

Abuse, neglect and witnessing violence during childhood within justice-involved samples: A meta-analysis of the prevalence and nature of gender differences and similarities

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BACKGROUND

Abuse, neglect and violence within the home are common experiences among justice-involved populations. However, there is uncertainty regarding the extent of gender differences in victimization rates between justice involved boys and men and girls and women. Some scholars emphasize that justice-involved women often experience more abuse at home than boys and men, but a systematic comparison has not yet been conducted. Thus, further research is needed to determine the true prevalence of victimization and ensure appropriate trauma-responsive services are provided. It is also important not to minimize victimization experiences among justice-involved boys and men, nor to conclude that their experiences of trauma and neglect are unrelated to their involvement in the criminal justice system. This meta-analysis aims to explore gender differences in childhood victimization rates among justice-involved individuals.

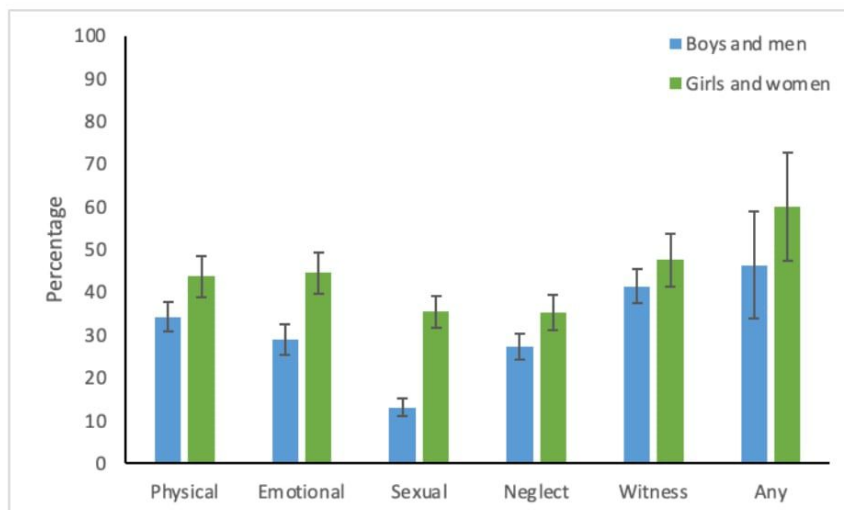
WHAT WE DID

Our search identified 62 studies (230,581 boys and men and 74,608 girls and women) that disaggregated results by gender. Across these studies, 170 effect sizes were obtained for each gender. The studies reported on five dimensions of victimization: physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; child neglect; and witnessed violence. The majority of studies sampled justice-involved populations who had committed general offences, which may have included violent and/or sexual crimes.

WHAT WE FOUND

Girls and women evidenced higher prevalence rates of physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, and any victimization relative to boys and men. However, the observed gender difference for witnessed violence was not statistically significant. Nevertheless, boys and men in the criminal justice system still displayed higher rates of victimization than boys and men in the general population.

Childhood victimization prevalence rates for boys and men, and girls and women



...data from Table 1

WHY IT MATTERS

The findings mirror gender responsive theories, confirming girls and women experience abuse and victimization at higher rates than boys and men. Beyond supporting the continuation of trauma-responsive approaches for the treatment of girls and women, the results of this meta-analysis indicate the need to consider of trauma-responsive approaches with boys and men. Cognitive behavioural therapy should be augmented with trauma-informed practices to account for experiences of childhood victimization across both genders.