

# CHILDHOOD MALTREATMENT IN PREGNANT ADOLESCENTS ENROLLED IN YOUNG PARENT RESOURCE CENTRES

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To examine rates of reported childhood maltreatment in pregnant adolescents enrolled in Young Parent Resource Centres (YPRCs).

**Method:** Self-reports were obtained using validated measures probing for trauma-related experiences: 1) Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), 2) Children's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Inventory (CPTSDI), 3) the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).

**Results:** The rates of reported childhood maltreatment in pregnant adolescents enrolled in YPRCs were as follows: 78% emotional abuse, 74% physical abuse, 52% sexual abuse. Results also demonstrated inconsistency of reporting various types of maltreatment across measures.

## INTRODUCTION

- Approximately 33,000 adolescents become pregnant each year in Canada.
- Reported rates of childhood maltreatment among community based samples of pregnant and parenting adolescents varies greatly across studies: 15%-27% emotional abuse, 15%-72% physical abuse, and 4%-66% sexual abuse.
- Such high rates of reported maltreatment are especially concerning given research evidence showing a significant association between a caregiver's history of unresolved childhood maltreatment and poor outcomes with respect to: (1) the quality of parenting this caregiver can provide; and (2) the caregiver's and offspring's socio-emotional and psychological functioning.
- Although pregnant adolescents who access YPRCs are considered to be an especially high risk group, most of the literature to date has focused on community-based samples of adolescent mothers not enrolled in these Centres.
- To address this gap in the literature, we examine self-reports of maltreatment in 27 pregnant adolescents enrolled in YPRCs.

## Hypotheses:

- 1) Given the high-risk nature of pregnant adolescents enrolled in Young Parent Resource Centres, we expect high rates of self-reported childhood maltreatment in this population.
- 2) Pregnant adolescents will consistently report trauma-related experiences across the CTQ, CPTSDI, and the AAI.

## METHOD

### Participants

- N = 27, pregnant 12-18 year old young women, in their first trimester of pregnancy, who are currently enrolled in a randomized controlled clinical trial.
- Recruited from five YPRCs from the greater Toronto area (Humewood House, Jessie's Centre, Massey Centre, Rosalie Hall, and the Young Parents' Program from the Hospital for Sick Children [HSC]).
- The study has received ethics approval from HSC.

### Measures

- 1) **Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein et al., 1994)**
  - Self-report of childhood abuse (physical, sexual & emotional) and neglect (physical & emotional)
  - Participants respond "never true" to "very often true" (1-5). Abuse/neglect was considered when subjects reported moderate to severe abuse/neglect.
- 2) **Childhood Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Inventory (CPTSDI; Saigh, 1998)**
  - Structured Interview to assess the presence or absence of PTSD.
- 3) **Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George et al., 1984)**
  - Semi-structured interview to assess unresolved mourning and unresolved trauma.

### Procedure

- CTQ, CPTSDI, AAI were collected at 12-23 weeks gestation.

## RESULTS

### 1) Reports of Childhood Maltreatment

- Using three measures that examine childhood maltreatment, we determine the self-reported rates of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.
  - The rates of reported childhood maltreatment in pregnant adolescents from these Centers were 78% emotional abuse, 74% physical abuse, 52% sexual abuse.

### 2) Consistency in Reports of Childhood Maltreatment

- Using repeated measures ANOVA we examine the consistency of reporting maltreatment across three measures: the CTQ, CPTSDI, and the AAI (Table 1).
  - **Emotional abuse.** Results demonstrate inconsistency of reporting emotional abuse across measures,  $F(2, 25)=13.47, p<.01$ . Post-hoc tests reveal that pregnant adolescents were more likely to report emotional abuse on the AAI, than on the CPTSDI ( $p<.01$ ) and the CTQ ( $p<.01$ ).
  - **Physical abuse.** Results demonstrate inconsistency of reporting physical abuse across measures,  $F(2, 25)=6.41, p<.01$ . Post-hoc tests reveal that pregnant adolescents were more likely to report physical abuse on the AAI, than on the CPTSDI ( $p<.01$ ) and the CTQ ( $p<.01$ ).
  - **Sexual abuse.** Results demonstrate inconsistency of reporting sexual abuse across measures,  $F(2, 25)=4.69, p<.01$ . Post-hoc tests reveal that pregnant adolescents were more likely to report sexual abuse on the AAI, than on the CPTSDI ( $p<.01$ ) and the CTQ ( $p<.05$ ).

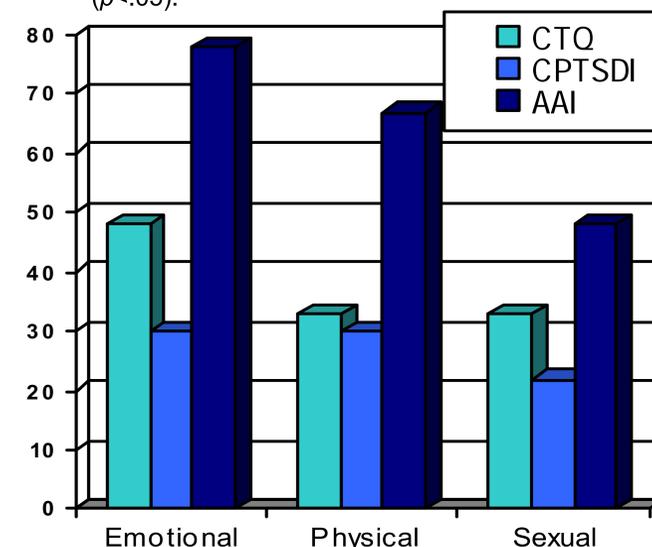


Table 1: Percent of adolescent mothers reporting abuse on the CTQ, CPTSDI, and the AAI.

## DISCUSSION and RELEVANCE

- Findings from the present study are consistent with previous research showing high rates of reported childhood maltreatment among pregnant adolescents. However, our results showed higher rates of emotional and physical abuse than those found in the literature sampling community based populations of parenting and pregnant adolescents.
- Adolescent mothers enrolled in YPRCs did not consistently report incidents of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse across the CTQ, CPTSDI, and AAI.
- Tests probing for the presence of maltreatment through abuse specific questions that require elaboration by subjects (e.g., the AAI) appear to be more sensitive at identifying emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, compared to questionnaires that ask about abuse specific questions without elaboration (e.g., CTQ) or tests asking general questions about the absence or presence of trauma (e.g., CPTSDI).
- Given (a) the strong links documented between caregiver histories of maltreatment and later socio-emotional difficulties in the offspring; and (b) the high rates of reported childhood maltreatment among pregnant adolescents from YPRCs, it is important to **identify early** pregnant adolescents with a history of childhood maltreatment, **particularly those enrolled in YPRCs**, and to provide them with **trauma-focused interventions, when indicated**.
- Findings from the present study should be viewed with caution given the small sample size and the lack of a community-based comparison group.
- Future research should compare the rates of maltreatment between young mothers who are considered at particular risk given their need to access YPRCs, and a community sample of young mothers.
- Future research should assess the efficacy of trauma-focused interventions in helping pregnant adolescents to 'resolve' their unresolved traumatic experiences of childhood maltreatment. We are currently involved in such an endeavor.

In collaboration with Humewood House, Jessie's Centre, Massey Centre, and Rosalie Hall. This study was funded by the Ontario Mental Health Foundation. For more information, please contact [amanda.mckibbon@sickkids.ca](mailto:amanda.mckibbon@sickkids.ca)