"I was trying to be the mother to her that I didn't have": Mothers' Experiences of Child Sexual Abuse and Intergenerational Maltreatment

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Introduction

- Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a type of developmental trauma that affects 8 to 31% of girls and 3 to 17 % of boys worldwide (Barth et al., 2013).
- CSA compromises healthy developmental trajectories
- Increased risk of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, eating disorders, self-harm (Bradley et al., 2019; Khadr et al., 2018), intimate partner violence victimization (Brassard et al., 2020).
- Long-term repercussions of CSA can increase the risk of intergenerational maltreatment, but there is limited existing research on cycles of CSA, especially using qualitative methodologies.
- Current study explores:
- Mothers' perceptions of their personal experiences of CSA.
- Impacts that CSA had on their attitudes, behaviours, and relationships with their children.
- Nuances between different continuity groups.

Method

 Mothers of emerging adult children recruited to participate in individual interviews



40 mothers participated; 23 reported CSA and were included in analysis

5/23 mothers experienced homotypic continuity



heterotypic continuity



CSA Homotypic Continuity = mom and emerging adult experienced CSA

CSA Heterotypic Continuity = mom experienced CSA; emerging adult experienced other type of maltreatment

Discontinuity = no CSA or other maltreatment of the emerging adult child (reported by the mother)

CSA Heterotypic Continuity

Supporting children's actions, decisions, and autonomy

Highly protective, but adjusting to give their child tools

Little self-reflection about parenting and the effects of childhood experiences

Difficulties expressing emotions and affection with children

> Intimate partner violence victimization

Desire for discontinuity

Highly protective

Enforcing boundaries

Sex education

Desire to be affectionate with children

Lack of authenticity in parenting behaviours

> and monitoring Memories of little supervision

during childhood and of being alone

Using peer role

models

Increased supervision

Open communication about sex, early discussions of consent

Educating/disciplining without violence Self-regulation of emotions

Distinguishing identities from that of their parents

Self-reflection about parenting

Overcoming challenges in expressing emotions and affection

Challenges to avoid role reversals

Discontinuity

CSA **Homotypic Continuity**

Struggles with setting boundaries

and limits

Lack of confidence in parenting

Feelings of guilt for not discussing sexual abuse

history with child

Disallowing participation in certain social events

Results

- Mothers in the current study were 48 years old on average. Most participants identified as White (87%, n = 20) and had obtained high levels of education, with 91% (n = 21) reporting a level of education above high school.
- 19 out of 23 mothers (8 continuity; 11 discontinuity) reported at least one other type of maltreatment, highlighting experiences of polyvictimization.

Identified themes:

- Parenting Challenges Related to Experiencing CSA
- Mothers' Perceptions of Parent-Child Relationships
- Experiences of Intimate Partner Relationships

Discussion

- Despite maltreatment continuing in their families, the qualitative results highlight mothers' best intentions to protect their children and prevent this cycle.
- Nuances between mothers who experienced continuity and discontinuity in terms of parenting and attachment to their children and romantic partners.
- Supports literature that cycles of CSA or other maltreatment types likely continue through complex effects on attachment behaviours and parenting.
- Future research: longitudinal designs and further qualitative research exploring CSA continuity (e.g., help-seeking, triangulating qualitative data from dyads).



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