration (Caldwell & Dickinson, 2009) and community notification laws (Prescott & Rockoff, 2011) should be repealed and replaced with new policies that strive to promote rehabilitative and preventative efforts, rather than relying exclusively upon punitive action. Recognition that individuals who engage in sexually abusive behaviors are simultaneously human rights holders and human rights violators (Ward, Gannon, & Birgden, 2007) is the first step in shaping our future work to prevent sexual violence.

Learning Goals

- After the presentation, participants will be able to describe the emergent themes evident in the literature.
 - Participants will be able describe emergent aspects of trauma and adverse childhood experience that act as developmental antecedents to sexually abusive behavior in adolescence.
- After the presentation, participants should be able to understand the study methods and findings, and have a better understanding of the current knowledge base.
 - Participants will discuss how articles were selected using search terms and inclusion and exclusion criteria, and what findings reveal about the current state of research on trauma and adolescent sexual offending behaviors.
- After the presentation, participants will be able to identify relevant future direction for practice, research, and policy.
 - Participants will be able to articulate how our current understanding of trauma and sexually abusive behavior shape the future of our work in the domains of research, trauma-informed practice, and sex offender management policy reform.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

References

- Caldwell, M. F., & Dickinson, C. (2009). Sex offender registration and recidivism risk in juvenile sexual offenders. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 27(6), 941-956.
- Prescott, J. J., & Rockoff, J. E. (2011). Do sex offender registration and notification laws affect criminal behavior?. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, 54(1), 161-206.
- Seto, M. C., & Lalumière, M. L. (2010). What is so special about male adolescent sexual offending? A review and test of explanations through meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(4), 526-575. doi:10.1037/a0019700
- Timshel, I., Montgomery, E., & Dalgaard, N. T. (2017). A systematic review of risk and protective factors associated with family related violence in refugee families. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 315-330.
- Ward, T., Gannon, T. A., & Birgden, A. (2007). Human rights and the treatment of sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 19(3), 195-216.

Rebecca Dillard, MSW is a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University in the College of Social Work. In her undergraduate career, Rebecca worked as a research assistant at a program providing collaborative community sexual offender treatment services for court referred juveniles, and her responsibilities involved assessment of incoming clients and their families, and evaluation of program service delivery. Rebecca currently works as a research associate, and her research interests include intervention and prevention services for adolescents who engage in sexually abusive behaviors, childhood experiences of trauma and maltreatment as they relate to subsequent juvenile justice involvement, and developmental antecedents of sexualized behavior problems in youth. Rebecca was the recipient of ATSA's 2018 Pre-doctoral Research Grant, which has helped to fund a study of hers titled *Maltreatment, Emotional Responses to Abuse, and Trauma among Adolescents Engaging in Sexual or non-Sexual Delinquency*.

Brienne Beaujolais, MA, MSW, LSW is a PhD student in the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on gender-based violence prevention and trauma-informed interventions for survivors. She is particularly interested in the intersections of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural contexts that promote empowerment, health, and well-being for marginalized populations that are vulnerable to violence

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Exploring the Effects of Trauma Type on Symptom Presentation in a Sample of Adolescents with Illegal Sexual Behavior

Kate Clauss, MA
Megan Harrelson, MS
Melissa Miller, BA
Kelli Thompson, PhD
Auburn University

High rates of trauma exposure in adolescents with illegal sexual behavior (AISB) point to a need for trauma informed care in residential treatment settings. Interpersonal traumas (e.g., experiencing and witnessing physical and sexual abuse) are endorsed at a high rate (50-80%) relative to non-interpersonal traumas (e.g., disasters and accidents; 6-31%; Burton, Duty, & Leibowitz, 2011; McMackin, Liesen, Cusack, LaFratta, & Litwin, 2002). Moreover, physical and sexual abuse are most frequently nominated as having the 'greatest impact' on AISB (McMackin et al., 2002).

Evidence from the adult literature suggests that trauma type impacts the severity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. For example, sexual assault survivors exhibited greater PTSD symptoms compared to bereaved individuals and motor vehicle accident survivors (Shakespeare-Finch & Armstrong, 2010). Data also suggest that childhood interpersonal trauma is associated with greater PTSD symptom severity and poorer emotion regulation relative to late-onset or single trauma exposure (Ehring & Quack, 2010). Finally, interpersonal traumas are associated with not only greater symptom severity, but also more chronic symptom presentation (Smith, Summers, Dillon & Cogle, 2016). Together, these findings suggest that consideration of trauma type could be particularly relevant for AISB who endorse interpersonal traumas at alarming rates. Some data exist on the effects of trauma type in AISB samples. One study found that exposure to multiple types of trauma and violent trauma exposure related to greater PTSD symptoms (Stimmel, Cruise, Ford, & Weiss, 2014). Another found that several forms of interpersonal trauma were associated with increased risk for suicidal ideation and substance use (Ford, Hartman, Hawke & Chapman, 2008). The goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between trauma type and psychopathology in a residential sample of AISB.

Participants were 90 males enrolled in residential treatment following a sex offense who endorsed exposure to at least one traumatic event at the beginning of treatment. The average age of participants was 15.87 years ($SD = 1.54$). The UCLA-PTSD-RI (UCLA) was used to assess trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms. Approximately 50% of the sample identified an interpersonal trauma, such as experienced or witnessed physical abuse, sexual abuse, or intimate partner violence, as their index trauma on the UCLA. The average score on the UCLA was 26.58 ($SD = 18.86$, $range = 71$) and 23.3% of the sample endorsed sufficient symptoms to meet criteria for clinically significant PTSD.

AISB with interpersonal index traumas reported significantly greater PTSD severity ($M = 31.62$, $SD = 18.18$) than those with non-interpersonal index traumas ($M = 21.53$, $SD = 18.36$) as assessed via the UCLA total score $F(1, 88) = 6.86$, $p = .01$. However, trauma type

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

was not associated with PTSD diagnostic status $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 1.55, p = .319$. The multivariate effect of trauma type on anxiety and depression symptoms was also significant $F(2, 87) = 3.80, p = .026$. Individuals with interpersonal traumas reported significantly greater anxiety $F(1, 88) = 6.75, p = .011$ and depression $F(1, 88) = 5.15, p = .026$, than those with non-interpersonal traumas.

These data suggest that while AISB reported greater symptom severity overall, they were not more likely to meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD. This subthreshold presentation could have important implications for the assessment and treatment of AISB in residential facilities. In particular, inclusion in trauma-focused intervention often relies on a diagnosis of PTSD. Findings suggest that this could be problematic for those with interpersonal traumas who endorse relatively high PTSD symptoms but might not meet the threshold for a diagnosis.

Learning Goals:

- Examine patterns of trauma type in a residential sample of AISB and provide associated descriptive information.
- Explore the associations between trauma type and symptom severity.
- Explore the relationship between trauma type and PTSD diagnostic status.

Kate Clauss, M.A. Kate is a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology program at Auburn University. She graduated from the University of North Carolina Wilmington with her M.A. in Psychological Science in 2017. She is broadly interested in risk and resilience factors for post-trauma outcomes. Her current research interests focus on cognitive factors that influence trauma-related psychopathology and the application of cognitive research to interventions for trauma-related distress. She also works as a graduate clinician at a residential treatment facility providing assessment services to youth with illegal sexual behavior.

Megan E. Harrelson, M.S. Megan is a doctoral candidate in the Clinical Psychology program at Auburn University. She received her B.A. in Psychology from Wake Forest University in 2014 and her M.S. in Clinical Psychology from Auburn University in 2016. Her current research interests focus on the impact of childhood victimization on long-term psychological adjustment and externalizing behavior problems in both clinical and nonclinical populations. She has also provided assessment and treatment services to youth who engage in problematic sexual behaviors across both residential and outpatient settings.

Melissa Miller, B.A. Melissa is a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology program at Auburn University. She earned her B.A. in psychology from Ohio University in 2014, after which she joined the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center as a project coordinator for several multi-site studies examining childhood neurodevelopmental disorders. Her research interests are broadly in the treatment and assessment of children and adolescents with ADHD and other related problems (e.g., Sluggish Cognitive Tempo). She also works as

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

a graduate clinician at a residential treatment facility providing assessment services to youth with illegal sexual behavior.

Kelli R. Thompson, Ph.D. Kelli is an Assistant Research Professor and Director of the Juvenile Delinquency Lab in the Department of Psychology at Auburn University. Her current research interests include the developmental pathways of delinquent behavior and the assessment, treatment-related outcomes and public policy issues facing justice-involved youth. Her current project is funded by a multimillion-dollar public-public partnership between the Alabama Department of Youth Services and Auburn University. This research project serves as the foundation for a comprehensive evaluation of the residential treatment program, the Accountability Based Sex Offense Prevention 'ABSOP Project'. A multi-method, multi-informant, quasi-experimental design is used in this more than 20 year, ongoing research project.