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Self-Blame associated with Sexual Maltreatment

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Introduction

Sexually maltreated youth are at increased risk for developing thoughts of self-blame associated with their traumatic experiences (Melville et al., 2014). Self-blame increases risk of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and self-harming behaviors (Gorgi et al., 2019). Self-blame can cause negative side effects in development and adulthood, changing the trajectory of the child who was affected by sexual assault (Ullman et al., 2014). Recent studies suggest we must continue to investigate the role in shame in producing meaning making progress, and how it affects other emotions, cognitive learning, and emotion regulating strategies (McElvaney et al., 2022). In order to continue to improve the quality of life in individuals who have experienced sexual maltreatment, we must continue to uncover the secret nature of shame.

Methods

Participants:

Participants included 117 maltreated youth aged 11-17 (M=14.07, SD=1.84) proceeding placement in an emergency group shelter due to substantiated maltreatment. Participants included female (60), male (53), non-binary (2), transgender-male (1), and transgender-female (1). Participants consisted of adolescents who endorsed physical maltreatment (53.8%), sexual maltreatment (25.6%), emotional maltreatment (58.1%), neglect (61.5%). Racial and cultural identity of self-identified participants included African American (34.2%), Multiracial (22.2%), Caucasian (18.8%), Hispanic/Latino (15.4%), Asian (2.6%), and Native American (.9%).

Measures:

The PTCI (Posttraumatic Cognitions Inventory) is a self-reported trauma questionnaire that also measures Self-blame (Foa et al., 1999).

Analyses:

The present study utilized a one-way ANOVA to determine group differences between maltreatment types for self-blame as measured.

Results

The hypothesis expects sexually maltreated youth groups to endorse higher levels of self-blame by comparison to physically, emotionally, and neglected youth groups. Results from the hypothesis found sexually maltreated youth reported similar levels of self-blame as other maltreatment groups [$F(23,73) = 1.55, p = 0.83$]. These findings suggest that maltreated youth experience self-blaming thoughts about past traumatic events regardless of maltreatment type.

Chart/Diagram/Table/Image

Oneway Self-Blame

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sexual Abuse	Between Groups	5.746	23	.250	1.546	.083
	Within Groups	11.800	73	.162		
	Total	17.546	96			
Physical Abuse	Between Groups	7.509	23	.326	1.429	.127
	Within Groups	16.677	73	.228		
	Total	24.186	96			
Neglect	Between Groups	5.913	23	.257	1.106	.361
	Within Groups	16.973	73	.233		
	Total	22.887	96			
Psychological Maltreatment/Emotional Abuse	Between Groups	7.353	23	.320	1.430	.127
	Within Groups	16.317	73	.224		
	Total	23.670	96			

Hypothesis

The hypothesis expects sexually maltreated youth groups to endorse higher levels of self-blame by comparison to physically, emotionally, and neglected youth groups.

Discussion

The association between self-blame and sexual maltreatment continues to raise questions on the impact of negative self view within sexual maltreated youth. The findings of this study highlight that self-blaming thoughts manifest in youth who have experienced any maltreatment type. For self-blame and sexual maltreatment associations there must be future studies who test pairing.

Conclusions/Future Research

Limitations of the present study include varied group size and some youth endorsed multiple maltreatment types, potentially reducing group differences. Participants were recruited at an emergency group shelter, making it difficult to obtain a clean sample size. Future studies should evaluate group differences for youth who endorse a singular type of maltreatment with increased sample sizes.

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