
Post-traumatic Effects in Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Literature Study

Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika¹, Hermahayu², Rayinda Faizah³ |

To Cite This Article: Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika¹, Hermahayu², Rayinda Faizah³ | (2024) Post-Traumatic Effects In Survivors Of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Literature Study, Journal of Islamic Communication and Counseling (JICC), Vol. 3 Number 1, January 2024, Pages 62-71. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jicc.v3i1.51>

To link this article: <https://jicc.ummy.ac.id/index.php/jicc>



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Received: 09 June 2023
Revised: 25 October 2023
Accepted: 31 October 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jicc.v3i1.51>

*Corresponding author : Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika, Hermahayu, Rayinda Faizah, Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang, Indonesia.

Journal of Islamic Communication and Counseling, Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. Siti Walidah building F6, 2nd floor, Jl. Brawijaya, Geblagan, Tamantirto, Kasihan, Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 55183.

Email: jcc_kpi@umy.ac.id

Reviewing editor Iredho Fani Reza, MA.Si., Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia.

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Post-traumatic Effects in Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Study Literature

Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika¹, Hermahayu², Rayinda Faizah³, Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang^{1,2,3}
rayinda.faizah@ummgl.ac.id³

Abstract: Childhood sexual abuse can result in long-term effects that remain in the survivors to confront and encounter continually. This study aimed to examine behavioral indicators that indicate trauma, which is one of the long-term effects of child sexual violence against children. The study used a literature study technique. There were three behavioral indications developed as long-term consequences of trauma endured by survivors of child sexual abuse. The first indicator was cognitive distortions characterized by self-blame, self-criticism, and a sense of worthlessness. Then, concerns regarding emotional regulation, which present persistent feelings of anxiety or sadness, can appear as the second implication. The last behavioral indication was difficulties regarding the ability to resist impulsive urges, evidently via the engagement in substance misuse and the development of deviant sexual conduct.

Keywords: Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse; Trauma; Cognitive Distortion; Emotion Control; Self-Drive Control

A. Introduction

The number of physically and sexually abused children in Magelang, Indonesia, has been rising significantly every year. In 2022, a female student attending a Muslim school was sexually abused and raped by three individuals consecutively (Agustina, 2022). The Indonesian Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection reported that most abuse victims in children were in the age range between 13 and 17 years old (KemenPPA, 2022). Children are considered a vulnerable age group targeted by sexual abusers due to their perceived vulnerability, which is seen as defenseless, and their constant reliance on the adults in their lives (Mukhoyyaroh, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the already rising incidence of child sexual abuse. Currently, individuals are experiencing higher levels of stress due to economic challenges, insufficient parental guidance, and the effect of social isolation measures implemented during the COVID-19 epidemic. These constraints restrict the mobility of the community and trigger more cases of physical and sexual abuse in minors.

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) refers to any interaction or connection between children and adults (or other minors) that is intended to satisfy the perpetrator's sexual desires, including acts of observation (NCTSN, 2023). Various forms of CSA include abortion, online gender-based abuse, sexual slavery, rape attempt, rape, molestation, intercourse, and incestuous behavior (Komnas Perempuan, 2020). Consequently, CSA can appear in either verbal or non-verbal (physical conduct) forms. A rise in the number of CSA victims results in a comparable increase in CSA survivors. Treatment and assistance, encompassing both physical and psychological aspects, will be provided to children who are victims of sexual assault. However, it will not be easy to reestablish the psychological state of the survivors to their initial condition.

The presence of post-traumatic stress is still evident in survivors, as indicated by long-term effects (Wiesel, 2015), (Sinanan, 2015). The long-term effects can occur and affect the psychological quality of CSA survivors. The forms of behavior indicating trauma include nightmares, sleeping problems, withdrawal, emotional disruptions, cognitive impairments, and sexual dysfunctions. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). However, not all of these forms of behavior appear in survivors of child sexual violence. The effect depends on the form of sexual violence experienced and how the surrounding environment provides support to the survivors. This study aimed to conduct a literature study about different forms of behavior indicating trauma that can appear in the survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In the future, this study can be used as a foundation for developing psychological instruments to assess the impact experienced by survivors of childhood sexual assault.

B. Research Method

This study is a literature review study with a literature study approach to examine papers published within the past decade. Relevant theoretical references regarding cases or issues of trauma as the impact of childhood sexual violence were collected. The cases mainly focus on the survivors of childhood sexual abuse at least one year after the abuse. A literature review is a research technique employed to acquire a thorough understanding of prior research conducted on a particular topic. The purpose of the review is to enlighten readers about existing knowledge and gaps in knowledge while also seeking potential ideas for future research.

C. Result and Discussion

The reviewed studies in the current literature review were eight research articles from the past ten years that discussed childhood sexual abuse (Table 1).

Table 1 List of research articles discussing childhood sexual abuse survivors.

No	Authors	Title	Research method	Results
1	Rachel Lev-Wiesel (Wiesel, 2015)	Childhood sexual abuse: From conceptualization to treatment	Literature review	Five forms of trauma can appear in survivors of childhood sexual violence: feelings of emptiness, feelings of being trapped in the past, and cognitive distortion.
2	Beth E. Molnar, Stephen L. Buka, and Ronald C. Kessler (Molnar, 2021)	Child sexual abuse and subsequent psychopathology: Results from the national comorbidity survey	Quantitative research using surveys on 5,877 survivors of childhood sexual abuse associated with potentially present disorders.	Sexual acts of violence in children can influence their mental system and disrupt brain function. The trauma effects can be implied by behavioral changes, which include mood change, anxiety, and drug abuse. Furthermore, cognitive distortion, such as self-blaming and self-criticizing thoughts, can occur.
3	Kathryn Whetten, Jane Leserman, Kristin Lowe, Dalene Stangl, Nathan Thielman, Marvin Swartz, Laura Hanisch, and Lynn Van Scoyoc (Whetten et al, 2006)	Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and physical trauma in an HIV-positive Sample from the Deep South	Interviews on 611 selected, eligible participants.	Sexual abuse of children increases the emergence of high-risk behaviors due to the trauma experienced, including drug abuse and deviant sexual behavior.

4	Ivo Noviana (Noviana, 2015)	<i>Kekerasan seksual terhadap anak: Dampak dan penanganannya</i>	Literature review	Childhood sexual abuse results in long-term effects that may last until adulthood. Examples of these long-term effects are trust issues, sexual behavior trauma, feelings of powerlessness, and the manifestation of stigmas.
5	Allison N Sinanan (Sinanan, 2015)	Trauma and treatment of child sexual abuse	Literature review	Sexual violence behavior in children heightens the likelihood of developing trauma disorders. These trauma disorders emerge as problematic behaviors, such as re-experiencing traumatic events (i.e., avoidance), cognitive impairments, mood disturbances, and self-destructive tendencies.
6	Sigrun Sigurdardottir and Sigridur Halldorsdottir (Halldorsdottir and Sigurdardottir, 2018)	Screaming Body and Silent Healthcare Providers: A Case Study with childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors	Qualitative analysis through a case study, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and constructivism approach.	Childhood sexual abuse can cause profound psychological trauma and contribute to long-term dysfunction of the body's immune system. Additionally, problematic behavior can emerge, such as anxiety, depression, disassociation, and sexual dysfunction. These behaviors can trigger difficulties in coping strategies and lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
7	Amy Rossiter, Fintan Byrne, Anna Paulina Wota, Zafar Nisar, Thomas Ofuafor, Ivan	Childhood trauma levels in individuals attending adult mental health services: An	Quantitative analysis using surveys on 129 sexual abuse victims pertaining to the possible	Sexual violence on children can result in trauma such as somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), paranoid and

	Murray, Charles Byrne, and Brian Hallahan (Rossiter et al., 2015)	evaluation of clinical records and structured measurement of childhood trauma	disorders they experienced	psychotic disorders.
8	Yael Lahav, Karni Ginzburg, and David Spiegel (Spiegel et al, 2019)	Post-traumatic growth, dissociation, and sexual revictimization in female childhood sexual abuse survivors	Interviews of 448 selected, eligible participants	Childhood sexual abuse contributes to long-term trauma and complicates emotional regulation due to the profound impact of the trauma.

This literature study found that sexual abuse in children can cause long-term effects of trauma. The enduring effects of sexual abuse on survivors are evident through cognitive abnormalities, mood disturbances, emotional difficulties, and impaired impulse control (Wiesel, 2015), (Sinanan, 2015), (Molnar, 2001), (Noviana, 2015). Psychological trauma is a psychological state in which an individual's behavioral patterns are disrupted due to exposure to an extraordinary and abnormal experience, leading to disturbances in their psychological characteristics (Rossiter et al., 2015), (Spiegel et al., 2019), (Saat, 2011). These unusual occurrences trigger psychological responses after sexual abuse conduct.

Cognitive disorders are one of the primary behavioral indicating trauma in CSA survivors. Cognitive disorders refer to irrational thoughts that cause emotional distortion and problematic conduct (Shakra & Chung, 2020), (Chadha & Maheshwari, 2021). The common forms of cognitive disorder in CSA survivors are self-blaming tendencies, self-criticizing thoughts, paranoia (overly distrust and suspicious of others), and low self-esteem (Wiesel, 2015), (Sinanan, 2015), (Molnar, 2001), (Noviana, 2015).

Dissociative refers to the emergence of a disconnection experience and a decrease in continuity between memories, thoughts, behavior, the surrounding area, and identity. This disorder takes the form of escaping from reality in a non-purposeful and harmful manner, causing difficulties in everyday functioning (Halldorsdottir & Sigurdardottir, 2018).

Emotional disturbances or difficulties in emotional regulation arise when survivors encounter challenges in stabilizing their emotions and tend to become more sensitive. These emotional troubles can lead to excessive anxiety or persistent feelings of sadness that indicate depressive disorder (Wiesel, 2015), (Sinanan, 2015), (Hallak et al., 2009). Emotional problems often influence the social skills of CSA survivors.

Challenges in controlling impulses are indicators of trauma for the survivors of sexual violence in children. Problems related to controlling internal urges result in survivors being more vulnerable to drug abuse problems and deviant sexual conduct

(Molnar, 2001), (Whetten et al., 2006). Impulse control issues are not the only primary source of most problematic behaviors among survivors of CSA. These challenging behaviors are also associated with emotional difficulties or challenges in emotional regulation.

D. Conclusion

Trauma can cause prolonged effects on survivors of childhood sexual abuse, even after psychological treatment. The behaviors of the survivors indicating trauma include cognitive distortion, such as self-blaming thoughts, self-criticism tendencies, and low self-esteem. Another behavior about emotional problems and emotional control difficulties manifested in excessive anxiety and indications of depressive disorder. The last post-traumatic stress behavior in childhood sexual violence survivors is the inability to regulate impulses, which causes the survivors to be more susceptible to substance misuse issues or deviant sexual behavior. The present literature study is expected to provide a foundation for the development of trauma evaluation psychological instruments for survivors of child sexual assault that accurately capture the long-term impacts associated with trauma disorders. However, the primary constraint in this research is the scarcity of literature sources that serve as the foundation that specifically addresses the topic of child sexual trauma survivors.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all participants for providing opportunities for data collection.

Email

rayinda.faizah@ummgl.ac.id³

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

Supplementary Material

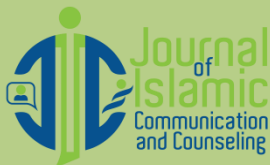
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Author Details

Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika¹, Hermahayu²,
Rayinda Faizah³

Citation Information

Cite this article as Journal of Islamic Communication and Counseling, Mahatma Acintya Dhyatmika, Hermahayu, Rayinda Faizah, JICC Vol.3 Number 1 January 2024



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