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The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Attachment and Mentalization in Sex Offenders

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Adverse childhood experiences have been linked to increased likelihood of criminal behavior and mentalization deficits. Mentalization, also known as reflective functioning, is core aspect of social functioning that involved the capacity to “interpret both the self and others in terms of internal mental states such as feelings, wishes, goals, desires, and attitudes.” This study looked at adverse childhood experiences, attachment, and mentalization in 93 registered sex offenders attending court-ordered outpatient treatment. The results of this research revealed that sex offenders endorse significantly more adverse childhood experiences compared to the general population. The findings also revealed that sex offenders have significant deficits in mentalization and lower perspective taking abilities compared to the general population. This study explores the advantages of providing trauma-informed care to sex offenders using mentalization-based treatment.

Oksana Sklyarov is currently a 4th year graduate student studying Clinical Psychology at George Fox University. Her clinical experiences include co-facilitating outpatient sex offender treatment in the PNW, working for a forensic private practice and conducting forensic evaluations (i.e. psychological, neuropsychological, psychosexual, domestic violence, parenting capacity, DHS cases, child custody evaluations, violence risk, aid and assist), working for the Idaho Innocence Project, and completing internships at juvenile detention centers and police departments.