

# Childhood Sexual Abuse and its Effects on Adult Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse often experience both short- and long-term adverse outcomes in mental and emotional areas of functioning that persist into adulthood. The goal of the current study was to examine the relationship between experiencing childhood sexual abuse and functioning in adulthood. Specifically, this study examines the impact of childhood sexual abuse on the quality of adult relationships and sexuality for the survivor. Secondary analysis data from the MIDUS Refresher Biomarker Project was used. The current study found no significant relationship between variables. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse did not differ statistically from those who had no experience of childhood sexual abuse. Survivors did not report lower levels of quality in their relationships with their partners. Additionally, when comparing survivors and nonvictims, there was no significant difference in personal sexuality among the two groups.

## INTRODUCTION

### Significance of the Study

The results of this research are significant because the results indicate that survivors can still function optimally in adulthood despite being sexually abused.

### Purpose of the Research

The goal of the current study was to examine the relationship between experiencing childhood sexual abuse and functioning in adulthood. Specifically, the current research examines how childhood sexual abuse affects the quality of relationships for the survivor and their sexuality in adulthood.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between being sexually abused as a child and relationship satisfaction in adulthood?
2. What is the relationship between being sexually abused as a child and the nature of personal sexuality in adulthood?

### Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that those with an experience of childhood sexual abuse would perceive their intimate relationships as lower quality than their counterparts, nonvictims of childhood sexual abuse. Additionally, it was also hypothesized that experiencing childhood sexual abuse would negatively impact the sexuality of the survivor.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- Findings suggest that CSA may affect the quality of relationships and sexuality among adult survivors in intimate relationships.
- Research supports that CSA affects developing and maintaining a stable and long-term intimate relationship. Given that CSA can affect the emotional development of the survivor from childhood to adulthood, it can affect aspects of a relationship that can be particularly difficult for both the survivor and their partner.
- Survivors who have experienced childhood sexual abuse report numerous problems in their intimate relationships, specifically their sexual experiences.
- The history of CSA has been linked to problematic sexual behaviors, including hypersexuality, sexual compulsivity, sexual impulsivity, or sexual addiction and survivors tend to engage in more risky sexual behaviors.

## METHODS

### Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from Midlife in the United States ( MIDUS Refresher): Biomarker Project 2012-2016.
- The Refresher Biomarker Project mirrors the second project in the five-project series, which examines how biological, psychosocial, and sociodemographic contribute to health outcomes.

### Data Collection Procedures

- Data was collected at three different collection sites: UCLA, Georgetown University, and the University of Washington.
- Data was collected with multiple assessment measures, including self-administered questionnaires, staff administered interviews, and physical exams conducted by trained staff and medical personnel.

### Sample and Sampling Method

- Participants were recruited through random sampling. Researchers conducted random digit dialing across the nation to recruit participants.
- The MIDUS Refresher Biomarker Project ( Series 4) sample contains participants from the primary sample who completed the MIDUS Refresher Survey in 2007.
- The sample consisted of 863 participants ( n= 746, primary MIDUS sample, n =117 African Americans from Milwaukee project ) aged 25 to 76 years old.
- A nearly equal number of men (n=413) and women (n=450) were included.

### Measures

**Independent Variable:** Childhood Sexual Abuse

- The independent variable of experiences of childhood sexual abuse was measured using the self-report Childhood Trauma Questionnaire.

**Dependent Variables:** Quality of Relationships with Partner & Personal Sexuality

- The dependent variables were measured using self-report Positive Feeling and Partner Questionnaire.

## RESULTS

- Two chi-squares were used to analyze the relationship between the variables.
- The results of the chi-square analysis revealed insignificant results.
- A chi-square was computed to determine the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and the survivors' relationship satisfaction in adulthood. The results indicated no significant relationship between the two variables ( $\chi^2(df) = 163.312, p < .001$ ).
- A chi-square was also computed to determine the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and the survivors' sexuality in adulthood. The results indicated no significant relationship between the two variables ( $\chi^2(df) = 75.300, p < .001$ ).

Chi-Square Tests Results

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	163.312 <sup>a</sup>	51	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	31.851	51	.984
Linear-by- Linear Association	1.692	1	.193
N of Valid Cases	557		

Chi-Square Tests Results

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	75.300 <sup>a</sup>	40	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	58.144	40	.032
Linear-by- Linear Association	5.460	1	.019
N of Valid Cases	511		

## DISCUSSION

### Summary Findings

- The inferential statistics of the study revealed insignificant results. This study found no significant association between all the study variables. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse did not differ statistically from those who had no experience of childhood sexual abuse with regard to the quality of their intimate relationships with their partners. Moreover, this study also found no statical difference in personal sexuality for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and those with no experience of childhood sexual abuse.

### Strengths and Limitations

- The current study used a longitudinal design. The primary advantage of using this form of research is that it helps find patterns that may occur over long periods but would not be observed over short periods. Changes can be tracked so that cause-and-effect relationships can be discovered.
- The current research design allowed for groups. Participants were divided into two groups, those with CSA history and those with no history of CSA. Therefore, allowing for the opportunity to compare and analyze the difference in responses between the two groups.
- Methodologically, self-reports were utilized for information gathered about CSA history. This may have impacted one's ability to accurately recall and report their abuse history due to desirability bias.
- Desirability bias can also have impacted the way participants report their sexuality. Socialite gender norms create different expectations about acceptable behaviors; therefore, survivors face distinct pressure in reporting certain behaviors, distorting the results.

### Implications for Research and Practice

- The current study's finding highlights the importance of assessing and addressing a survivors' systems in order to develop protective factors. Utilizing the survivor's ecosystems (i.e., family) in treatment can help survivors thrive and move forward with their lives
- The current research offers a basis for social workers and mental health providers to create programs and policy initiatives aimed at early intervention for those who report cases of childhood sexual abuse to assist with psychosocial functioning before adulthood is reached. The current study findings point to a need for early intervention for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Offering early intervention services offers the opportunity to provide valuable skills that could help garner more support for the survivors before they reach adulthood.

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