

# Childhood Abuse and Later Parenting Outcomes in Two American Indian Tribes

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2008.

## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** To examine the relationship of childhood physical and sexual abuse with reported parenting satisfaction and parenting role impairment later in life among American Indians (AIs).

**METHODS:** AIs from Southwest and Northern Plains tribes who participated in a large-scale community-based study ( $n = 3,084$ ) were asked about traumatic events and family history; those with children were asked questions about their parenting experiences. Regression models estimated the relationships between childhood abuse and parenting satisfaction or parenting role impairment, and tested for mediation by depression or substance use disorders.

**RESULTS:** Lifetime substance use disorder fully mediated the relationship between childhood physical abuse and both parenting satisfaction and parenting role impairment in the Northern Plains tribe. There was only partial mediation between childhood sexual abuse and parenting role impairment in the Southwest. In both tribes, lifetime depression did not meet the criteria for mediation of the relationship between childhood abuse and the two parenting outcomes. Instrumental and perceived social support significantly enhanced parenting satisfaction; negative social support reduced satisfaction and increased the likelihood of parenting role impairment. Exposure to parental violence while growing up had deleterious effects on parenting outcomes. Mothers and fathers did not differ significantly in the relation of childhood abuse experience and later parenting outcomes.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Strong effects of social support and mediation of substance abuse disorders in the Northern Plains offer direct ways in which childhood victims of abuse could be helped to avoid negative attributes of parenting that could put their own children at risk.

**PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS:** Mothers were not significantly different from fathers in the relation of abusive childhood experiences and later parenting outcomes, indicating both are candidates for interventions. Strong effects of social support offer avenues for interventions to parents. The prevalence of substance use disorders and their role as a mediator of two parenting outcomes in the Northern Plains should focus special attention on substance use treatment, especially among those who experienced childhood victimization. These factors offer direct ways in which childhood victims of abuse can be helped to avoid negative attributes of parenting that could put their own children at risk of violence.