Child Abuse & Gender Based Violence

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Introduction
- Child abuse is a physical maltreatment or the sexual molestation of a child.
- Child abuse is an universal phenomenon, occurring across ages, genders, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- Child abuse is manifested as (1) emotional; (2) physical; (3) sexual; and (4) neglect, resulting in different outcomes.
- Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that in a given culture are associated with each biological sex.
- Females are abused at a much higher rate than males. Over 22 million women in the United States have been raped in their lifetime.

Research Question
To what extent is gender a factor in physical and sexual abuse and victimization of children and women?

Methodology
- Analysis of official child abuse and gender based violence (BJS; NIJ, ACS-USDHHS)
- Review of academic journal articles.
- Coding of current event media articles

Criminological Theories Considered
- Cycle of violence is the theory that posits that child maltreatment leads to subsequent perpetration towards the next generation.
- Social-Psychological Strain Theory suggests that overwhelming negative emotions such as anger, frustrations, and resentment resulting from abusive treatment from others can result in violent and criminal behavior (Agnew, 1992).
- Social Control Theory (SCT) assumes that individuals have a natural tendency towards crime and violence, which is restrained by their social bonds. By disrupting these bonds, maltreatment by caregivers makes individuals more likely to offend.
- Social Learning Theory (SLT) maintains that individuals develop patterns of violent or delinquent behavior through imitation. These behaviors are observed by children to result in positive outcomes (control over others, or the acquisition of material or social benefits).

Age, Gender, and Relationship as Relevant Factors in Physical and Sexual Abuse

Growing up Abused
- Brain development is directly linked to the quality and quantity of the interactions with caregivers, family and the community.
- Repeated exposure to stressful events can affect the brain’s stress response.
- School-age children who witness violence exhibit a range of problem behaviors, including: depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers.
- During FFY 2012, a nationally estimated 3.2 million children received either an investigation or alternative response at a national disposition rate of 42.7 children per 1,000 in the population (Source: Children’s Bureau, USDHHS).

Gender-Based Violence
- Annually, an estimated average of 78,000 children are sexually abused. Actual rates are likely to be between 260,000 and 650,000 per year. Underreporting is conspicuous, due to the dark figure of crime.
- Over 22 million women in the United States have been raped.
- Almost two-thirds of all rapes are committed by someone who is known to the victim (73%), according to the NCVS, 2010.
- Sexual violence is associated with serious social, physical and health conditions, including trauma, depression, physical injuries, substance abuse, and economic loss (JAMA, 2012).
- According to the Family Violence Interventions for the Justice System report, boys who witness their father’s violence are ten times more likely to engage in spouse abuse in later adulthood than boys from non-violent homes.

Discussion of Findings
- Gender violence threatens family structures. Children suffer emotional harm when they watch their mothers and sisters being abused.
- Victims of sexual violence often abuse their own children or others, further triggering negative psycho-social outcomes beyond the individual.
- Children who come from abusive families rarely look for help out of fear. Children are not naturally accustomed to violence, but once aggression occurs within their household, it leads to chronic feelings of anxiety and danger in relation to their environment and family.
- It’s important to get educated about rape, and how it is anticipated by stalking and other criminal activities.
- Support the legislation to prevent violence, and educate the public

Selected References