

Honors Program

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Childhood Sexual Victimization and Perpetration by Males

Psychology

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Abstract

Recent research has brought to our attention the growing epidemic of unwanted sexual contact in childhood and the relationship to coercive sexual behavior in adulthood. These behaviors include becoming victimized again as well as victimizing others. This research surveyed college students at Bemidji State University about their sexual experiences and attitudes. The surveys that were used included the Sexual Experience Survey (Koss & Oros, 1985) as well as the Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987) and an abbreviated questionnaire that inquires about the frequencies of unwanted sexual experiences prior to the age of 16 (Finkelhor, 1979). These survey's combined provided the participant's sexual history throughout their lifetime, as well as their current sexual attitudes and practices. The sample obtained were students enrolled in a psychology course that chose to complete the study to receive extra credit in their course. This research concluded limited results, but has started a much bigger conversation on how to help victims of sexual abuse and how to work toward prevention.

Childhood Sexual Victimization and Perpetration by Males

Sexual aggression toward women has become a growing issue in our society today; as a result it has become a substantial challenge for public health (Kjellgren, Priebe, Svedin, & Langstrom, 2010). National prevalence estimates indicate a startling 1 in 8 women have been a victim of rape (Bernat, Calhoun, & Adams, 1999), and we are now discovering that up to 90% of these encounters are left unreported (Kjellgren et al., 2010). With such high prevalence rates many have begun to question what may bring these individuals to perform such actions, and it is crucial that we complete the research needed to find these answers. Studies are now being conducted on the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and coercive sexual behavior in adulthood that are beginning to find a connection (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). Now is the time for us to continue our research so that we can identify at risk adolescents sooner and provide them with the resources that they may need.

Several studies define adult-child sexual experiences in similar ways, but for this research it is defined as, "a sexual experience done against a child's will by an adult, someone who was at least 5 years older, prior to the age of 16" (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). A child who experienced such behavior may now as an adult be struggling with self-esteem, trust in relationships, sexual maladjustment, self-destructive behavior, and depression (Kjellgren et al., 2010). Unfortunately, this list only begins to scratch the surface of the psychological issues a victim may experience. Childhood sexual abuse has devastating effects on the lives of many people we see every day similar to those mentioned and yet many of these individuals do not seek out help, especially males.

This research project examined why men are drawn to sexual coercion as adults. Sexual coercion is defined as a "'pressure' from an [individual] to engage in sexual behavior"

(Shackelford & Goetz, 2004). The hypothesis in this study is that sexual abuse in childhood is a contributing factor to sexual offenses later in life. More specifically, this research focused mainly on the male population due to the higher victimization rates of women and lower reported abuse rates in male youth (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). It was not the intent to make males "the bad guys." There are several known cases of men being victimized by women, however it is much less common due to underreporting.

This study was intended to find significance at a local level, here at Bemidji State University. The findings were envisioned to be public so that it may provide the local population with a more sound reasoning behind why individuals may participate in sexually coercive behavior. Pinpointing a potential cause of sexually coercive behavior was ideal to help create a prevention plan for the future.

Literature Review

The work done by Kjellgren et al. (2010) brought about a great deal of interest in this topic. They surveyed high school students from Sweden about their sexual attitudes and experiences with the hopes of identifying the risk factors among sexually coercive male youth. They used an inclusive self-report questionnaire about sociodemographic conditions, sexual victimization, parental and peer evaluations, conduct problems, depression, substance abuse, and a set of normative and deviant sexual cognitions, attitudes and behaviors. They concluded that several risk factors were "both generally criminogenic and sexuality-specific." In other words, their potential for criminal behavior and how they stereotypically viewed each gender. Some examples include parental attachment, hostility toward women, sexual preoccupation, penetrative

sexual victimization, having watched violent porn, and younger age of first sexual intercourse (Kjellgren et al., 2010).

Bernat et al. (1999) measured how sexually aggressive and nonaggressive men respond to acquaintance rape. Their sample of men was split into two separate categories, those who were sexually aggressive and those who were not. Each group listened to a recording of consensual intercourse and acquaintance rape while their sexual arousal level was being measured. Also, it was the participant's responsibility to say "stop" when they found the situation to be escalating toward rape. This study found that sexually aggressive men had higher levels of sexual arousal when listening to the recording of the rape and that they failed to cease the rape from occurring. This provided evidence that men who are sexually aggressive respond positively toward the use of force in sexual situations and fail to recognize coercion (Bernat et al., 1999).

The current study replicates Stevenson and Gajarsky (1991). Their study looked for a relationship between unwanted childhood sexual contact, sexual attitudes, and behaviors relating to further victimization and perpetration. They sampled 400 undergraduates about their personal history, sexual attitudes, and childhood and adult sexual experiences. As a result they found that those who experienced unwanted childhood sexual contact were more likely to perpetrate acts of sexual aggression and report unwanted sexual experiences in adulthood (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). In addition, respondents who had unwanted childhood experiences "reported a greater acceptance of permissiveness, a more casual, tolerant, playful approach to sexuality, as well as greater instrumentality, an egocentric, mechanical, and genital-oriented approach to sexuality" (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991).

Methods

College males and females between the ages of 18 to 24 were surveyed using the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Oros, 1985) that was utilized in the work done by Stevenson and Gajarsky (1991). This survey is a self-reporting tool that investigates the degrees of sexual aggression and sexual victimization (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). The survey "refers explicitly to sexual intercourse in conjunction with coercion, threat, and force for female victims and male perpetrators" (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991).

Participants also completed the Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). From the collection of this data the attitudes of the participants toward consensual sexuality were analyzed. The subscales of this survey consist of areas related to sexual permissiveness (e.g. "I would like to have sex with many partners."), sexual practices which concerns responsibility and conventionality (e.g. "Masturbating ones partner during intercourse can increase the pleasure of sex."), communion which reflects sharing, involvement and idealism (e.g. "Sex is the closest form of communication between two people."), and instrumentality which indicates genitally focused utilitarian attitudes (e.g. "The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.") (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991). These surveys have been found to have high test-retest reliability Lastly, participants completed a replicated 13-item questionnaire about unwanted sexual experiences before the age of 16. These questions were chosen from a larger scale done by Finkelhor (1979).

In order to encourage students to complete the survey the professors in the psychology department at Bemidji State University offered extra credit in their courses for their participation. Permission was obtained to attend psychology courses personally to discuss further the extent of the study and what the participants would be asked to do. Even though only a few classes

received a formal introduction, it was important to put a face to the project so that students felt reassured and more willing to complete the study.

Sign-up sheets were then posted outside of the psychology department for individuals to choose a date and a time that worked best for them. Unfortunately, even with the researcher's best efforts the original plan to find subjects failed. The next step was to host an event in the residence hall. There was an announcement posted to all of the residence hall staff to inform their residents of an extra credit opportunity in the dorm's lounge area. Fortunately, this event was a success and 44 male and 48 female participants completed the study as a result.

In order to analyze the results a similar route to Stevenson and Gajarsky's study was used. First, using the questionnaire referring to unwanted sexual experiences before age 16 the percentages for each experience were calculated separately by gender. A chi-square analysis was used to determine if those who had unwanted sexual experiences in childhood were more susceptible to revictimization as adults in comparison to those without such experiences. In addition, another chi-square analysis was also used to determine if those who had unwanted sexual experiences in childhood were more likely to perform acts of sexual aggression than those who had not had such experiences. For the second survey, the Sexual Attitudes Scale, a series of 2X2 ANOVAS were computed for each of the subscales (Stevenson & Gajarsky, 1991) in regard to gender and sexual experiences in childhood..

Results

Of the 48 females and 44 males surveyed, 50% of the females and 56% of the males reported at least one sexual experience done against their will by an adult. A reminder that in this study an adult is considered someone that is at least 5 years older and that these experiences

occurred before the age of 16. Of the 13 behaviors presented in the Sexual Experiences Survey an invitation to something sexual had the highest prevalence (53.3%) with the second being another person showing their sex organs (30.4%). Following closely behind was kissing and hugging (29.3%), other person fondling (27.2%), other person touching (26.1%), self-exposing (18.5%) and you fondling (18.5%). In regard to the remaining behaviors, attempted intercourse (13.0%), intercourse (12.0%), other oral (9.8%), and anal intercourse (1.1%) had also been reported on a smaller scale.

Next, a Chi-square analysis was used to discover if the participants that had unwanted sexual childhood sexual experiences were more vulnerable to revictimization in adulthood. Results concluded that there was not a significant relationship for males $X^2(1, N=44)=.652, p>.05$ or females $X^2(1, N=48)=3.02, p>.05$. The data concluded that 36.4% of males and 41.7% of the females that had unwanted experiences in childhood reported an unwanted sexual experience as an adult.

A Chi-square analysis was also used to determine if males that had unwanted experiences in childhood were more likely to perpetrate acts of sexual aggression than men that did not have similar experiences. There was not a significant relationship $X^2(1, N=44) = .603, p > .05$ for males who had unwanted childhood experiences. Approximately 6.8% of males reported perpetrating sexual aggression during adulthood.

A series of 2 x 2 ANOVAS were used on each of the subscales of the Sexual Attitudes Scale. The mean scores were calculated for each of the four categories with lower the scores indicating a greater endorsement of the subscale. Results indicated a significant interaction between gender of those with sexual experiences in childhood and sexual practices $F(1, 88) =$

6.15, $p < .05$ with men ($M = 2.31$) being more likely to endorse the use of birth control, sex education, and masturbation than women ($M = 2.43$). There was not a significant difference for permissiveness, communion, or instrumentality. Main effects for childhood experiences were not significant on any of the subscales. Main effects for gender were significant on the scale of permissiveness, with males ($M=3.27$) being slightly more permissive than females ($M=3.96$).

Discussion

The undergraduate students currently enrolled at Bemidji State University have indicated a wide range of unwanted sexual behaviors in their childhoods. Even though these results were not consistent with past findings in most areas, there are several things to consider after analyzing the obtained data.

One area that proved to match the results from the previous study is that men reported having a more permissive attitude toward sexual activity. In short, the men surveyed believed sex could be meaningless, fun, and with multiple partners. These statistics immediately brought forward the ideals of gender on sexuality in our society. Currently there remains a double standard that it's okay for males to be sexually active with multiple partners, when the opposite is implied for women (Allison & Risman, 2013). It's an interesting dynamic to consider when looking at these results as a whole. As we know everything around us plays a role in how we value and view ideas, and in this case society has set in place a prominent belief of what each gender role should be, especially in regard to sexual activity. If time was not of concern I would have enjoyed spending more time with participants to interview them further on their views of gender in society to receive more encompassing results to report.

In addition, it is important to express the significance found between victimized men and women with regard to sexual practices. Male participants viewed sexual activity in a more conventional and straightforward manner with women tending to be slightly less agreeable in regard to sexual responsibility and conventionality. This evidence does not align with the original study completed by Stevenson and Gajarsky. Our results indicated that women who have been sexually abused as children tend to be less “standard” in their sexual practices whereas the past study proved the opposite. This evidence could also support the belief that sexually abused men are more likely to victimize later in adulthood due to their standard view of sexual practices. However, significance in other subscales of the SAS would have provided a more certain indication in this conclusion of sexually abused men.

Even with a considerably small sample, 50% of the females and 56% of the males reported at least one sexual experience in their childhood, those results are both heart-rending and astonishing at the same time. In northern Minnesota, our population has the tendency to believe that these occurrences do not happen in our area, but rather in highly populated “big cities.” I’m guilty of these presumptions at times myself, and these results provided higher frequencies than I had imagined in such a small and select population. Knowing these prevalence rates from my participants I’m even more motivated to help individuals that may be suffering from these experiences. It would be ideal to have these percentages shown to the campus community at the very least. Hopefully, with more people being exposed to these astounding numbers there could be a bigger initiative to make a difference and the building of a collaboration to decrease them.

Once again, the results from this study were not significant in research terms, however there may be significance in at least one of my participant’s lives. I anticipate that completing

this study may have sparked a conversation among participants. I envision that the emotions that arose from participation from this study could be the start of someone speaking out for the first time and seeking the help if needed. More specifically, I hope that men find the courage to speak out. There is a large stigma placed on males as perpetrators of sexual assault and the cases of males being victims are significantly underreported. Men are placed under such strict gender roles that they are not allowed to show any signs of weakness, which leaves many of them facing these issues on their own. If there is simply one man that has taken a step toward ending this debilitating stigma, then I can consider my study a success.

Further research will need to expand to a much greater population. For the sake of simplicity I chose to work with the population of students enrolled in a Psychology course at Bemidji State University. It was not measured, but I would predict that students in the upper level Psychology courses would be Psychology majors which may have created a confounding variable considering the education in their field. In addition, participation bias may have also been a key factor in my results, especially for victims of childhood abuse that have not been given the opportunity to cope effectively with their emotions. This may have prevented them from participating in the study. It would be ideal for a future researcher to eliminate these sampling biases by working with a much more large and broad population.

Subsequent to that, in future research I would like to learn more about the relationships with the perpetrators of the participants that were sexually abused as a child. In a majority of cases the child knows the perpetrator, and I would be interested to learn more about how having a familial relationship with the perpetrator effects the victim in comparison to a child that did not have a close relationship with them. In addition, it would be interesting to learn more about the resiliencies of children that have been abused. Not every child is equally affected by the abuse

later in life, it would be beneficial to learn more about these differences between participants. Lastly, if I could replicate my study I would not have chosen to use the Sexual Experiences Survey because the survey is extremely gender biased and was originally only worded as men being the perpetrator. In my attempt to recreate the survey so that both genders may complete it, I managed to only confuse my participants.

In closing, the prevalence rates of sexual abuse in our society cannot continue to be ignored. It is now up to those that are aware to continue to move forward in this area of research to raise awareness and most importantly help those that have been victimized. As I continue my education, I anticipate taking my findings with me into my graduate work and continuing to expand my research to a more extensive and diverse population. I will take my passion for this topic and use it to advance my research for all the men, women, and children that have been a victim of sexual abuse so that one day we may put an end to it once and for all.

Research Participant Informed Consent**Childhood Sexual Victimization and Perpetration by Males**

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to look at the sexual attitudes and beliefs of males and females in relation to their childhood experiences.

Activities and Procedures: You will be handed a packet of three surveys related to your past sexual experiences and the beliefs you hold now. We ask you to fill them out completely and as accurately as you can. We will remain in this room until your surveys are complete. Please feel free to take as much time as you need.

Incentives: Following the completion of this study an 'extra credit card' will be signed. You may submit this card to your professor to receive extra credit.

Benefits: By participating in this study you will become familiar with this topic area by forming an understanding of a type of research that is being conducted.

Potential Risks and Safeguards: A potential risk to this study is the possibility of bringing forward difficult memories from your childhood. However, we have been in contact with those at the Student Health and Counseling Center and they will be available to you following the study if needed.

Confidentiality: The surveys are completely confidential, all we'll ask for is your age and gender. Upon the completion of the surveys you will place yours face down away from the researchers to ensure that your identity remains confidential. The completed surveys will remain with the head researcher, Cara Mielke and will be destroyed upon the completion of the data entry.

Questions about the Research: Upon the completion of the survey you will be able to ask questions regarding the study. If you find yourself with further questions you may contact the following:

- Cara Mielke, (320)290-9504 cara.mielke@live.bemidjistate.edu
- Randall Ludeman, Conduct Officer, (218)755-3750, rludeman@bemidjistate.edu

Complaints or Concerns: You have the right to contact the proper authorities if you have any complaints or concerns about the study, those include:

- Marsha Driscoll, Chair, Department of Psychology, Hagg-Sauer Hall 202, (218) 755-2870, MDriscoll@bemidjistate.edu
- Patricia Rogers, Dean, College of Human Ecology and Health Sciences, Sattgast Hall 315, (218) 755-2965, PRogers@bemidjistate.edu

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If at any time you feel that you cannot complete the surveys provided you are free to withdraw.

I have read the above statements and voluntarily agree to participate in the described research. I further acknowledge that a copy of this consent form has been offered to me.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Printed Name of the Participant

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Unwanted Sexual Experiences Prior to the Age of 16

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Invitation or request to do something sexual | Y | N |
| 2. Other person showing his/her sex organs to you | Y | N |
| 3. You showing your sex organs to other person | Y | N |
| 4. Kissing and Hugging in a sexual way | Y | N |
| 5. Other person fondling you in a sexual way | Y | N |
| 6. You fondling other person in a sexual way | Y | N |
| 7. Other person touching your sex organs | Y | N |
| 8. You touching other person's sex organs | Y | N |
| 9. Other person oral fondling of your sex organs | Y | N |
| 10. Child oral fondling of other person's sex organs | Y | N |
| 11. Attempted intercourse | Y | N |
| 12. Intercourse | Y | N |
| 13. Anal intercourse | Y | N |

Sexual Attitudes Scale	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neutral	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Permissiveness

1. I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Casual sex is acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I would like to have sex with many partners.	1	2	3	4	5
4. One-night stands are sometimes very enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5
5. It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time.	1	2	3	4	5
6. It is okay to manipulate someone into having sex as long as no future promises are made.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Sex as a simple exchange of favors is okay if both people agree to it.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The best sex is no strings attached.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely.	1	2	3	4	5
10. It is possible to enjoy sex with a person and not like that person very much.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Sex is more fun with someone you don't love.	1	2	3	4	5
12. It is all right to pressure someone into having sex.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Unlimited premarital sexual experience is fine.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Extramarital affairs are all right as long as one's partner doesn't know about them.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Sex for its own sake is perfectly all right.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I would feel comfortable having intercourse with my partner in the presence of other people.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Prostitution should be accepted by society.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Sex is best when people approach it as good physical release.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Sex without love is meaningless.	1	2	3	4	5
20. People should at least be friends before they have sex together.	1	2	3	4	5
21. In order for sex to be good, it	1	2	3	4	5

must also be meaningful.

Sexual Practices

22. Birth control is part of responsible sexuality.	1	2	3	4	5
23. A woman should share responsibility for birth control.	1	2	3	4	5
24. A man should share responsibility for birth control.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Sex education for young people is of little value.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Using "sex toys" during love making is abnormal.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Masturbation is all right.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Masturbating one's partner during intercourse can increase the pleasure of sex.	1	2	3	4	5

Communion

29. Sexual techniques get better as a relationship progresses.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Sex is the closest form of communication between two people.	1	2	3	4	5
31. A sexual encounter between two people deeply in love is the ultimate human interaction.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Orgasm is the greatest experience in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
33. At its best, sex seems to be the merging of two souls.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Life without sex would be very dull.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Sex is usually an intensive, almost overwhelming experience.	1	2	3	4	5
36. During sexual intercourse intense awareness of the partner is the best frame of mind.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Sex is fundamentally good.	1	2	3	4	5

Instrumentality

38. Sex is best when you let yourself go and focus on your own pleasure.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Sex is primarily the taking of pleasure from another person.	1	2	3	4	5
40. The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Sex is primarily physical.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Sex is primarily a bodily function.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Sex is mostly a game between males and females.	1	2	3	4	5

Sexual Experience Survey*Have you ever:*

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Had sexual intercourse with a man (woman) when you both wanted to? | Y | N |
| 2. Had a man (woman) misinterpret the level of sexual intimacy you desired? | Y | N |
| 3. Been in a situation where a man became so sexually aroused that you felt it was useless to stop him even though you did not want to have sexual intercourse? (Could you not stop yourself even if the woman didn't want to?) | Y | N |
| 4. Had sexual intercourse with a man (woman) even though you didn't really want to because they threatened to end your relationship otherwise? | Y | N |
| 5. Had sexual intercourse with a man (woman) when you didn't really want to because you felt pressured by his (her) continual arguments? | Y | N |
| 6. Found out that a man had obtained sexual intercourse with you by saying things that he didn't really mean? (Obtained sexual intercourse by saying things you didn't really mean?) | Y | N |
| 7. Been in a situation where a man (you) used some degree of physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.) to try to make you (a woman) engage in kissing or petting when you (she) didn't want to? | Y | N |
| 8. Been in a situation where a man (you) tried to get sexual intercourse with you (a woman) when you (she) didn't want to by threatening to use physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.) if you (she) didn't cooperate, but for various reasons sexual intercourse did not occur? | Y | N |
| 9. Been in a situation where a man (you) used some degree of physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.) to try to get you (a woman) to have sexual intercourse with him (you) when you (she) did not want to, but for various reasons sexual intercourse did not occur? | Y | N |
| 10. Had sexual intercourse with a man (woman) when you (she) didn't want to because he (you) threatened to use physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.) if you (she) didn't cooperate? | Y | N |
| 11. Had sexual intercourse with a man (woman) when you (she) didn't want to because he (you) used some degree of physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.)? | Y | N |
| 12. Been in a situation where a man (you) obtained sexual acts with you (a woman) such as anal or oral intercourse when you (she) didn't want to by using threats or physical force (twisting your [her] arm, holding you [her] down, etc.)? | Y | N |
| 13. Have you been raped? | Y | N |

Research Debriefing

Thank you: Thank you very much for taking the time to complete our study. We appreciate your time!

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study was to look at the sexual attitudes and beliefs of males and females in relation to their childhood sexual experiences.

Significance of the Study: With the data from this study we are hoping to find more evidence on a relationship between childhood sexual abuse and adult coercive sexual behavior. From that we would like to begin searching for the proper therapy techniques to assist these individuals and to stop further victimization.

Educational Information: Previous research studies have begun to find a direct correlation between those who are sexually abused in childhood and later victimization of others. Sexual aggression has become a substantial challenge on public health today and with further research in this area we may learn how to reduce these rates and to save others from being victimized.

Questions about the Research: Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have. Also, if you'd like to find out more after the study please contact any of the researchers listed on the consent form.

Concerns: In addition, if you have any concerns following the study please discuss them with the researchers now or you may contact any of the authorities also listed on the consent form.

Incentives: Upon your exit you will receive a signed 'extra credit card' that you may submit to your professor to receive extra credit.

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