Childhood neglect (CN) is overlooked in child maltreatment studies, yet, it is linked to a wide range of psychological and interpersonal difficulties in adulthood (Leeb et al., 2011). CN impairs the development of identity and self-knowledge (Kapeleris & Paivio, 2011). Indeed, neglectful parents often fail to be attuned and responsive to their child's internal world, which impairs the development of a coherent sense of self (Fonagy & Luyten, 2009). While identity impairment has been found to relate to sexual disturbances in previous studies (Briere & Runtz, 2002), it has never been examined as a potential mediator of the relationship between CN and sexuality in adulthood. A community sample of 374 adults completed online questionnaires assessing CN, identity impairment and sexual disturbances (i.e., sexual concerns and dysfunctional sexual behaviors). A total of 66% of the sample endorsed having experienced at least one act of CN. Path analyses showed that identity impairment acted as a mediator of the association between more CN and increased sexual disturbances in adulthood, explaining 16% of the variance in sexual concerns and 13% in dysfunctional sexual behaviors. Further analyses showed that CN affected sexuality through identity impairment above and beyond the effect of child sexual abuse. Building a stable and coherent sense of self might be a particularly relevant therapeutic intervention for therapists working with CN survivors.

Jacinthe Dion Child Maltreatment Leads to Poorer Adaptation through Adult Attachment Anxiety: Results of a 10-Year Longitudinal Study

Jacinthe Dion - Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Jennifer Gervais - Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Noémie Bigras - Université du Québec à Montréal, Natacha Godbout - Université du Québec à Montréal

This talk shares the results of a study examining the role of adult romantic attachment as a mechanism explaining the association between child maltreatment before age 14 years and psychological adaptation at age 24 years. A total of 604 participants from the general population took part of a 10 year longitudinal study. Child maltreatment (sexual, physical or emotional abuse) was retrospectively assessed at 14 and 24 years. Adult romantic attachment, self-esteem and psychological distress were evaluated at age 24. Path analyses revealed that insecure attachment partially mediated the relationship between the co-occurrence of child maltreatment (i.e., cumulative trauma) and later psychological adaptation outcomes. Overall, these results indicate that child maltreatment increases psychological distress and decreases self-esteem directly, but also indirectly through their link with attachment anxiety. Emerging adults with a history of child maltreatment represent a vulnerable population for psychological adaptation. Interventions targeting romantic attachment security may increase well-being among child maltreatment survivors.