Self-harm, Substance Abuse and Age: Relatedness to Sexually Abusive Behaviors Toward Others by Juveniles

Tara K. Cossel, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

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Introduction

The present study analyzes three factors as they relate to functioning: self-harm, substance abuse and age. Research has shown girls highest in mid-adolescent self-harm are those who engage in high levels of bullying (Herker, Ashcraft, Brownson, Fontaine, & Maughan, 2008). Little research has been done to analyze specific behaviors toward others among adolescents who self-harm.

Dembroski, Viehman, Schindler, & Waschbusch (2011) found a positive correlation between antisocial orientation and illicit drug use. Further research was done to understand the nature of behaviors and functioning of juveniles who abuse substances. Johnson (1998) found a history of substance abuse in the majority of families of children who engaged in sexually abusive behaviors. Juvenile substance abuse may also be correlated with children who engage in sexually abusive behaviors.

Previous research suggests age may be a factor in functioning. In a study on bullying, aggressive victims became increasingly prevalent and passive victims and bullies became more prevalent with age (Hawker, & Guerra, 2006). Additionally, victimization and aggressive behavior may decrease with age. Sexual harassment of same- and opposite-sex peers has been shown to increase over early adolescent years and level off in later high-school years (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, McMaster, & Jiang, 2006).

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the relation among self-harm, substance abuse and age in relation to functioning. Specifically, juveniles’ sexually abusive behaviors toward others and behaviors toward others at 12 months were analyzed.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were juveniles meeting the criteria for serious emotional disturbance and required multi-agency involvement. These juveniles range in age from 10.76-19.98 years. There were 283 males and 139 females with a mean age of 14.437 years. The CAFAS was administered by staff trained by qualified trainers in the use of the CAFAS. All staff used acceptable reliability ratings.

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Results

The purpose of this study was to examine how self-harm, substance abuse and age relate to sexually abusive behaviors toward others. Juveniles who abuse substances have been shown to increase over early adolescent years and level off in later high-school years. In a study on bullying, aggressive victims became less prevalent and passive victims and bullies became more prevalent with age (Hawker, & Guerra, 2006). Additionally, victimization and aggressive behavior may decrease with age. Sexual harassment of same- and opposite-sex peers has been shown to increase over early adolescent years and level off in later high-school years (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, McMaster, & Jiang, 2006).

To examine how self-harm, substance abuse and age relate with juveniles’ sexually abusive behaviors toward others, between groups ANOVAs were performed with follow-up analyses using the LSD procedure (p = .05).

There was a significant three-way interaction among self-harm, substance abuse and age in relation to sexually abusive behaviors toward others (F(3,215) = 2.75, p = .045; Mean = .376, r = .17). Follow-up analyses (LSDmmd = .213) revealed for participants who do not abuse substances, across all age groups there was no significant difference in sexually abusive behaviors toward others between those who self-harm and those who do not self-harm. For those who self-harm and for those who do not self-harm, there was no difference in sexually abusive behaviors toward others among the three age groups.

Among juveniles who abuse substances, for those in age group 1 (10.76-13.47 years), those who self-harm demonstrated more sexually abusive behaviors toward others than participants who do not self-harm. For age group 2 (13.47-15.52 years) and 3 (15.52-19.98 years), there was no significant difference in sexually abusive behaviors toward others between those who self-harm and those who do not self-harm. For participants who do not self-harm, sexually abusive behaviors toward others were statistically equivalent for all age groups. For juveniles who self-harm, those in age group 1 engaged in more sexually abusive behaviors toward others than those in age group 3, and those in age group 1 demonstrated more sexually abusive behaviors than those in age group 2. However, sexually abusive behaviors toward others were statistically equivalent for age groups 2 and 3.

There was a significant main effect of self-harm as related to sexually abusive behaviors toward others (F(1,149) = 5.08, p = .026; Mean = .376, r = .17). Such that those who self-harm engaged in more sexually abusive behaviors toward others than those who do not self-harm. This was not descriptive of the entire design. Among those who do not abuse substances, juveniles presented with similar levels of sexually abusive behaviors toward others regardless of self-harm. Additionally, there was no difference in sexually abusive behaviors toward others for youth in age group 2 between those who self-harm and those who do not self-harm.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine how self-harm, substance abuse and age relate to sexually abusive behaviors toward others (F(3,215) = 2.75, p = .045; Mean = .376, r = .17). Such that those who self-harm engaged in more sexually abusive behaviors toward others than those who do not self-harm. This was not descriptive of the entire design. Among those who do not abuse substances, juveniles presented with similar levels of sexually abusive behaviors toward others regardless of self-harm. Additionally, there was no difference in sexually abusive behaviors toward others for youth in age group 2 between those who self-harm and those who do not self-harm.