

Student Research Conference abstract

A number of large, community-based samples have demonstrated that childhood abuse and neglect remain disturbingly prevalent in our society (i.e., Hussey, Chang, & Kotch, 2006). An additional body of literature exists regarding the long-term negative consequences of childhood maltreatment, including impairments in sexual function and higher incidence of risky sexual behavior. The development of an individual's view of him/herself as a sexual person (sexual self-schema) may be influenced by abuse history and subsequently explain these patterns of sexual behavior, while a supportive family environment may mitigate the impact of abuse on both self-schemas and sexual behavior. This project aims to assess the influence of childhood maltreatment on sexual self-schemas and sexuality to better predict and explain the risky and dysfunctional sexual behavior frequently endorsed by abuse survivors.

In this study, 251 women and 84 men from across the country, between the ages of 18 and 25, completed an Internet-based survey with multiple questionnaires assessing emotions, sexual behavior and functioning, and childhood experiences. To assess the impacts of childhood maltreatment and family environment on sexual self-schemas and sexual behavior, we computed hierarchical linear regressions controlling for age and testing for gender interactions. Results indicate significant differences between men and women on measures of sexual self-schemas and risky sexual behavior as predicted by history of childhood maltreatment and family environment.

This study contributes uniquely to the literature concerning the long-term impacts of childhood abuse and neglect, particularly in its findings regarding the sexual behavior of adult male abuse survivors, a population which remains understudied. Additionally, analyses comparing participants' sexual desire to their reported sexual behavior indicate that particular

forms of maltreatment are associated with heightened sexual activity but not with an increased desire for sex, suggesting such abuse history may supersede motivation for sexual activity.