ARTICLE:

SUMMARY:
Purpose – explore the relationships between CSA, perceived parental support, psychological distress and couple adjustment in adults using attachment as a conceptual framework.

Hypotheses:
- Report of parental support will be related to higher attachment security, and parental non-support related to higher attachment insecurity
- Attachment representations might have been either developed or altered by an exposure to an interpersonal trauma (CSA) depending on the parental behaviors (i.e., support) associated with this trauma

Four groups of individuals in study:
1. CSA survivors with perceived parental support
2. CSA survivors without perceived parental support
3. CSA survivors who reported their parent(s) were unaware of the abuse
4. Non-survivors

Subjects:
- N = 348 (153 men and 195 women) who were in couple relationships, either married (n=103) or cohabitating (n = 245)
  - Average duration of relationship – 9.4 years
  - Mean age of participants – 31.5 years
  - Education – 13.3 years

Measures:
- Childhood Sexual Experiences Questionnaire – history of CSA
- Multiple Choice Question – perceived parental support
- Experiences in Close Relationships scale – attachment representation
- Psychiatric Symptom Index – psychological distress
- Dyadic Adjustment Scale – level of relationship quality and satisfaction
Findings:
1. 17% were survivors of CSA
   a. 80% were female
   b. Average age at first assault – 9.7 years
   c. Response to abuse disclosure
      i. 8 (14%) reported parental intervention
      ii. 9 (15%) reported lack of parental intervention
      iii. 42 (71%) reported the parent(s) were unaware of abuse
2. CSA survivors who experienced parental support were less avoidant in their romantic relationship compared to all other groups
3. CSA survivors with unsupportive parent(s) showed higher levels of anxiety about abandonment in their romantic relationships and more psychological distress.
4. CSA survivors with unsupportive parent(s) showed more couple distress than survivors with supportive parent and those who were not abused
5. Lack of parental support following CSA predicts the development of anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy toward their partner
   a. These insecure attachment representations were related to elevated psychological distress and lower couple adjustment
6. Female survivors without parental support – linked to their own insecure attachment and their association with a partner reporting attachment anxiety and psychological distress
7. Male survivors without parental support – linked to psychological distress in their partner

IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS
1. Should we tell parents that their support of the child, regardless of what they believe at first is very important for their child’s future? In addition to all of the other negative long-term outcomes, it will also affect their child’s ability to develop healthy adult romantic relationships. Do you want your child to have a happy marriage/partnership?
2. This study strongly supports the necessary involvement of parents in therapy with their children post-abuse (Parental/caregiver engagement in TF-CBT).


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