

“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.

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).

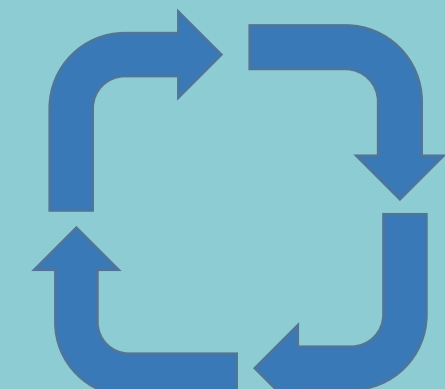
Method

- Mothers of emerging adult children recruited to participate in individual interviews

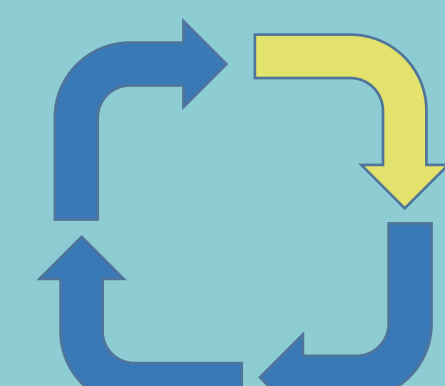


40 mothers participated; **23 reported CSA** and were included in analysis

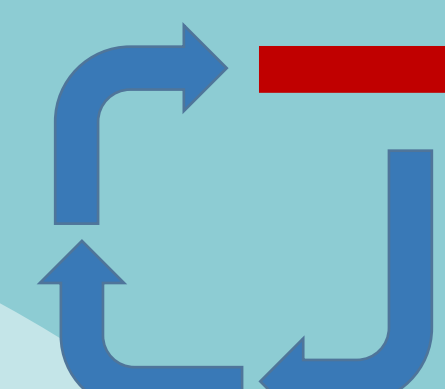
5/23 mothers experienced homotypic continuity



7/23 mothers experienced heterotypic continuity



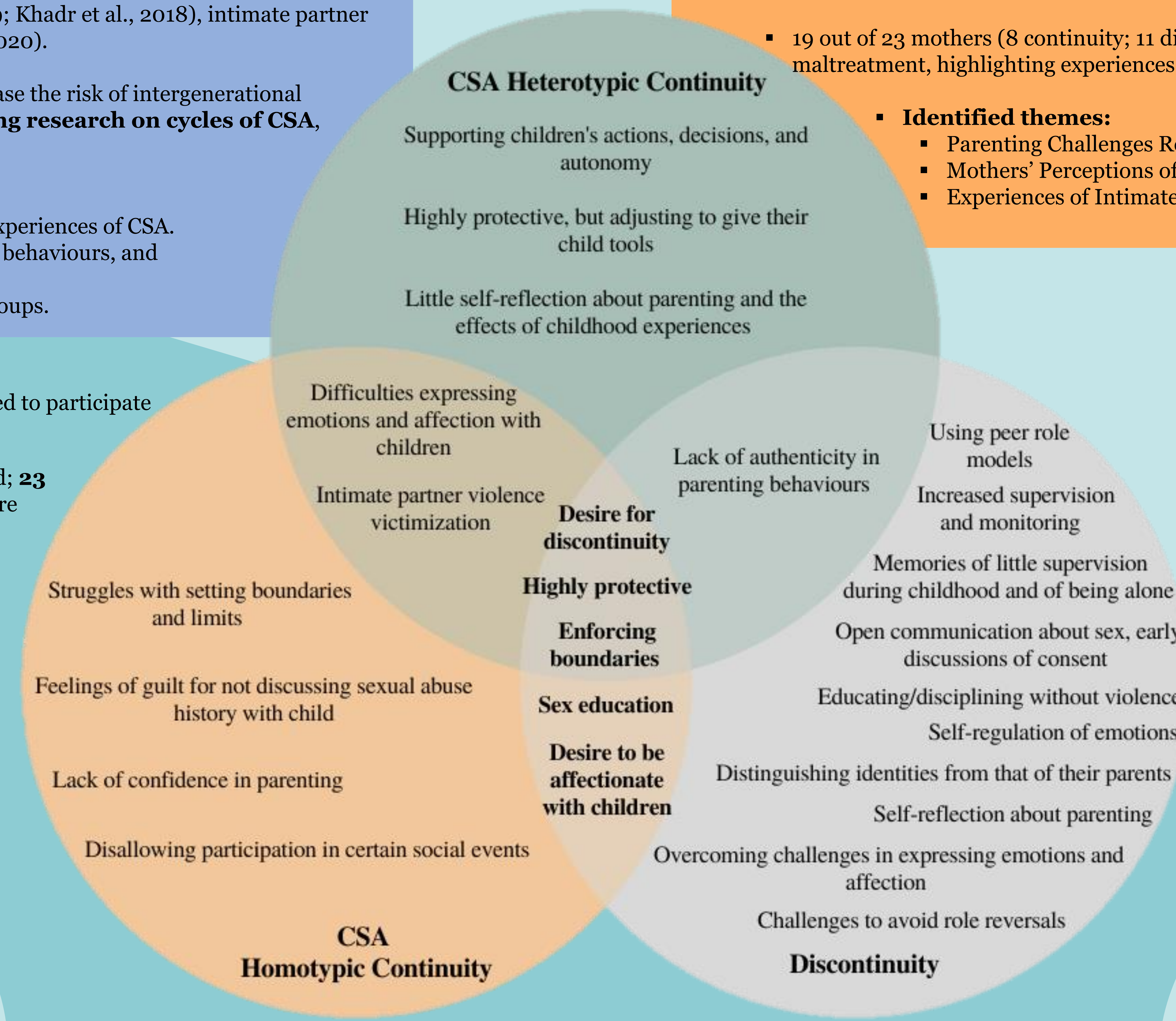
11/23 mothers experienced discontinuity



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)



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