



September 2018

Effects of Physical and Sexual Abuse on Mental Health

Heather Owens MPH
East Tennessee State University, owensh@etsu.edu

Elaine Loudermilk MPH
East Tennessee State University, loudermilke@etsu.edu

Megan Quinn DrPH
East Tennessee State University, quinnm@etsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ejournal.tnmed.org/home>



Part of the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Owens, Heather MPH; Loudermilk, Elaine MPH; and Quinn, Megan DrPH (2018) "Effects of Physical and Sexual Abuse on Mental Health," *Tennessee Medicine E-Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://ejournal.tnmed.org/home/vol3/iss3/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Tennessee Medicine e-Journal. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tennessee Medicine E-Journal by an authorized editor of Tennessee Medicine e-Journal.

Effects of Physical and Sexual Abuse on Mental Health

Background: Research shows that childhood sexual and physical abuse is common and associated with many psychological disorders in adulthood.

Objectives: This study investigated the effects of physical and sexual abuse during childhood on adult depressive disorder diagnosis and reporting of poor mental health days.

Methods: Data were collected from 2011-2012 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). The sample size was 84,255 and included only states that answered the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) module on the BRFSS questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were followed by simple and multiple logistic regression analysis controlling for age, gender, income, education, marital status, and race.

Results: Being touched sexually had the highest odds of being diagnosed with depression (OR=1.93, CI 1.76-2.11). Being sworn at, insulted, or put down had the highest odds of reporting poor mental health days (OR=1.79, CI 1.72-1.87). Odds of being diagnosed with a depressive disorder increased with age. However, reporting poor mental health days decreased as age increased. In both models, men were found to be significantly less likely to be diagnosed with a depressive disorder or report poor mental health days (OR=0.59, CI 0.57-0.62; OR=0.64, CI 0.62-0.67, respectively).

Conclusion: Those exposed to sexual abuse were more likely to be diagnosed with a depressive disorder; those exposed to physical abuse were more likely to report poor mental health days. This study contributes to further understanding of physical and sexual abuse during childhood on adult mental health, which could lead to better treatment programs and a shift in the stigma of mental health conditions.