

5-1993

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Schneider, Sharla J., "Behavioral Comparisons of Maltreated Children" (1993). *Honors Theses*. Paper 193.

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**Behavioral Comparisons of
Maltreated Children**

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Abstract

The behavioral and cognitive differences among sexually abused children were investigated. A total of 19 Child Behavior Checklists were evaluated for distinguishing factors on the Internalizing, Externalizing, Attention Problems, and Thought Problems scales. First, the subjects were placed into two groups, those who had been victims of sexual abuse (SA) and those who had been victims of SA plus Other maltreatment (e.g., neglect, physical abuse, etc.). Only three subjects were found to be in the SA plus Other maltreatment group, so three subjects from the SA only group were selected for comparison based on age and sex. All were females and each group had an average age of 8.3. The Attention Problems scale was found to be statistically significant for those with the SA plus Other group. Second, of the 16 subjects in the SA group, two subgroups were formed using age as the independent variable. To look at groups having similar life experiences, the two youngest (ages 4 and 5) and the two oldest (ages 16 and 17) were excluded. Thus, the two groups were those aged 8-11 and those aged 12-15. The Thought Problems scale was discovered to be statistically significant for those aged 8-11.

Behavioral Comparisons of Maltreated Children

Although much research has been accomplished regarding the common behavioral characteristics of maltreated children, most research does not distinguish the specific type of abuse (e.g., Hecht, Foster, Dunn, Williams, Anderson, & Pulbratek, 1986; Kravic, 1987; Salzinger, Kaplan, Pelcovitz, Samit, & Krieger, 1984). A recent literature review, performed by Conaway and Hansen (1989), revealed 23 investigations into the social behavior of physically abused (PA) and neglected (N) children. Of those 23 investigations, none compared or contrasted the behaviors of children who were sexually abused (SA) with those who were PA or N. Although one research (viz., Salzinger et al., 1984) did include victims of SA, and, even though some subjects had been exposed to more than one type of maltreatment, SA was not distinguished from PA or N in the actual data analysis.

Ney, Moore, McPhee, and Trought (1986) did distinguish between physical abuse (PA: hits, shakes, burns, etc.), verbal abuse (VA: criticism, blaming, humiliating), physical neglect (PN: insufficient food, clothing, shelter), emotional neglect (EN: avoidance, lack of recreation or education), and sexual abuse (SA:

exposure, titillation, incest, etc.) when he investigated maltreated children's perspectives on the severity, frequency and duration of abuse or neglect. He found that children who were victims of PA, VA, or SA blamed themselves for mild mistreatment. Also, children who had been exposed to VA and SA even blamed themselves for severe mistreatment. Although Ney was less specific on children who had been neglected, he indicated that these children were more likely to blame themselves than someone else for their mistreatment. Since Ney used the assessment of abuse or neglect by parents, children, and hospital staff, it is important to note (for the purpose of this study) that, although the tendency for agreement was not as great for EN or VA, interrater agreement was significant on the extent to which the child was a victim of PA or SA.

Many researchers have used the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) created by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1982, 1983) as a parent rating instrument. The CBCL has reliably measured social competence and internalizing and externalizing behavior problems of maltreated children (e.g., Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986; Salzinger et al., 1984; Tong, Oates, & McDowell, 1987; Wodarski, Kurtz, Gaudin, & Howing, 1990; Wolf, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985). Furthermore, some of

these same researchers used subjects from battered women's shelters (e.g., Jaffe et al., 1986; Wolfe et al., 1985), as had been originally intended in the current study.

Jaffe et al. (1986) compared boys who had been PA to boys who had witnessed violence between their parents. Although no group differences in social competence were found, Jaffe discovered that PA boys and those who had witnessed parental violence had significantly more internalizing behavior problems than the control subjects. Consequently, PA boys demonstrated significantly more externalizing symptoms than the exposed-to-violence boys, who in turn exhibited significantly more externalizing symptoms than the control group.

Wolfe et al. (1985), however, compared the behavior of children of battered women to family violence and maternal stress. He failed to discriminate between children who only observed the violence with children who were themselves PA, SA, or N. Wolfe reported that children were more likely to fall in the clinical range, as opposed to the adjusted range of the Child Behavior Profile (CBP; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1982) if they were boys, if they were exposed to a higher frequency and intensity of physical

violence, and if their mothers were more stressed (i.e., had more negative life events over the past year).

The current study was refocussed to evaluate the data from the only subject pool received. At the start of this investigation, the plan was to evaluate and distinguish between the behavioral differences of children who had been victims of SA, PA, and N, since this distinction had not been made clear by previous researchers. However, the investigation was changed to evaluate the behavioral and cognitive differences among children who had been victims of SA, since data on these subjects became the only available resource.

A large number of studies support the evidence of traumatic childhood experiences leading to learning difficulties, inhibition, and constriction of thought (e.g., Alter-Reid, Gibbs, Lachenmeyer, Sigal, & Massoth, 1986; Rubenstein, 1980; van der Kolk, 1987; Westen, Ludolph, Misle, Ruffins, & Block, 1990). Westen et al. (1990) stated that SA victims have a tendency to develop an inflexible, hysterical cognitive style; this disruption in the development of cognitive skills (e.g., focusing of attention, disciplined concentration, and accommodation to new information) leads to permanent deficits due to the disruptions

being structuralized in latency and adolescence. Therefore, it was decided that cognitive differences (viz., attention and thought problems), as well as behavioral differences (viz., internalizing and externalizing), would be investigated in the current study.

Method

Subjects

CBCL data was collected for 19 children between the ages of 4-17 from the Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's Sexual Abuse Treatment Program. The only information, other than the ratings, to which we had access was the age, sex, and classification(s) of maltreatment for each child. The first comparison was of two groups of three subjects each who were matched on age and sex. Thirteen subjects' CBCL's were excluded from this first comparison on the basis of not meeting the requirements of matching on age and/or sex. The second comparison was of two groups of six subjects each who were placed in their respective groups based on their age and their classification (all SA). Three subjects were excluded for being classified as SA plus Other and four subjects, the two youngest and two oldest were excluded because their life experiences

would have been far different from the rest in their respective groups.

Instrument

Parental ratings on the CBCL were used to compare all subjects on the Internalizing, Externalizing, Attention Problems and Thought Problems scales. Attempts at collecting Achenbach Teacher Report Forms (TRF) for interrater agreement failed; only two TRF's, for the 19 total subjects for whom we had CBCL's, were returned.

Procedure

For the first comparison, subjects were placed into two groups, those who had been victims of (SA) and those who had been victims of SA plus Other maltreatment (e.g., neglect, physical abuse, etc.). Only three subjects were found to be in the SA plus Other group, so three subjects from the SA only group were selected for comparison based on age and sex. All were females and each group had an average age of 8.3. Subjects were then compared between groups on the dependent variables of Internalizing, Externalizing, Attention Problems, and Thought Problems as reported on the parent-completed CBCL's.

For the second comparison, two subgroups of eight subjects each were formed from the 16 subjects in the

SA group, using age as the independent variable. To look at groups having similar life experiences, the two youngest (ages 4 and 5) and the two oldest (ages 16 and 17) were excluded. Thus, the two groups were those aged 8-11 and those aged 12-15. Again, subjects were then compared between groups on the dependent variables of Internalizing, Externalizing, Attention Problems, and Thought Problems as reported on the parent-completed CBCL's.

Results

Both investigations were between subjects designs. The first study was on the behavioral and cognitive differences between those children who were SA and those who were subjected to SA as well as other types of maltreatment. In that study, the only statistically significant result was that found on the Attention Problems scale. The SA plus Other group ($M = 74.7$) had significantly more attention problems than the SA only group ($M = 57.3$), $t(2) = 4.30$, $p < .05$. Refer to Table 1 for the total means and standard deviations for both maltreated groups in this first investigation.

Insert Table 1 about here

The second study compared the behavioral and cognitive differences among those in the SA only group and between those aged 8-11 with those aged 12-15. The only significant finding was that of the Thought Problems scale. The 8-11 year olds ($M = 64.7$) were found to have significantly more thought problems than the 12-15 year olds ($M = 53.3$), $t(5) = 2.571$, $p < .05$.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 discloses the total means and standard deviations for both groups in this second study.

Discussion

The results did not show much support for behavioral differences existing among different types of maltreatment or between ages of those in the same maltreatment group. This could be due to the small sample size or lack of categorization of comparison group (SA plus Other). The significant difference in attention problems of victims of SA plus other maltreatment as well as the significant difference in thought problems of younger victims of SA was somewhat surprising. Finkelhor (1990) was not supported here, as he felt there would be no possibilities of finding a single sexually abused child syndrome. Even though

this current research did lack some seemingly important demographic information (viz., duration of abuse, intensity of abuse, relationship to perpetrator, etc.), the findings are relevant and are important for future research.

Although a number of researchers have shown there to be a substantial group (at least 21-36%) of SA victims with little or no symptomatology (see Finkelhor, 1990), the more plausible reason for the lack of differentiation in the current study is the small sample size.

It seems that there is great need for the research into the comparisons and differentiations among types of maltreatment. Instead of just lumping all types of abuse into the category of maltreatment, each type of abuse should be looked at with as much individual interest as the subjects/clients themselves. Future research in the area of distinguishing types of abuse, especially on behavior and cognition, should consider as much relative demographic information as is possible.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Distinguishing Classifications

Sexually Abused Group				
	Internalizing	Externalizing	Attention Problems	Thought Problems
Means	51.0	47.7	57.3	52.7
Standard Deviations	8.7	14.5	6.4	4.6

Sexually Abused Plus "Other" Group				
	Internalizing	Externalizing	Attention Problems	Thought Problems
Means	59.0	74.0	74.7	68.7
Standard Deviations	4.0	8.7	2.5	5.1

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Distinguishing Age Differences

Sexually Abused Group: 8-11 Year Olds

	Internalizing	Externalizing	Attention Problems	Thought Problems
Means	65.3	60.2	69.8	64.7
Standard Deviations	9.4	15.2	6.1	5.3

Sexually Abused Group: 12-15 Year Olds

	Internalizing	Externalizing	Attention Problems	Thought Problems
Means	56.7	59.0	60.0	53.3
Standard Deviations	13.5	16.8	8.4	8.2