

Promoting Resilience in People who have Experienced Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Survivors Stories 1.

“This is a story that I have waited sixty years to fully tell. From about age seven until I was ten my brother sexually abused me... There was no one to tell and I knew that no one would believe me so I have stayed quiet all of these years. I married an abusive man and suffered through twenty-one years of marital sexual abuse and rape. I tried to talk about this after I divorced him and his family convinced my children that I was crazy. I am not crazy nor have I ever been crazy. Somehow I have survived.”

Dancinginthedarkness.com

Survivors Stories 2.

“Born to NY parents that would soon succumb to their illnesses. A young girl and boy unwanted by the immediate family would be tossed into the NYC system for foster care...I was about 7 the first time my step father touched me...As a teenager, I wondered, “would anyone believe me?” I hated myself. I hated what I allowed to continue to happen, I hated that I was so weak to allow it. I hated that I felt ugly everywhere...*(struggling with the presence of her stepfather and negotiating adulthood)*...

My husband waited up for me to come home...he asked me something no one had ever asked “did your father ever touch you?” I got help this time, my husband really loved me. With my husband beside me, I told my sister and brothers. They didn’t hate me, and they believed me. They never doubted me....I studied many techniques – meditation, went into therapy. I’m so thankful for every day...Talking with my children helped me and continued to help me to heal. I am a professional woman. I am a manager of a business. I am a survivor.

Susan www.womensselfesteem.com

Prevalence and incidence of child abuse and neglect

11-17 year olds

- Around one in five children (18.6%) have been severely maltreated.
- Over one in eight children (13.4%) have experienced severe maltreatment by a parent/ guardian.
- One in 20 children (4.8%) have experienced contact sexual abuse.

18-24 year olds

- One in four young adults (25.3%) had been severely maltreated during childhood.
- One in seven young adults (14.5%) had been severely maltreated by a parent/guardian in childhood.
- One in nine young adults (11.3%) had experienced contact sexual abuse during childhood.

Negative Outcomes associated with CSA

Regardless of definition, researchers have shown that people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, are at an increased risk of developing various difficulties, including:

- Interpersonal/sexual difficulties (Ahmad, 2006)
- Suicidal behaviour (Tonge & King, 2004)
- Addiction (Bulik, Prescott & Kendler, 2001; Lee, Lyvers & Edwards, 2008).
- Revictimisation (Hamilton & Browne, 1999; Olafson & Boat, 2004)
- Dissociation (Hanks & Stratton, 1995)

CSA & Resilience

However, some people are able to survive their experiences and ‘bounce back’ in order to lead healthy adult lives.

My Doctoral Thesis : Methodology

- My thesis investigated whether self-esteem, attachment and coping strategies promote resilience in women who have experienced childhood maltreatment.
- 527 women (18-71yrs old) recruited through advertisements in Take a Break, The Birmingham Post and The Birmingham Evening Mail.
- All completed a battery of measures online (including: A screening questionnaire, The Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale, The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, The Trauma Symptom Inventory, The Relationship Questionnaire, The Relationship Scales Questionnaire, The Coping Responses Inventory and the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory).
- 477 women completed all of the questionnaires.

My Doctoral Thesis : What is Resilience

In the study resilience was conceptualised in 3 different ways. It was therefore defined as:

- a. Self reported success in adult life.
- b. A lack of psychopathology.
- c. The presence of identified protective or compensatory factors.

Depending upon the definition used, 33.5% - 48.6% of participants were found to be demonstrating resilience.

My Doctoral Thesis: Main Findings

- Having a secure attachment style, was found to be most predictive of resilience (result found using logistic regression).
- Social self-esteem was predictive of resilience
- Coping style, did not predict resilience.
- An accepting/resigned coping style was found to reduce the likelihood that participants demonstrated resilience.

Other People's Studies

48 papers identified which examine resilience in individuals who have a history of CSA.

Factors found to be associated with resilience were:

- Inner/psychological resources
- Family
- Friendships/relationships
- The community
- Demographic variables
- Abuse Characteristics

Inner/Psychological Resources

- Adaptive coping skills / Hardiness
- Attribution Style
- Meaning Making
- Self Esteem

Inner/Psychological Resources (cont.)

- Interpersonal/Emotional competence
- Ego Resilience/Ego Control
- Low Neuroticism

Family

- A stable and supportive family environment
- Being supported and understood by parents
- Positive parenting practices
- Is in a context where other forms of adversity are minimised.

Friends/Relationships

- Having a confiding relationship
- Perceived Support from spouse

The Community

- School
- Spirituality
- Being part of a group

Demographic Variables and Abuse Characteristics.

- Gender
- Race
- High Socio-Economic Status
- IQ
- Severity of Abuse
- Age at which the abuse began



Applying Resilience Research :Some ideas from the Literature

- Following a resilience based curriculums in schools. E.g. UK Resilience Programme or Al's Pals: Kids making healthy choices (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004) and the Penn Resilience Project.
- Utilising psychological interventions with individuals. E.g. Uncover strengths and Build Resilience: A four step model (Padesky & Mooney, 2008).
- Using family interventions (e.g. Place, Reynolds, Cousins & O'Neill, 2002).
- Running community groups (e.g. SUPERSTARS, Emshoff, Raduka, Anderson & Calvert, 1996).
- Developing resources to teach others how to respond to disclosures of CSA in a way that will enhance resilience (e.g. Jinich et al, 1999).

Some Key/Interesting References

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THANK YOU