



As a Matter of *fact*

Maltreated Children: The High Risk of Poly-victimization

Poly-victimization (exposure to multiple forms of victimization) is highly correlated with indicators of traumatic stress in children. According to Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby (2011), for these children, “victimization may be better thought of as a condition rather than an event.” Practitioners should avoid organizing assessment of victimized children around a single form of maltreatment.^(2,9,12)

- 1 Poly-victimized children have lower self-esteem, higher incidences of risky sexualized behaviors, higher rates of self-harming attempts, higher instances of depressive behaviors, greater substance abuse issues, and have a significantly higher proportion of delinquency behaviors than children who suffer a single form of maltreatment.⁽¹⁻⁸⁾
- 2 There is often co-occurrence between sexual and physical abuse, and between witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical and sexual abuse.^(1-2,13-15)
- 3 Emotional residues from maltreatment can create a “victim schema” that communicates vulnerability to peers and can invite bullying and peer violence.^(2,12,16,17)
- 4 Efforts to identify children, mitigate their circumstances, and disrupt their high vulnerability to ongoing victimization should be the goal of intervention. School staff and child welfare workers must pay particular attention when children report any type of victimization, including harassment by peers. These events may signal broader victimization vulnerability, and in responding to the child, the focus may need to extend beyond the specific report, to include an assessment of other forms of victimization.^(2,9-10,12-15,17)
- 5 Children suffering from multiple forms of victimization experience higher anxiety and psychological distress than children exposed to chronic victimization of a single type.^(1,10-13,15,18)
- 6 Significant associations exist between childhood physical and sexual abuse, and adolescent delinquency. Multiple types of adverse childhood experiences should be considered as significant risk factors for a spectrum of violence-related outcomes during adolescence.^(3-8,10)

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