

The Assessment of the Attitudes and Behaviors about Physically Abused Children: A Survey of Mental Health Professionals

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Abstract

Objectives

The purpose of the current study was to assess clinician reports of behaviors and attitudes of physically abused children in order to determine whether they generally behaved in a manner designed to maintain the attachment to the caregiver rather than disrupt the attachment.

Methods

Three hundred and thirty-eight clinicians were surveyed about the attitudes and behaviors of physically abused children. Some clinicians rated a specific severely abused child, some rated severely abused children in general, some rated a specific moderately abused child, and some rated moderately abused children in general. Half of the items on the survey pertained to attachment-enhancing behaviors (caring and the parent's feelings, staying connected to the family of the parent, minimizing the harm, and so forth) and half of the items reflected attachment-disrupting behaviors (idolizing the other parent, being rude towards the parent, expressing trivial reasons for being hurt with the parent, and so forth).

Results

For each of the four samples, abused children were rated as expressing significantly more attachment-enhancing behaviors than attachment-disrupting behaviors. They were also found to exhibit more extreme attachment enhancing behaviors than extreme attachment disrupting behaviors. For the most part, characteristics of the rater and the child were not associated with ratings.

Conclusions

Physically abused children were reported to want to maintain relationships with abusive caregivers, which presents challenges as well as opportunities for clinicians working with this highly vulnerable population.

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Author contributions

A.J.L.B. developed the survey and method plan and oversaw all data collection and analysis and drafted the paper. S.M. assisted with the development of the survey and the writing of the paper. W.B. assisted with the development of the survey. T.A. assisted with data collection and reviewed the draft of the paper.

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Ethics declarations

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

All participants were provided with written informed consent statement that described the study, the sponsors of the study, the nature of confidentiality, and any perceived risks and benefits from participating.

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