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Maltreatment and Youth Delinquency: The Relationship between Physical Neglect and Delinquent Behaviour in Young Males

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters by Thesis only in Psychology

Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand

Melissa Wilson

2013
Abstract

Current maltreatment research speculates neglect is more prevalent than abuse, is associated with other forms of maltreatment in 95% of cases, and can go unnoticed until other forms of maltreatment are brought to the attention of authorities (Arthur, 2007). Even though any form of maltreatment is detrimental to the development of a young person; neglect has been significantly associated with youth delinquency and insecure attachment (Robertson, 2009; Zielinski, 2009). Neglect however, is the most understudied and least understood form of maltreatment (McSherry, 2007). This study aimed to explore neglect and its relationship with insecure attachment and youth delinquency. Eighty one young males, aged 16 – 20 years were recruited from community organisations and a school located in the lower North Island of New Zealand. The young people were assigned into two groups - delinquent group and non-delinquent group. Three questionnaires were administered: Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire, and Self-Report Delinquency Scale. Results indicated that overall maltreatment, overall abuse, overall neglect, physical abuse, and physical neglect were all significantly associated with youth delinquency. The more severe the experience of physical abuse or physical neglect the more likely the young person was to display delinquent behaviour. There was no association found between attachment and delinquent behaviour, possible reasons for this are discussed. Physical neglect was the only type of maltreatment to remain significant after the school group was removed.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Dr Ruth Gammon for her valuable guidance and support during the entire process of this research. Her wealth of knowledge and contribution to the design, implementation, and results analysis of this study have provided me with an improved skill set in research and for this I am thankful.

Thank you to Stephen Humphries for his guidance on psychometrics, scoring, and statistical analysis. Thank you to Hung Ton for helping track down and purchase the CTQ.

Thank you to Trish Young for her cultural feedback, which impacted positively on my ability to undertake this research.

I would also like to thank Neil Viviers my fiancé for his support, patience, and computer skills throughout this research process.

Both Neil Viviers and my brother Daniel Wilson proof read my thesis. I am honoured they spent the time and energy on such a mammoth task.

A big thank you to all the staff and young people at the community organisations and the school who participated in this study without them I would not have completed this study.

Approval for this study was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B on February 28th, 2012 (Appendix A).
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