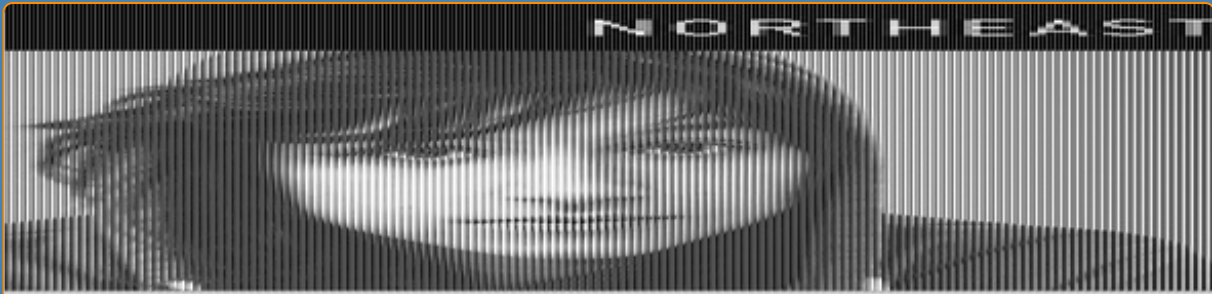


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Dear Colleague:

For this month, the NEARI Press newsletter article explored the prevalence of childhood trauma in adult male sex offenders using the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACES). ACE research has consistently demonstrated the negative impact of early trauma on behavioral, medical, and social well-being in adulthood.

For years, we have explored the impact of ACE on victims and survivors of sexual abuse. In this study, the authors noted that sex offenders as a group have significantly higher rates of ACE than men in the general population.

We hope you find this newsletter compelling as much as we do in writing it. As always, if you have any other questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick
NEARI Press

Implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences on the Treatment for Adult Male Sex Offenders

by David S. Prescott and Joan Tabachnick

Authors

Jill S. Levenson, Gwenda M. Willis, and David S. Prescott

The Question

What is the prevalence of trauma in adult male sex offenders?

The Research

Jill Levenson, Gwenda Willis and (our own) David Prescott explored the prevalence of childhood trauma in 679 adult male sex offenders using the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACES). ACE research has consistently demonstrated the negative impact of early trauma on behavioral, medical, and social well-being in adulthood. As the authors noted, there has been emerging evidence that early traumatic experiences are common in the lives of sex offenders.

Given the previous studies, it is not surprising that this study found that males convicted of a sex offense had more than 3 times the levels of child sexual abuse, 2 times the levels of physical abuse, 13 times the levels of verbal abuse and more than 4 times the levels of emotional neglect

compared to males in the general population.

In the past, some professionals and researchers have suggested that a history of victimization may contribute to offending. The current study does not indicate a direct link but rather, it shows that it is more likely that a sex offender will have experienced multiple forms of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse early in their lifetime. Offenders in general had significantly higher ACE scores than men in the general population. Further, less than 16% of sex offenders had a zero ACE score compared to 38% in the general male population.

What is known is that early childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction are common in the general population. Criminal populations and specifically people who have sexually abused are even more likely than the general population to have a history of early trauma. These adverse child experiences are now clearly associated with the likelihood of adult substance abuse, suicide attempts, depression, smoking, heart and pulmonary diseases, fetal death, obesity, liver disease, intimate partner violence, early initiation of sexual activity, promiscuity, sexually transmitted disease, and unintended pregnancies. It is therefore incumbent upon sex offender treatment providers to more strongly emphasize the role of early trauma in self-regulation and attachment and use this information to inform their treatment practices.

Bottom Line: Sex offenders as a group have significantly higher rates of ACES (adverse childhood experiences) than men in the general population.

Implications for Professionals

Professionals working with people who have sexually abused, especially those professionals working with adolescents will want to include the often-pernicious effects of trauma and other adverse experiences into their assessment and treatment approaches. Three take-away messages seem clear for those at the front lines of practice:

1. Childhood adversity can result in physical as well as relational challenges for clients. Teaching and promoting physical and emotional health is crucial.
2. Adverse experiences not only can result in conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but may also affect people in ways that might not be as easily seen as linked to these early experiences (e.g., heart and pulmonary disease). In other words, many clients may be unaware of the myriad ways that their adverse experiences have shaped their lives.
3. Providers who are harsh and confrontational with clients may be replicating the environments in which our clients experienced adversity. Working to contradict these early adverse conditions is an essential part of effective treatment.

Implications for the Field

The field of assessing and treating people who have sexually abused has understandably focused in understanding risks, needs, responsivity (e.g., matching services to the characteristics and culture of each client), and other areas of program development and service delivery. This research indicates that a key component of responsivity is an understanding of the many ways that adversity can affect the mind, body, and life experiences of our clients. Treatment approaches must still be focused on holding people accountable for their actions. But with this newer research in mind, effective treatment must be a far more holistic process aimed at having clients re-claim their lives before they can entirely re-build them into one that ensures community safety.

Abstract

This study explored the prevalence of childhood trauma in a sample of male sexual offenders (N = 679) using the Adverse Childhood Experience Scale (ACES). Compared with males in the general population, sex offenders had more than 3 times the odds of child sexual abuse (CSA), nearly twice the odds of physical abuse, 13 times the odds of verbal abuse, and more than 4 times

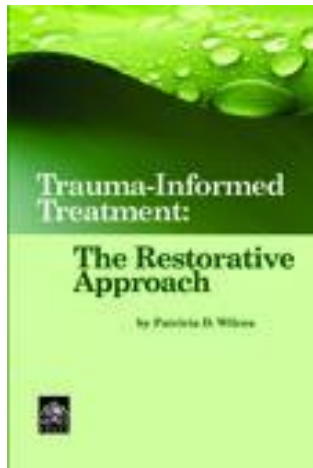
the odds of emotional neglect and coming from a broken home. Less than 16% endorsed zero ACEs and nearly half endorsed four or more indicators. Multiple maltreatments often co-occurred with other types of household dysfunction, suggesting that many sex offenders were raised within a disordered social environment. Higher ACE scores were associated with higher risk scores. By enhancing our understanding of the frequency and correlates of early adverse experiences, we can better devise trauma-informed interventions that respond to the clinical needs of sex offender clients.

Citation

Levenson, J.S., Willis, G.M., & Prescott, D.S. (2016). Adverse childhood experiences in the lives of male sex offenders: Implications for trauma-informed care. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 28, 340-359.

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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



Trauma-Informed Treatment: The Restorative Approach

by Patricia Wilcox

Author Patricia Wilcox has written the essential guide to trauma-informed care with at-risk youth. Wilcox provides a foundational understanding of trauma's impact on the developing brain, then details its implications for treatment, the promotion of pro-social behaviors, and improving the culture among clients and staff. Incorporating the key concepts of compassionate understanding, validation, skill teaching, and the primacy of trustworthy relationships for healing trauma and rebuilding connections in the child's brain, Wilcox tackles some of the most

difficult challenges in treatment settings with practical approaches grounded in theory and research. This book is an invaluable resource for parents, social workers, childcare staff, therapists, agency administrators, and anyone who cares about how kids are treated when they need skillful, trauma-informed care.

ISBN: 978-1929657-64-3

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QUESTIONS/FEEDBACK

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