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4-2020

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Boohar, Erika; Wisehart, Chelsey; McCoy, Kelsey; and Hansen, David J., "Symptom Presentation of Sexually Abused Youth at a Child Advocacy Center: An Examination of Parental Factors" (2020). *UCARE Research Products*. 164.

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# Symptom Presentation of Sexually Abused Youth at a Child Advocacy Center: An Examination of Parental Factors

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## Introduction

- Parental involvement and support are crucial factors in child sexual abuse (CSA) victims' outcomes (Kilroy et al., 2014)
  - However, non-offending parents often report increased psychosocial distress or traumatization following CSA disclosure (Plummer, 2006)
  - This can lead to lower reports of parental efficacy (Spaulding, 2020)
- Parents also report a poorer sense of competence in their parenting following CSA disclosure (Jones & Prinz, 2005)
  - Parental sense of competence is also negatively associated with the severity of internalizing and externalizing problems in children (Preyde et al., 2015)
- Additionally, Parental expectations about how CSA affects children were predictive of parents' ratings of their child's behavior pre-treatment (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2009)

### The Current Study:

- The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parental factors and child symptomology following CSA.
- It was hypothesized that parents having greater difficulties in their parental role will report greater internalizing and externalizing problems for sexually abused youth presenting to a treatment program at a Child Advocacy Center.

## Methods

### Participants:

- Participants were 273 parents of sexually abused youths presenting to Project SAFE (Sexual Abuse Family Education), a 12-week cognitive-behavioral treatment program held at a Child Advocacy Center
  - Parents were 23-72 years old ( $M = 38.02$ ,  $SD = 7.51$ ), 87.8% female, and 86.7% European American

### Measures:

- **Parental Efficacy Questionnaire (PEQ; modified Teti & Gelfand, 1991)**
  - Measures parental efficacy for managing their children
- **Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1983)**
  - A measurement of parenting stress
  - This study used the sense of competence subscale
- **Parental Expectancies Scale (PES; Eisen et al., 2004)**
  - Assesses parental expectancies in academics, extra-curricular, household, social and general success areas
- **Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991)**
  - Parental report of child's internalizing and externalizing behaviors

### Procedure:

- All participants completed a self-report assessment battery prior to treatment
- Analyses were conducted using archival data obtained from Project SAFE database records



**Table 1.** Linear Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Elevated Internalizing Behavior Scores (CBCL).

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation with Internalizing Problems		Regression Weights	
			R	b	$\beta$	
Parental Efficacy	17.35	4.10	-.264***	-.234	-.086	
Parental Competence	51.00	30.74	.274***	.335	.215***	
Parental Expectations	76.99	18.24	-.238***	-.088	-.144*	
Parental Age	38.02	7.51	.140*	.190	.128*	

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 2.** Linear Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Elevated Externalizing Behavior Scores (CBCL).

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation with Externalizing Problems		Regression Weights	
			r	b	$\beta$	
Parental Efficacy	17.35	4.10	-.360***	-.373	-.134*	
Parental Competence	51.00	30.74	.410***	.499	.315***	
Parental Expectations	76.99	18.24	-.286***	-.105	-.168**	
Parental Age	38.02	7.51	.014	.012	.008	

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Results

- Results from the multiple regression analysis for internalizing problems are summarized in Table 1 ( $R^2 = .134$ ,  $F(4,266) = 10.309$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
  - Parents who experience greater stress regarding their parental competence and older parents were expected to report greater child internalizing problems.
  - Parents who report lower expectations about their child's functioning following sexual abuse were expected to report greater child internalizing problems.
  - Though significantly correlated, parental efficacy did not contribute to the regression model.
- Results from the multiple regression analysis for externalizing problems are summarized in Table 2 ( $R^2 = .222$ ,  $F(4,266) = 18.982$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
  - Parents who experience greater stress regarding their parental competence were expected to report greater child externalizing problems.
  - Parents who report lower efficacy and lower expectations about their child's functioning following sexual abuse were expected to report greater child externalizing problems.
  - Parental age was neither correlated nor contributing to the externalizing problems regression model.

## Discussion

- As hypothesized, results suggest that parents reporting greater difficulties in their parenting role will also report greater internalizing and externalizing problems for their sexually abused child when presenting to treatment.
  - There were some dissimilarities between internalizing and externalizing problems:
    - Parental efficacy was a significant predictor for externalizing problems in the model, but not for internalizing problems
    - Additionally, parental age was a significant predictor for internalizing problems, but not for externalizing
  - This underscores the heterogeneous nature of symptoms in survivors of CSA and the need for further exploration
- This provides support for concurrent parent-child treatment programs and highlights the necessity for parent education within the program

### Limitations and Future Research

- All data were collected prior to treatment, so examination of these relationships longitudinally would further enrich our understanding of the associations.
- Examination of specific symptoms (i.e., depression, anxiety, etc.) would also be beneficial.



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