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## Child Abuse and Its Long Term Effects

Becky Lohse

Valparaiso University, [becky.lohse@valpo.edu](mailto:becky.lohse@valpo.edu)

Rachel Egan

Valparaiso University, [rachel.egan@valpo.edu](mailto:rachel.egan@valpo.edu)

Lauren King

Valparaiso University, [lauren.king@valpo.edu](mailto:lauren.king@valpo.edu)

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# Child Abuse and Its Long Term Effects

[www.childhelpline.org](http://www.childhelpline.org)  
(1-800) 422-4453

Rachel Egan, Lauren King, Rebecca Lohse, Valparaiso University Social Work Department, Sponsor, Matthew Ringenberg, PhD, MSW, May 14, 2020

## Introduction

Child abuse is a serious, life-impacting issue in the United States, with over three million reports of child abuse accounted for each year (Childhelp, 2018). With this being the case, many children are subjected to neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The effects of child abuse can include many psychological and cognitive difficulties as the child ages, and these effects can be long-term. One of the many problems with child abuse is that it not only affects the child at the time of the abuse, but this trauma follows them throughout their life, sometimes resulting in depression. It is important to understand how child abuse affects the victims throughout their lives.

**Research Question:** Do children who are victims of child abuse have a higher chance of experiencing depression later on in life?

## Methods

The method of retrieving data for our research was done by using a questionnaire in two different ways - paper copies and an online version. We proposed our research plan to Stewart Cooper, the head of the Counseling Center on campus, in order to be given permission to advertise our study in the Counseling Center so that students are able to complete it. If students did take part they were then given the option of either a paper copy that they could take while they were in the Counseling Center or given a flyer with information on where they could take the questionnaire online. The online questionnaire was completed upon approval from the counseling center as well as professors in the Valparaiso University's Social Work department.

## Background Information

In terms of **Gender**, there were 163 females, 52 males, 2 non-binary, and 1 transgender male.

In terms of **Ethnicities**, there were 10 African Americans, 7 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 18 Hispanic/Latinos, 2 Native Americans, and 191 Whites.

## Results

### • Overall Depression and Abuse

Each type of abuse (Physical, Verbal, Sexual, and Neglect) significantly correlated (.185 to .282) with depression (all p values <.006).

### • Depression Variables and Types of Abuse

All types of abuse significantly correlated with loss of interest. No type of abuse significantly correlated with sleeping less. No type of abuse significantly correlated with sleeping more. All types of abuse (except sexual) significantly correlated with trouble completing tasks. All types of abuse (except sexual) significantly correlated with eating less. Although verbal abuse and sexual abuse were close to being significant (.057 and .06 respectively), no types of abuse significantly correlated with eating more. All types of abuse significantly correlated with trouble concentrating. All types of abuse significantly correlated with feeling hopeless about the future.

### • Gender and Depression/Abuse

When comparing gender and depression, females had a higher mean of experiencing depression ( $p=.011$ ). When comparing gender and abuse, women had a higher mean of experiencing abuse, but this was not significant ( $p=.252$ ).

## Conclusion

We found support for our hypothesis that experiencing abuse as a child correlates with depression in adulthood:

- There were significant correlations between depression and all four types of abuse, verbal, physical, sexual, and neglect ( $p<.006$  for all).
- Different signs of depression also had significant correlations.
  - This means that participants who were victims of child abuse **are more** likely to have signs of depression later on in life.

## Implications

Victims of child abuse can show signs of depression later on in their life. This can lead to:

- Lack of concentration
- Sleeping less
- Loss of interest

Those who have been abused and supporters of those abuse victims can reach out to the VU Counseling Center (219-464-5002).

## Limitations

There was an unequal proportion of ethnicities and genders in our sample population. We lost out on participants due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We received a list of student emails from the University to send our survey to students, but we ran into a lot of duplicate email addresses that we had already asked to participate. There was a lack of open-ended answers we received from participants who filled out the survey due to the potential apprehension in disclosing abuse.

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