

ABSTRACT

Risk factors for abuse and predictors of psychological symptomatology and cognitive development in Trinidadian adolescents

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This thesis took the form of a five-part study, to ascertain whether the data fit the theoretical model, to investigate the effects of socio-demographic variables on depression, self-esteem and cognitive development, the risk factors for physical abuse and sexual abuse, the effects of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and residential care on depression, self-esteem and cognitive development. The literature, to a great extent, provided mixed evidence of the strength of the predictor variables and for certain subject variables such as maternal age and household size there was a noticeable dearth of literature. The overarching theoretical framework drew on the psychosocial system, traumatic event processing and ecological models. A cross-sectional, quasi-experimental, correlational research design was used. The total sample consisted of 226 adolescents in non-residential and residential care and the self-report measures which they completed included a socio-demographic questionnaire, depression, self-esteem, cognitive development and child physical and sexual abuse scales. The test instruments were analysed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ascertain their acceptability for use in the Trinidadian context and structural

equation modelling (SEM) was used to test all of the hypotheses in this study.

The results indicated that the theoretical model developed for this study needs to be re-visited since the structural equation model only partially supported it. The subject variables did not predict depression, self-esteem, cognitive development, physical abuse and sexual abuse scores; with the exceptions of older adolescents predicting higher self-esteem than younger adolescents and large household size predicting impaired cognitive development. Physical abuse and sexual abuse predicted depression but not self-esteem and cognitive development, and type of residence predicted self-esteem and cognitive development but not depression. Possible explanations for these results are discussed, limitations outlined and recommendations proposed.

Keywords: Adolescent depression; adolescent self-esteem; adolescent cognitive development; child physical abuse – predictors and effects; child sexual abuse – predictors and effects; residential care; Trinidadian adolescents