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Victims of Child Abuse May Have PTSD

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Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on October 28, 2010

Researchers studying how individuals mentally cope with sexual abuse have discovered that some children and teenagers blame themselves or their family for the abuse suffered in their childhood.

Furthermore, investigators discovered victims of child sexual abuse often resort to avoidance coping.

For example, they may [sleep](#) more than usual, avoid thinking on the problem, or, in the case of teenagers, resort to alcohol and drug abuse.

This behavior leaves important psychological aftereffects on victims: They present more symptoms of [post-traumatic stress](#) disorder.

In the study, researchers at the University of Granada analyzed how different cognitive variables affect the development of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. To such purpose, a sample of victims of child sexual abuse was used.

The researchers analyzed the moderating role of coping strategies, the impact of the sense of guilt and of blaming others, and the feelings triggered by sexual abuse.

This research proved that long-term psychological adjustment of victims of child sexual abuse greatly depends on some cognitive factors, and on their interaction.

Further, this study helped to determine under what circumstances (associated to situations of sexual abuse) these cognitive factors have higher impact.

To carry out this study, 1,500 female university students were asked to answer an anonymous test developed by University of Granada researchers. Thus, information from 160 women who had been victims of child abuse was obtained. These cases constituted the convenience sample of the study.

The study is innovative, since it not only analyzes the role of cognitive variables in the psychological adjustment of victims of child abuse, but it also analyzes the role of such variables, according to the circumstances of the abuse.

That is, the study describes the conditions that make such cognitive variables have higher impact on psychological adjustment.

The researcher states that the results "may be useful for the clinical treatment of victims of child abuse, since it allows the identification of three intervention areas extremely valuable, both for their impact on adjustment, and because they can be modified (coping strategies, sense of guilt, feelings caused by sexual abuse)".

Part of the results of this research will be published soon in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*, one of the most relevant and influential journals specializing in child sexual abuse.

Source: [University of Granada](#)

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