Frequency and types of interpersonal maltreatment experienced by male and female forensic populations: A meta-analytic review

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ABSTRACT

Research has consistently shown that forensic populations experience a high frequency of interpersonal maltreatment. Additionally, males and females have been found to report different types of maltreatment, although these results are mixed. A meta-analysis was conducted to help synthesize the literature and distinguish gender differences. A systematic review of the literature led to the selection of 36 studies that reported the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, and witnessed violence in forensic populations. Preliminary results show that while all forensic populations experience a great amount of interpersonal maltreatment, males generally experience more maltreatment than females with the exception of witnessed violence. Specifically, females experienced greater amounts of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse than their male counterparts, although these effects are small (except sexual abuse). The results support research conducted by the feminist pathways perspective. Overall, this is the first meta-analysis to compare the prevalence rates of interpersonal maltreatment among male and female forensic samples and can aid in development and improvement of gender-responsive treatment.

INTRODUCTION

- Females in the Justice system tend to experience higher amounts of abuse (sexual abuse in particular) than their male counterparts (i.e., between 22.9% and 98% of female justice-involved youth vs 1% to 33% of male justice-involved youth [Johansson & Kempf-Leonard, 2009; Kenny & Schreiner, 2009; McQuaid et al., 1997; Pasko & Mayeda, 2011]).
- The social sciences literature has consistently found that males and females who have experienced abuse are at an increased risk for criminal behaviour (Dunnegan, 1997; Moloney et al., 2009).
- Although there have been a few recent literature reviews on the prevalence maltreatment (Kerig & Becker, 2012; Maschi et al., 2012), there have not been any meta-analyses looking at the prevalence of interpersonal maltreatment across forensic populations.

METHODS

- 36 unique studies
  - Only studies that included males and females within the same study were included
  - N ranged from 39 to 34,222 Justice-involved individuals (M = 2,057, Median = 559)
    - Females: N ranged from 15 to 3,502 (M = 374)
    - Males: N ranged from 24 to 10,111 (M = 1342)
  - Samples were mainly from the United States (k = 23) and Canada (k = 5)
  - 29 studies were published, 7 were unpublished
- Total of 76 effect size calculations (for males and females): 25 for physical abuse, 28 for sexual abuse, 10 for emotional abuse, 7 for neglect, and 6 for witnessed violence
- Interrater Reliability
  - percent agreement ranged from 71% to 100% for both categorical and continuous variables

Hypotheses: We expect that both males and females involved in the justice system will have experienced high rates of interpersonal maltreatment.
- However, it is expected that females will have experienced more interpersonal maltreatment than their male counterparts overall.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Both fixed-effect and random effects meta-analyses were conducted, but only the fixed effect results are discussed
- Proportions were calculated for each individual type of interpersonal maltreatment (for males, females and overall sample)
- Gender differences in the amount of interpersonal maltreatment experienced were examined

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Interpersonal Maltreatment</th>
<th>Overall Prevalence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>16.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>17.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>11.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>9.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The average percentage of each type of interpersonal maltreatment experienced by males and females

- Overall, interpersonal maltreatment was experienced by 16.76 to 56.86 percent of forensic samples.
- The most prevalent types of maltreatment include physical abuse, neglect, and witnessed violence.
- On average, proportions of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were significantly higher for females (by 10-15%). No significant differences for neglect and witnessed violence.

DISCUSSION

- Although rates of interpersonal maltreatment are found to be high across all forensic samples, there were significant gender differences: females reported greater amounts of physical, sexual, emotional abuse than males (largest difference was sexual abuse)
- Males witnessed more violence than females (but not significant)

LIMITATIONS

- Did not include a community comparison group of males and females who are not involved in the justice system
- Large amounts of variability between studies

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Comparing different types of maltreatment across gender on both community samples and justice-involved samples
- Examining the differences of how specific types of maltreatment are defined and measured

REFERENCES


FIGURE 1

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- The most prevalent types of maltreatment include physical abuse, neglect, and witnessed violence.
- On average, proportions of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were significantly higher for females (by 10-15%). No significant differences for neglect and witnessed violence.

Table 1. Weighted Effect Size for Each Type of Interpersonal Maltreatment

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Type of Maltreatment</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>56.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>53.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>40.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>39.56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Outlying studies were removed for physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Q-values decreased by at least 50% when outliers were removed, indicating that they were in fact outlying studies). k = number of studies. Q = a significance test for variability across studies.