

Child Abuse, Sexual Orientation, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization

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Child abuse victimization has been linked to a number of long-term consequences, including physical and mental health issues (Molnar, Buka, & Kessler, 2001). Additionally, experiencing child abuse has been associated with an increased risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) victimization during adulthood (McDonald, 2012). In fact, IPV victimization may be up to four times greater among individuals who were victimized during childhood than for individuals who had not experienced child abuse (Coid et al., 2001).

Although the link between childhood victimization and experiences of victimization later in life seems to be clear (Chen & White, 2004; Murphy, 2011), much less is known about the role of sexual orientation in that relationship. The role of sexual orientation is important to consider given that research has found higher rates of childhood abuse among non-heterosexual individuals (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005). This report presents results from a study that used a nationally representative sample to examine whether the link between child abuse and adult IPV victimization varies by sexual orientation. The full article will appear in an upcoming issue of the peer-reviewed journal, *Violence & Victims*.

Sample

The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) was conducted between November 1995 and May 1996. Random digit dialing was used to acquire a nationally representative sample of 8,000 women and 8,005 men who were 18 years of age or older, from all 50 states plus the District of Columbia (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Our study used data from respondents who reported a current or former romantic cohabiting or marital relationship. In total, 7,216 female and 6,893 male respondents were used for the analyses presented here. The sample was split almost evenly by gender (48.9% were male, 51.1% were female). The majority of the respondents were white (82.3%), while African Americans and other races made up 8.0% and 9.8% of the sample, respectively. Almost 92.9% of the respondents were non-Hispanic, and the average age was just over 45. The bulk of the sample was employed at

least part time (70.0%) and had at least a high school education (89.7%). Sexual orientation was measured as a behavioral variable based on the respondent's romantic-cohabiting or marital relationship history. Respondents were identified as heterosexual if they reported only an opposite-sex relationship history. Respondents were identified as non-heterosexual if they reported having at least one same-sex relationship. Mirroring other measurements of sexual orientation, one percent of our sample was identified as non-heterosexual.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents

Age	45.1
Gender	
Female	51.1%
Male	48.9%
Race	
White	82.3%
African American	8.0%
Other	9.8%
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	7.1%
Non-Hispanic	92.9%
Employment	
Employed part or full time	70.0%
Unemployed/Not working	30.0%
Education	
Less than high school diploma	10.3%
High school diploma or greater	89.7%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	99.0%
Non-Heterosexual	1.0%

Child Abuse and Sexual Orientation

Figure 1 confirms previous research indicating a greater risk of having experienced child abuse among non-heterosexual individuals. While about four percent (3.9%) of heterosexual individuals were victims of child abuse, 10.6% of non-heterosexual respondents reported experi-

encing child abuse victimization. This pattern and prior research suggest that non-heterosexual youths may be singled out by parents for maltreatment (Balsam et al., 2005). This singling out may be a result of the child’s non-conforming gender behavior prior to the awareness of both the child and parent of the child’s non-heterosexuality.

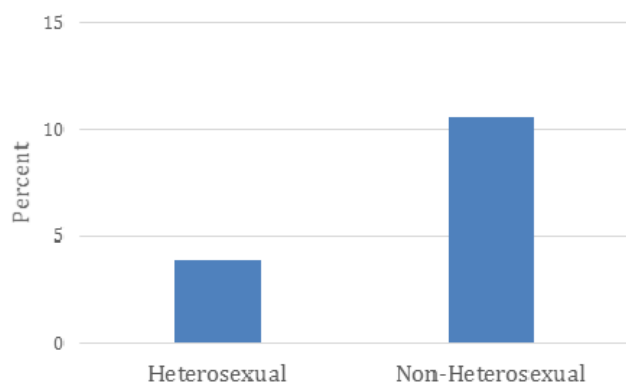


Figure 1: Percent Reporting Having Experienced Child Abuse

Child Abuse and IPV Victimization

Figure 2 represents the relationship between whether respondents reported experiencing specific forms of Intimate Partner Violence in adulthood based on child abuse victimization status. Adult IPV victimization was assessed overall as well as looking at specific forms of IPV, including verbal, control, and physical/sexual. Across all four types of IPV, individuals who reported experiencing child abuse had higher rates of adult victimization.

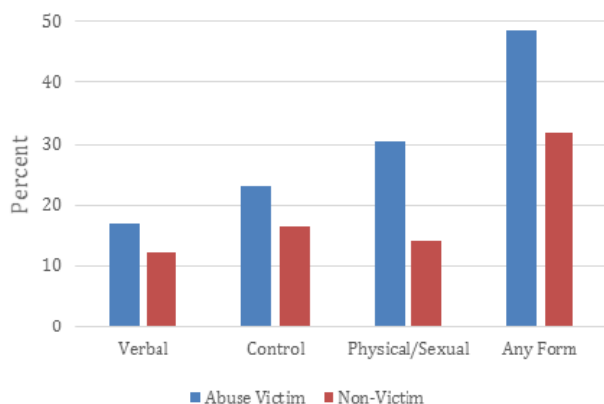


Figure 2: Likelihood of Having Experienced Specific Forms of Adult IPV Victimization by Child Abuse Status

Verbal IPV consisted of verbal tactics used to hurt, humiliate, or isolate the respondent. Seventeen percent of child abuse victims experienced verbal IPV in adulthood compared to 12.2% of those who did not report child abuse victimization. Similarly, child abuse victims were more likely than non-victims to experience control IPV (23.1% vs. 16.5%, respectively). Control IPV is defined as attempts by an abuser to control the respondent’s thoughts and/or actions. Finally, physical/sexual IPV victimization consist-

ed of experiencing actual or threatened physical attacks and/or actual or threatened forced sexual intercourse. Twice as many child abuse victims experienced adult physical or sexual IPV victimization compared to child abuse non-victims (30.5% vs. 14.0%, respectively). Overall, almost half of child abuse victims were victims of at least one form of IPV in adulthood (48.6%), as compared to 31.8% of child abuse non-victims.

Adult IPV Victimization by Child Abuse Victimization and Sexual Orientation

While these results identify an increased likelihood of having experienced child abuse victimization among non-heterosexual individuals and a link between child abuse victimization and later IPV victimization experienced in adulthood, little research has looked at how child abuse victimization and sexual orientation overlap to predict later IPV victimization. This section presents a comparison of the likelihood of adult IPV victimization by sexual orientation group and child abuse victimization status considered together. Results are presented for each specific form of adult IPV victimization, as well as for IPV victimization overall.

Verbal IPV Victimization

Figure 3 presents a comparison of the percentage of respondents reporting verbal IPV victimization in adulthood among each of the four groups (heterosexual child abuse victim, heterosexual non-victim, non-heterosexual child abuse victim, and non-heterosexual non-victim). The greatest likelihood of reporting verbal IPV victimization is for the heterosexual child abuse victim group. Seventeen percent of respondents in this group reported experiencing verbal IPV. Similarly, thirteen percent of non-heterosexual child abuse victims were also victims of verbal IPV in adulthood, compared to twelve percent of heterosexual child abuse non-victims and eleven percent of non-heterosexual individuals with no child abuse history.

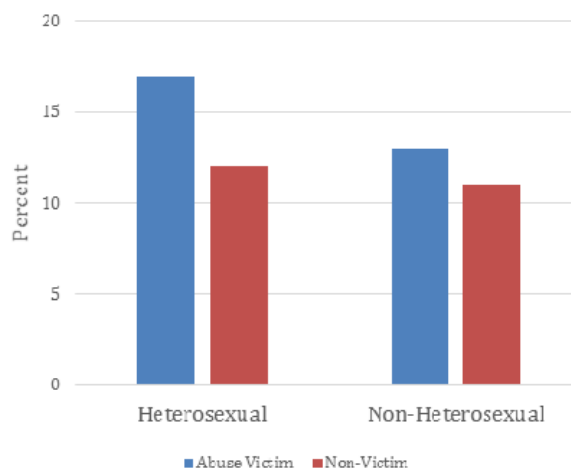


Figure 3: Verbal IPV Victimization by Sexual Orientation and Child Abuse Victimization

Control IPV Victimization

The percentages of each group who reported experiencing control IPV are presented in Figure 4. While the percentage of those with no history of child abuse reporting control IPV were the same for both heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals (17% for both groups), there was a large difference between heterosexual child abuse victims and non-heterosexual child abuse victims who reported having experienced control IPV in adulthood. While twenty-two percent of heterosexual child abuse victims reported experiencing control IPV, more than twice as many non-heterosexual child abuse victims reported control IPV (53%).

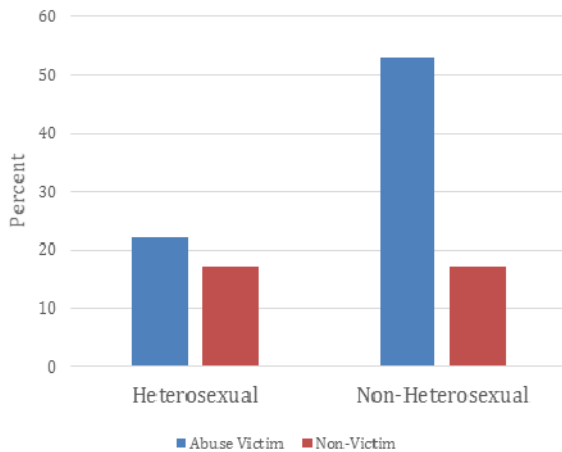


Figure 4: Control IPV Victimization by Sexual Orientation and Child Abuse Victimization

Physical/Sexual IPV Victimization

As shown in Figure 5, thirty percent of heterosexual child abuse victims have been victims of physical or sexual IPV, compared to 14% of child abuse non-victims of the same sexual orientation. Forty percent of non-heterosexual child abuse victims have been victims of physical or sexual IPV compared to 32% of non-heterosexual individuals with no child abuse history.

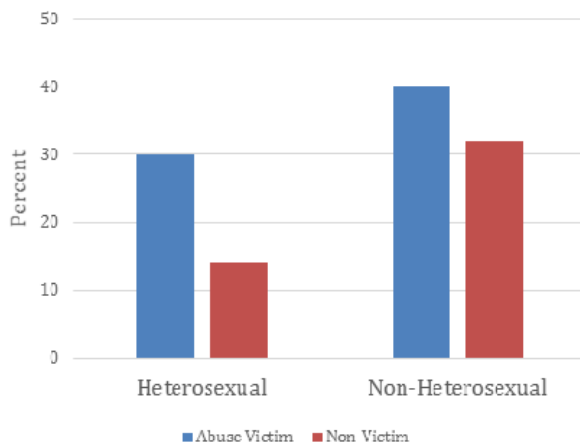


Figure 5: Physical/Sexual IPV Victimization by Sexual Orientation and Child Abuse Victimization

Any Form of IPV Victimization

Figure 6 demonstrates that almost half (48%) of heterosexual child abuse victims have been victims of at least one form of IPV in adulthood, compared to about two-thirds of non-heterosexual child abuse victims. Individuals in the non-heterosexual, no child abuse group have a similar experience of adult IPV victimization as the heterosexual, child abuse victims. About half of both groups reported experiencing some form of adult IPV victimization. In contrast, just under one-third (32%) of heterosexual individuals with no child abuse history reported experiencing at least one form of adult IPV victimization.

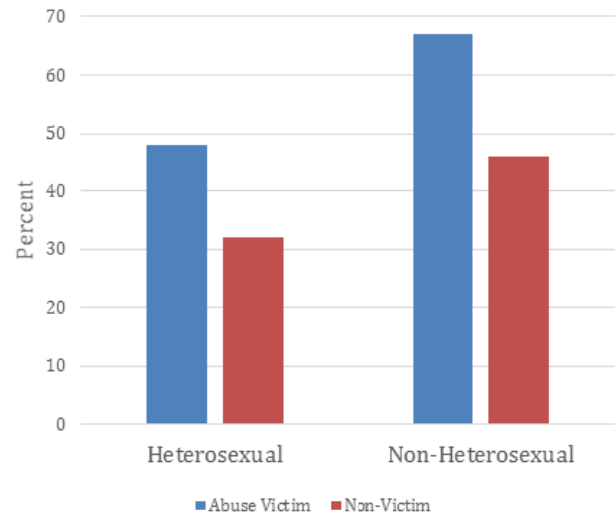


Figure 6: Any IPV Victimization by Sexual Orientation and Child Abuse Victimization

Conclusions

Intimate partner violence is an issue with long-term, and often severe, consequences for offenders and victims. Although the body of literature examining IPV, its victims and offenders is extensive, it is clear that there is much more to be understood about this phenomenon, specifically regarding the role of sexual orientation. Results from this study shed some light on the interaction between child abuse victimization, sexual orientation, and adult experiences of IPV victimization. The findings of higher rates of adult IPV victimization for non-heterosexual child abuse victims lend support to the need for specific social welfare programs for non-heterosexual IPV victims, programs which are currently severely lacking. Based on the evidence presented here, non-heterosexual individuals who have experienced child abuse are more likely to be IPV victims as adults than similarly situated heterosexual individuals. Further research is necessary to fully understand the relationship between child abuse victimization, IPV victimization, and sexual orientation.

References

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Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline (including same sex relationships): 1-800-799-SAFE

National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (child abuse): 1-800-252-5400

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline: 1-888-843-4564

The Montrose Center (Texas LGBT Resource Center): 713-529-0037

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