

*Life Writing and Human Rights Conference: Genres of
Testimony 11th July 2011, Kingston University London*

Lifespan experiences of abuse and trauma in the community

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Centre for Abuse & Trauma Studies

- CATS is a social science research Centre at Kingston University
- It is directed by Prof Davidson (Criminology) & Prof Bifulco (Health and Social care) with Dr Christopher Hammerton (Legal studies)
- CATS aims to incorporate research and practice on a broad range of abuse and trauma issues involving:
 - Victims, offenders and legal issues.
 - Methodological issues combining qualitative & quantitative
 - Practice applications in criminal justice, social work and health settings.

www.cats-rp.org.uk

CATS ongoing research topics



- Putting children at the centre of police practice. *Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Command.*
- Evaluating neglect and abuse in Child Safeguarding Services. *Kingston Safeguarding Services.*
- Evaluating attachment in abused young people in residential care. *St Christopher's Fellowship*
- Evaluating the Youth Violence Project: *Guy's & St Thomas Trust*
- European Online Grooming Project *EC Safer Internet Programme*



Knowledge Exchange with Practice

- training courses on identification and assessment of abuse for practitioners in health, social care and criminal justice services.

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Plan of session



- Narratives, testimony and research methodology outlined
- Defining and measuring childhood neglect and abuse and its impacts
- Examples of childhood accounts from a research sample of 303 community women (MRC funded)
- Childhood adversity and adult mental health outcomes outlined
- Additional uses for interview narrative discussed

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Childhood abuse: UN convention on Rights of the Child (Ratified by UK government 1991)



- (Article 19) Children should be protected from abuse or neglect
- (Article 37) No child should be subject to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. No child should be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily.

UK policy child protection



- Children and Young Persons Act, 1989 defined legal aspects of the child protection process.
- 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', 1999 is the updated policy document giving definitions and best practice
- 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need & their Families', 2000 – how to assess child's experience and promote evidence-based practice.

Definition of significant harm

'Working Together, 1999'

"There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm. Considering the severity of ill-treatment may include:

- ✧ the degree and extent of physical harm,
- ✧ the duration and frequency of abuse and neglect,
- ✧ the extent of premeditation,
- ✧ The degree of threat or coercion,
- ✧ sadism and bizarre or unusual elements in child sexual abuse.

Each of these elements has been associated with more severe effects on the child and/or relatively greater difficulty in helping the child overcome the adverse impact of the ill-treatment."

Social worker dilemma - How to assess childhood neglect and abuse accurately?

Narrative accounts can provide necessary detail of severity, timing, relationship to perpetrator and multiples of abuse

Testimony and methodology



- Legal Testimony requires: *Evidence in support of a fact or assertion; proof.*
- Measurement in social science requires reliability and validity
 - Reliability to ensure consistency of coverage across site/ individuals
 - Validity to ensure real experiences accounted, not those influenced by bias.
- *Can collecting narrative factual accounts of childhood abuse can be undertaken in a reliable and valid manner?*
- *Are narrative accounts superior to quantitative questionnaire methods in terms of avoiding bias, providing context and understanding meaning of events?*

Aspects of Abuse and Trauma



- Differentiating
 - Exposure (perpetrator action; trauma event) from
 - Impacts (physical or emotional harm; trauma disorders)
- Collecting a factual account of experience, behaviour, incidents in a chronology.
- Whilst abuse at all ages has damaging effects, those in childhood and teenage years also impinge on normal development and later life chances.

Effects of childhood neglect and abuse



- .. Increases likelihood of a range of clinical psychological disorder:
 - n Emotional; Behavioural and Severe
- .. Increases vulnerability
 - n Psychological (eg Low self esteem);
 - n social (eg isolation)
 - n behavioural (eg aggression)
 - n Relational (eg in partner relationships)
 - n Educational and employment
- .. *How can we ascertain risks for different disorder?*

Childhood abuse is common in the community



- .. Experiences of severe neglect, physical or sexual abuse in childhood affects around 1 in 4 individuals (sample of London women, Bifulco & Moran, 1998).
- .. 15% severe neglect, 21% physical abuse, 18% sexual abuse and 6% psychological abuse (National sample of young people, Cawson 2000).

Measurement needed



Investigator-based, contextual interviews

- Narrative accounts of personal experience of stress and relationships attending to relevant context, timing and meaning of experience.
- A method both quantitative & qualitative to maximise potential analysis and theoretical insight.
- Scorings based on benchmarked, precedent examples to give reliable scores
- Working inductively from the narrative accounts can instruct theory development.

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Childhood Experience of Care and Abuse (CECA) Interview



Bifulco et al 1994, JCPP

- Semi-structured interview to assess early life experience retrospectively.
- Broad coverage of neglect and abuse to develop a chronology
- Factual aspect emphasised with severity, timing and relationship to perpetrator established.
- Tested reliability (inter-rater reliability) and validity (comparison sisters accounts; comparisons with service records)
- Training courses available www.cecainterview.com

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Study of London women

- 303 high-risk community women, aged 25-55, (average 35) with relationship difficulties and adverse backgrounds selected by questionnaire from GP surgery lists.
- All given life history interviews to cover childhood adversity, adult adversity and lifetime clinical disorder.
- Quantitative analysis based on scored narrative material

Examples: Neglect

- *You had the bare essentials. You had your bed, you had your wardrobe and that was it. You didn't have nice things in your room. Father wouldn't let us have lights on in the bedroom; we'd have to do homework by TV. If we came home from school there wouldn't be a meal on the table, Mum would probably be asleep. She'd give us some money to go and get a cake for our dinner. She slept most of the day, we maybe saw her when we were going to bed. No breakfast - did it yourself if there was any there...Sometimes we'd oversleep and it was too late to have breakfast. We'd just have to have a quick wash down and run up to school.*
- *We bathed ourselves. We had a bath once a week. (Did she wash your clothes?) No, us children took them round to the launderette. Father did provide for us more than me mother. When we were with him there was food... Otherwise we went without. Mum used to keep me off school on a Friday to do all the shopping.*
- *I could never go to her if I was upset or unhappy.*

Example of a CECA Neglect rating scale

Definition

Material neglect and indifference shown by parents and carers to child in relation to:

- n material care (being fed, clothed); regular household routines; health & hygiene.
- n Socialisation: neglect of friendships, social activities
- n Education: neglect of school work, career options;
- n Emotional needs & support: failure to attend to child's need for emotional support

Severity determined by pervasiveness of neglect and number of areas of neglect

Rated:

- | | |
|----------------|----------|
| 1. Marked |] Severe |
| 2. Moderate |] Severe |
| 3. Mild | |
| 4. Little/none | |

Scored

For neglect by different parent figures
For changes in severity over time aged 0-17

Example: Physical abuse

- .. "He kicked me with his boots on and I went to hospital, and they knew it was him. They said to me, 'Was it your father?' and I said, 'No, some boy did it'. They put my arm in a sling. He never beat me as much as he beat my brothers and sisters- he'd say, 'if you don't make me happy I'm going to beat them'....Mainly he used to hit us with his hand or a belt. I got hit mainly at weekends. If you cried he'd hit you harder - you couldn't win. If you didn't cry, it was not hard enough. If we did get a beating, all three of us, we used to see who had the biggest marks."
- .

Example of sexual abuse (with psychological abuse)



- Father would have sexual intercourse with his daughter from age 9 to 14. "It was full intercourse. And if I refused I would get a good beating. If I stayed off school and he found out, he would threaten to tell my mother. And I was more frightened of my mother funnily enough, of her finding I'd been staying away from school. But if I let him have sex with me he wouldn't say anything. He was just a bastard. Also he would say that I was a liar to other people. I think it was preparing in case I ever did say anything about the sex. He told me that if I got pregnant I must say that it was a boyfriend. She told her grandmother and her brother but they didn't believe her and did nothing.

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Example of Psychological Abuse



(Extreme rejection).

Mother was always rejecting. We were walking along with my nan one day and she said about me 'I hate her, push her under a bus'. I never did anything to make her treat me like this. One day she shouted at me to come in from the garden. I didn't straightaway because I was playing and so she shut the door and locked it. She wouldn't let me in, even when it started raining. I had to sit in the shed at the bottom of the garden all evening in the rain.

One day the family were going to Brighton for the day. Mum told us to get our coats on. My brother and sister got their coats and then she said to me 'no your not coming, and she hit me. She then left me at my aunts. I was at my aunts for the next three years.'

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Reporting of retrospective abuse



- 80% were open about the abuse at interview and reported fully and in detail. The remainder gave enough information to score but were more reluctant. Accounts verified by a sample of 100 sisters interviewed independently
- Only 18% confided about abuse during childhood
- Perpetrator enforced secrecy in 14% of instances (mainly sexual abuse).
- In only 9% of instances abuse stopped due to formal intervention: 2% of cases had social work involvement; 3% had police involvement; 2% teacher involvement.
- Other reasons for abuse ending – abuser left or stopped 22%; child left house/situation 31%; child acted to stop the abuse 10%

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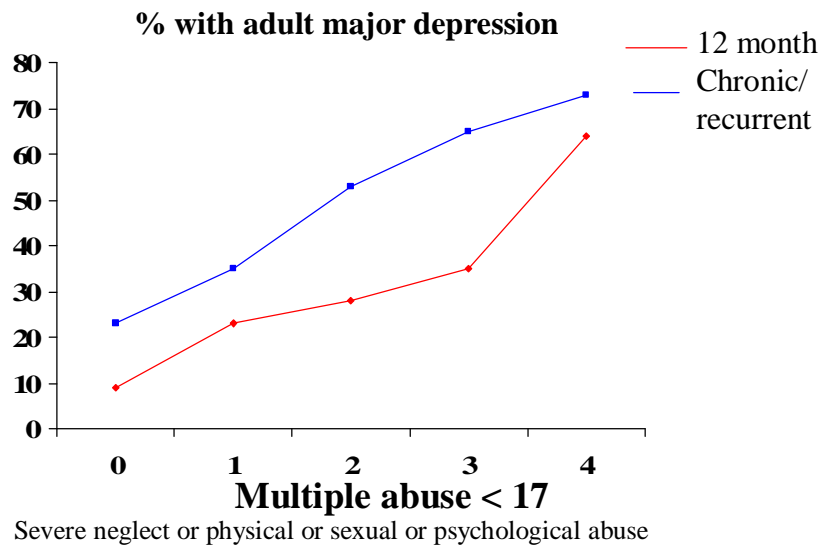
CECA experience and clinical depression in 12 months before interview: (303 adult community women)

CECA dichotomy – peak severity 1-marked or 2-moderate	Odds ratio +
Neglect both parents	3.18**
Physical abuse either parent	3.00**
Sexual abuse from any perpetrator	7.00***
Psychological abuse either parent	2.85*
Index: Neglect, physical or sexual abuse	3.20**

+ proportion increase in disorder if experience present

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Dose-Response effects of multiple neglect/abuse



Examples of quantitative findings



- Severe neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological abuse at severe levels in childhood increases risk of later disorder by 3 times in adults and 7 times in adolescent/young adults.
- The greater the number of abuses in childhood the higher the rate of disorder. Not only for depression, but self-harm, anxiety, substance abuse and conduct disorder.
- Specificity found for parent inflicting neglect abuse and disorder (mothers for emotional disorder in offspring; fathers for substance abuse; both for conduct disorder).
- Childhood neglect/ abuse leads to over double the rate of domestic violence and sexual assault in adulthood in women. It also relates to psychological vulnerability.
- Both childhood and adult abuse predicting recurrent lifetime depression in women.

Implications



- Standardised semi-structured interviews are effective tools for eliciting accurate retrospective accounts of abuse and inter-personal trauma
- Research studies show the major impact of childhood neglect/abuse on adult functioning.
- These currently used in research, but are also applicable to psychological and social work services.
- They may have relevance to police and legal services.

Uses of personal testimony of retrospective childhood abuse



- Legal proceedings (eg re institutional abuse cases in 1980s in the UK; abuses by clergy eg Ireland)
- For identifying and convicting perpetrators and for compensation claims for victims – extent and severity and multiples of abuse need to be outlined.
- For use in psychological treatment and resolving trauma issues

Archived data



- CATS has an extensive archive of over 500 life interviews with 3 generations of London families.
- Novel uses for archived narrative data need to be devised and ethical and copyright issues over re-use of data resolved.
- Secondary analysis can be undertaken using different methods and approaches for researchers and students.
- Narratives can be used for training material for practitioners.

Lifespan Collection website: www.lifespancollection.org.uk

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Lifespan Collection website. The browser window title is 'Home page - Mozilla Firefox'. The address bar shows 'http://www.lifespancollection.org.uk/'. The page content includes a navigation menu on the left with sections for 'PROJECTS', 'MEASURES', and 'PUBLICATIONS'. The main content area features a header with the title 'The Lifespan Collection' and a sub-header 'Interviews with ageing research study'. Below this is an 'Introduction' section with text describing the research project, which was funded through the ESRC and JISC. The text mentions that the research was part of a wider programme of research on ageing and health, and that the data has been used for various research projects. On the right side, there are logos for RADAR (Research Archive and Data Repository) and JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee).

Thank you for your attention!

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