



The Review on the Correlation Between Childhood Sexual Abuse and Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract. Childhood sexual abuse is a common phenomenon in today's world and can have a significant impact on an individual's mental health, such as PTSD or depression. Most of these effects last into adulthood, and relationship satisfaction is one of them, and can have a significant negative impact on an individual's life. The aim of this review was to explore the correlation between childhood sexual abuse and relationship satisfaction. The now substantial literature on CSA shows various views about its effects and relationship satisfaction is one of them. Relationship satisfaction typically measures the quality of a romantic relationship, and the survivors of CSA have difficulty and maintaining a mutually satisfying and close relationships in a relationship. And in order to analyze the reasons, this paper discusses the effect of childhood sexual abuse on the relationship satisfaction from three perspectives by research review and qualitative research. And in a result, the correlation between childhood sexual abuse and relationship satisfaction is negative.

Keywords: Childhood sexual abuse · relationship satisfaction · correlation · psychology

1 Introduction

The now substantial researches on CSA show various effects of it. Some focus on the biological perspective while others concentrate on the psychological one. The psychological effects of CSA have a wide range from PTSD via adulthood relationships (especially the romantic ones) to dissociation of adulthood.

The adulthood relationships surveys of Barker (2021) demonstrate that the correlation between childhood sexual abuse and relationship satisfaction is negative [1]. However, the definition of CSA age is uncertain. It is certain that the adverse effects of childhood experiences persist into adulthood and are reflected in relationship satisfaction with their partner. Since relationship satisfaction is also influenced by sexual shame, which would be combined with romantic partner attachment avoidance or romantic partner attachment anxiety.

The American Medical Association (1992) defined childhood sexual abuse as “the engagement of a child in sexual activities for which the child is developmentally unprepared and can not give informed consent” (p. 5) [2]. This kind of injury can have a more serious impact on the victim in the form of physical injury to psychological injury for children. What’s more, Relationship satisfaction is described as the ‘people’s global subjective evaluation of the quality of the marriage’ [3]. Meanwhile, the quality of romantic relationship is usually measured by relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction based on childhood sexual abuse was negatively correlated, which would affect the relationship with the partner of the victim before adulthood.

This article will analyze the manner and extent of the influence of childhood sexual abuse on relationship satisfaction via the three causes of negatively correlated outcomes by literature review and qualitative analysis.

Childhood sexual abuse is definitely a terrible phenomenon and really common around the world. There are a huge number of problems the survivors suffered from. This pain is lifelong and influences the survivors’ both biological and psychological health and the relationship satisfaction is one of these troubles. To make this issue narrowly focused, the bad effects of childhood sexual abuse and the survivors’ psychological pain should be illustrated in detail and made more clearly. The relationship satisfaction is only one of them but it’s an iconic example.

2 CSA Survivors’ Attachment Style and Relationship Satisfaction

CSA is a bad social phenomenon that can have many adverse psychological effects on individuals, and for individuals who have suffered from CSA, CSA is often considered as a childhood trauma and most of its effects continue into adulthood. Factors within CSA survivors themselves can affect relationship satisfaction, and this article focuses on the effects of CSA on relationship satisfaction when attachment style is the mediating variable.

2.1 Attachment Styles

Hazan and Shaver (1987) classified attachment styles as secure, anxious, avoidance [4]. Attachment secure people are more likely to express interest and affection, they are also more likely to be alone, more independent, they have the ability to accept or reject, and can take pain, making them a good, positive attachment type. Attachment anxious people are always anxious and nervous about their relationship, they often need their partner to remove this uncertainty by expressing affection, have difficulty being alone, and often get into relationships that are unhealthy or even abusive. Their behavior may be irrational, irregular, and emotional. Attachment avoidance is extremely dependent on others, yet self-centered, and often dislikes intimate relationships. Anxious and avoidant attachments can also be referred to as insecure attachments, which are negative, maladaptive types of attachments.

2.2 Attachment Style and PTG

According to the Nelson et al. (2019), there was a negative correlation between attachment style and post-traumatic growth (PTG) (correlation coefficient -0.31) [5]. At the same time, there is a strong association between the degree of trauma and attachment style, and trauma itself affects the formation of attachment types. As the degree of trauma suffered by CSA survivors varies, the degree of influence on attachment style also varies. It also argues that counseling is effective in helping CSA survivors not only to recover from this unfortunate experience in terms of mental and physical health, but also in helping CSA survivors to engage in post-traumatic growth.

Meanwhile, Candel and Turliuc (2019) claimed that attachment anxious, avoidance attachment and relationship satisfaction were negatively correlated [6]. Attachment anxious individuals showed a fear of abandonment and betrayal in intimate relationships, which was the opposite of attachment secure, which showed a positive and secure feeling. In contrast, individuals with attachment avoidance tend to keep a certain distance from the romantic partner when dealing with intimate relationships, and there are obvious gaps in their relationships, and they are usually described as mistrust.

2.3 Attachment Style and Relationship

By exploring the perspective of CSA survivors themselves, it is possible to find a negative correlation between CSA and relationship satisfaction of individuals with this experience when attachment type is the mediating variable.

It is possible that this is because individuals with experiences related to CSA have difficulty trusting others and fear of being hurt after such a traumatic experience, all of which can negatively affect satisfaction with intimate relationships. Moreover, survivors of CSA may have strong and increasing self-criticism, which can lead to decreased relationship satisfaction and a tendency to form avoidant attachments [7]. At the same time, the fear of intimacy among CSA survivors, whose ability to maintain a stable long-term intimate relationship is also affected by the experience of CSA, and who are not keen to communicate or trust their partners completely, with emotional distance and isolation being frequent occurrences. Therefore, many researchers agreed that CSA survivors can have PTSD, depression, and other problems, and that these factors also contribute to decreased relationship satisfaction.

Furthermore, survivors have difficulty engaging in normal, healthy sexual behaviors, including identifying and expressing one's sexual needs and desires, lower sexual satisfaction as a result of experiencing CSA [8]. Possible sexual dysfunctions also affect relationship satisfaction in intimate relationships.

3 The Responses to Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction

Partners of CSA survivors give feedback, both positive and negative, on the CSA survivor's disclosure of the experience, both of which can have an impact on relationship satisfaction. Individuals with CSA-related experiences have more difficulty than others in trusting others and establishing a long-term stable intimate relationship, and disclosure of CSA-related experiences is not an easy task for them because they have suffered

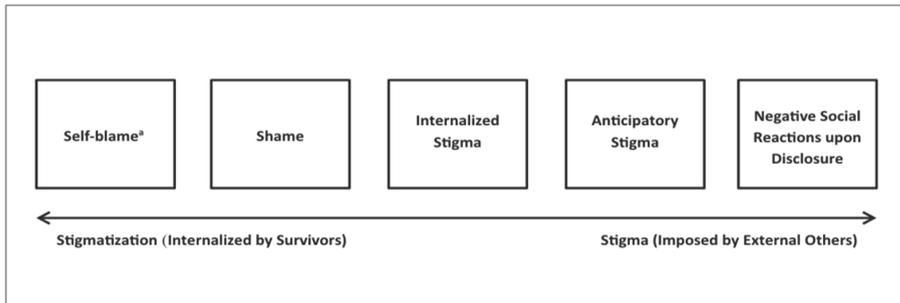


Fig. 1. General Societal Stigma (made by the author)

trauma and most of the perpetrators are relatives or friends. On this basis, it is difficult for them to fully trust their partners, and most CSA survivors are self-critical and want positive feedback from their partners, so feedback from their partners is important for CSA survivors.

According to Easton (2019), it demonstrated that early disclosure by CSA survivors would be effective in avoiding mental health problems, but only 8.2% of CSA survivors had early disclosure [9]. Most partners of CSA survivors gave very positive feedback after the survivors disclosed their CSA-related experiences, but a large proportion still gave negative feedback, accompanied by condemnation and stigmatization [10]. In addition, more than half of the partners who gave positive feedback were accompanied by condemnation, blaming, and stigmatization. Negative feedback on CSA survivors' representations was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. That is, negative feedback contributes to low levels of relationship satisfaction in CSA survivors and their partners, as well as trauma symptoms in CSA survivors.

In addition, de Montigny Gauthier et al. (2019). Found that survivors exposed to different treatment may react as if they were traumatized for a second time [11]. On this basis, it can be assumed that negative feedback can cause secondary harm to CSA survivors and reduce relationship satisfaction through this pathway. Positive feedback, on the other hand, was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, which increased if the partner of the CSA survivor gave positive feedback to the survivor's disclosure.

It is worth noting that disclosure and feedback on it affected relationship satisfaction for both CSA survivors and their partners, where negative responses to the disclosure was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction for both CSA and their partners.

4 The Stigma and Relationship Satisfaction

Stigma is defined as 'a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person'. Stigmatization tends to be the CSA individuals internalized by themselves, while stigma is imposed by external others (Fig. 1) [12].

According to Theimer & Hansen (2018), stigma is detrimental to CSA victims' recovery from trauma and can lead to reduced disclosure behavior, or increased non-disclosure [13]. They also believe that stigma includes CSA victim labeling, stereotyping, and blaming these victims for their CSA experiences.

Xiao and Smith-Prince (2015) mentioned that in countries with collectivist cultures, CSA survivors usually avoid disclosure because of the fear of shame on members of the family related to their experiences. And if the survivor's CSA-related experiences are exposed through others, this can affect their self-esteem, making them more susceptible to stigmatization, as well as reducing trust in others and relationship satisfaction with their partner [14]. Furthermore, CSA survivors are more likely than others to suffer from psychological problems such as PTSD, depression and anxiety. These psychological problems are known to have a significant negative impact on an individual's life cycle. It also can cause them to be unable to handle an intimate relationship well, which can also reduce relationship satisfaction.

5 Discussion

In contemporary society, CSA is a very common phenomenon, and the decrease in relationship satisfaction is a major impact of CSA. This paper investigates the relationship between the two research methods literature review and qualitative analysis, and gives relevant suggestions.

First of all, family members of CSA survivors should identify the problem in time, increase the probability of early disclosure as much as possible, and give them care and understanding. Also, family members of CSA survivors should take them to counsel to reduce the negative psychological effects of CSA-related experiences.

Second, partners of CSA survivors should respond positively with tolerant and loving when the survivors disclose, avoiding negative responses and stigma. It can reduce self-criticism and low self-esteem in CSA survivors. Contributes to mutual satisfaction in the relationship while improves the psychological health of CSA survivors.

Additionally, other than CSA survivors who active disclosure of their experiences, others, such as family members or partners, should not expose the experiences of CSA survivors without survivor's consent. This can have a significant negative impact on them. Finally, social organizations and government agencies should pay high attention to this phenomenon, protect the personal safety and psychological health of children, introduce punishment mechanisms for CSA offenders, and provide sex education in families with children to prevent the occurrence of CSA.

6 Conclusion

By analyzing the effects of attachment type, disclosure and stigmatization on relationship satisfaction, the author found that attachment type and CSA can influence interact. Attachment type is a mediating variable that interacts with CSA to have an indirect effect on relationship satisfaction. Meanwhile, reactions and stigmatization from others, like partner, were negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

This article is more informative, clear, and partially discussed, and relevant suggestions are given. However, this article does not combine more factors, and lacks empirical experimental data to better discuss the point of view, so it is slightly thin.

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