



Social Support as a Predictor of Sexually Abused Adolescents' Happiness

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Abstract – English

The aim of the study was to find out whether social support had a buffering effect on the impact of child sexual abuse (CSA) on adolescents' happiness. The participants were 7514 secondary school students, 3633 boys and 3744 girls, enrolled in 9th and 10th grade in Iceland in February 2009. Using one-way Anova and logistic regression, the study examined whether social support from parents and friends increased the likelihood of adolescents' happiness (main effects) and more so for sexually abused adolescents than those not abused (interaction effects). The results indicated that adolescents with history of CSA were less likely to report being happy. Both social support of friends and parents increased the likelihood of adolescents' happiness (main effects). However parental support was a weaker predictor of happiness among those adolescents who had experienced intrafamilial abuse whereas friend support was a weaker predictor of happiness for those who had experienced extrafamilial abuse (interaction effects). These results indicate that in general social support of parents and friends is an important predictor of happiness for abused and nonabuse adolescents, but in the case of intrafamilial abuse parental support is not as strong predictor of happiness as for other adolescents and in the case of extrafamilial abuse friends support is a less strong predictor of happiness than for others. In conclusion, the results indicate that adolescents who have experience sexual abuse are need more effective social support resources, in particular in the social network surrounding the perpetrator of sexual abuse.

Key words: Sexual abuse, social support, happiness

Útdráttur – Íslenska

Markmið rannsóknarinnar var að kanna hvort félagslegur stuðningur sé sterkari áhrifaþáttur á hamingju unglunga sem hafa orðið fyrir kynferðisofbeldi í æsku (KOF) en annarra. Þátttakendur voru 7514 grunnskólanemendur, 3633 drengir og 3744 stúlkur sem skráð voru í 9. og 10. bekki allra grunnskóla á landinu í febrúar 2009. Með einhliða dreifigreiningu og aðhvarfsgreiningu var kannað hvort félagslegur stuðningur foreldra og vina yki líkur þess að unglingar teldu sig hamingjusama (meginhrif), einnig var kannað hvort hann væri sterkari forspárþáttur hamingju barna sem hafa orðið fyrir KOF en annarra (samvirknihrif). Niðurstöðurnar gáfu til kynna að unglingar sem orðið höfðu fyrir KOF reyndust síðust líklegir til að telja sig hamingjusama. Hvort tveggja félagslegur stuðningur frá vinum og foreldrum juku líkur á hamingju unglunga (meginhrif). Samt sem áður reyndist stuðningur foreldra veikari forspárþáttur hamingju meðal þeirra unglunga sem upplifað höfðu KOF innan fjölskyldu, á meðan stuðningur vina reyndist veikari forspárþáttur hamingju þeirra sem orðið höfðu fyrir KOF utan fjölskyldu (samvirknihrif). Niðurstöðurnar gáfu til kynna að unglingar sem orðið höfðu fyrir KOF væru ólíklegri til að teljast hamingjusamir, ásamt því að stuðningur foreldra reyndist sterkari forspárþáttur hamingju unglunga sem höfðu orðið fyrir KOF innan fjölskyldu heldur en annarra. Eins reyndist stuðningur vina sterkari forspárþáttur hamingju þeirra sem höfðu orðið fyrir KOF utan fjölskyldu heldur en þeirra sem ekki áttu sögu um slíkt. Að lyktum gáfur niðurstöðurnar til kynna að unglingar með reynslu af KOF þarfnist meiri og áhrifaríkari félagslegs stuðnings, sér í lagi innan félagslega tengslanetsins í umhverfi geranda kynferðisbrotanna.

Lykilorð: Kynferðisofbeldi, félagslegur stuðningur, hamingja

Social Support as a Predictor of Children's Happiness

All throughout life people continuously encounter stimuli of various kinds. The way they experience and react to the stimuli is not universal and can even vary between individuals. It is impossible to identify how each and every one would and should interact in every situation but what is commonly known is that not all events lead to positive outcomes. One type of events that can lead to negative outcome is experience of sexual abuse, whether it is in child- or adulthood (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Asgeirsdottir, Sigfusdottir, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2011; Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Hyman, Gold & Cott, 2003; Putnam, 2003; Thomas, DiLillo, Walsh & Polusny, 2011; Tremblay, Hébert & Piché, 1999; Ullman & Filipas, 2005). In local literature, sexual abuse has been defined as any form of sexual act, verbal or physical, directed towards another person without his or her consent (Farestveit and Sveinsdóttir, 2007).

Numerous studies and analyses have been conducted on the matter of child sexual abuse (CSA). Many of them which indicate a great gender difference in its prevalence where much higher rates are found among girls than among boys (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Asgeirsdottir, Sigfusdottir, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2011; Dube, Anda, Whitfield, Brown, Felitti, Dong & Giles, 2005; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1999; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; Putnam, 2003, Wellman, 1993). Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith's (1999) meta analysis showed that 27% of females and 16% of males claimed to have suffered sexual abuse as children. They indicated that higher rates of CSA occurrences were found among children that at some point or time period in childhood lived with a single parent or lived with unhappy families. Not all researchers agree on how high the rates of CSA are, but though not as high as Finkelhor et al.'s findings, Putnam's (2003) review was consistent with their findings where it showed that 16.8% of females and 7.9% of males reported as having experienced CSA. Icelandic studies

have shown a similar pattern of prevalence rate of CSA experience among adolescents. In Asgeirsdottir's article from 2011 27.3% of all participants, 17.8% of boys and 37.5% of girls, claimed to have experienced sexual abuse of any kind.

One of the most frequently discussed factor of child sexual abuse is how it contributes to negative emotional affects following experiences of abuse. It can be divided into three research generations on the matter (see Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner, 2001). These researches include both studies on short- and long-term impact of CSA on victims as well as the relations between CSA and negative psychological outcomes. They strived to figure out which factors mediate the effects of negative outcomes, and lastly they endeavoured to identify mediating processes for reducing negative outcomes following experiences of CSA.

Present literature is, however, mostly directed towards negative outcome factors such as depression, anger, suicidal behaviour and similar emotional factors. Many studies show how sexual abuse increases negative psychological factors, such as depression and anger (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Asgeirsdottir, Sigfusdottir, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2011; Thomas, DiLillo, Walsh & Polusny, 2011). Child sexual abuse is said to evoke internalizing and external behaviour problems among victims (Tremblay, Hébert & Piché, 1999) as well as being a significant risk factor for psychopathology, especially depression, and substance abuse (Putnam, 2003). It has even proved as a leading factor to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among many victims (Hyman, Gold & Cott, 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2005) or symptoms related to PTSD (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995).

When looking at previous studies contextualizing CSA with its most common emotional effects on children it is important to cogitate which factors there may be in their environment that could somehow moderate these effects. One of the factors that has been showed as a helpful force when it comes to children and adolescents and their well being is

social support. Thoits defined social support in 1986 as a compensation which individuals who have been subjected to stressful events are provided with (See Hyman, Gold & Cott, 2003). It has been said to play the role of a certain buffer to increased levels of stress, where it hinders the individuals from developing negative symptoms and engaging in maladaptive conduct. Social support can come from both friends and family, and within the family parental support has been the most frequently studied factor.

Social support provides various impacts on children. A study by Miklikowska, Duriez and Soenes (2011) indicated that it increased children's empathy throughout their adolescent years. Children claiming to have low or no symptoms of depression have also claimed to perceive a high level of parental support (Ingudottir, Gudmundsdottir, Asgeirsdottir and Sigfusdottir, 2009). Studies looking at different sources of social support have indicated that genders are not equally affected by social support from parents and friends. Girls are more likely to receive more effective social support from their friends while boys perceive greater support from their parents and family (Evans, Steel & DiLillo, 2013; Rueger, Malecki & Demaray, 2008). In Rueger, Malecki and Demaray's study from 2008 boys claimed to perceive least support from their close friends, out of different sources of social support (parents, teachers, classmates and close friends).

When social support is put in context with effects of CSA, one could easily think of it as an inevitably mediating force for negative effects. Many researchers have made a supreme effort to explain the effects of social support, both amidst victims and their parents, as well as victims and their friends. Social support has been shown as a mediating factor of negative outcomes following traumatic experiences, such as sexual, physical and emotional abuse in childhood (Evans, Steel and DiLillo, 2013). The study by Evans et al. indicated that perceived social support from family had a greater mediating effect on men, whereas social support from friends had more impact on reducing trauma symptoms in women. Parental support is

said to be a particularly important factor for victims of interfamilial or extrafamilial child sexual abuse (Jankowski, Leitenberg, Henning & Coffey, 2002) and that it decreases the likelihood of revictimization.

Not all researchers agree that social support buffers the effects of negative outcomes following experiences of child sexual abuse. Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner (2001) indicated that parental support only has little direct or indirect impact on victims' adjustment later in life (Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner, 2001). A study conducted by Tremblay, Hébert and Piché (1999) showed that social support and coping strategies of sexually abused children did not imply an interaction effect on adjustment following the abuse. Asgeirsdottir, Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson and Sigfusdottir (2010) exerted in their study on depressed mood and anger among sexually abused adolescents also indicated that parental support did not have an interaction effect on emotional factors such as depression and anger.

Not many studies are found on the specific matter of the effects of sexual abuse on adolescents' happiness. Murthi and Espelage (2005) conducted a study which revealed that children who had suffered sexual abuse often report feeling a loss of childhood happiness following the abuse. Their results yielded that social support had a mediating effect on the dimension of loss. The greater support children perceived the feeling of loss decreased.

Aim of this study

The aim of the present study was to see whether social support has a buffering effect on the impact of sexual abuse on adolescents' happiness, that is if social support decreased the level of negative outcomes following experiences of intra- or extra familial CSA. The most important factor this study adds to the current literature is the focus on the relationship between sexual abuse and happiness among adolescents. It is important to study this relationship more specifically due to lack of research on the matter compared to the amount of

studies that have been conducted on negative emotional factors. The hypotheses put forward in the present study were the following:

(a) Higher rates of child sexual abuse are found among girls than among boys. (b) Adolescents who report having experienced sexual abuse are less likely to describe themselves as happy compared to adolescents who do not report history of sexual abuse. (c) High parental support increases the likelihood of happiness among adolescents (d) Parental support buffers the negative effects of sexual abuse on happiness, by being a stronger predictor of happiness for those who have suffered child sexual abuse than those who have not. (e) Parental support is a stronger predictor for the happiness of adolescents who have experienced extrafamilial sexual abuse. (f) Friends support is a stronger predictor for the happiness of adolescents who have suffered interfamilial sexual abuse.

Method

Participants and procedure.

The data used in the present study was archival, collected by Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) by conducting a cross-sectional survey in February 2009 (Gudmundsdottir, Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir & Sigfusson, 2009). The participants were 7514 students enrolled in 9th and 10th grade in all secondary schools in Iceland in February 2009 at the time of distribution of the questionnaires. There were 3633 (48.3%) males, 3744 (49.8%) females and 137 (1.8%) that did not identify their gender, 3615 (48.1%) who were in 9th grade and 3801 (50.6%) in 10th grade and 98 (1.3%) students did not specify their grade. The participants did not receive any payments or compensation of any kind for participating in the study. In total of 83.5% of the population in these cohorts took part in this survey. Hence, making the sample highly representative for adolescents of that age group in Iceland.

The questionnaires were distributed by teachers from each school, who kindly asked the participants not to write their name, ID number or any information that could hinder their anonymity on the paper. Using self-report measures, participants were asked to answer questions concerning demographic information, their condition, well-being, social status, drug use, exposure to/or experience of violence and other things. The teachers assured all students that they could ask and seek further information if any item or topic in the questionnaire seemed opaque. When they had finished answering the questionnaires, they were asked to put them in closed envelopes and hand them over to a relevant teacher or school staff present in the room.

There are certain ethical issues concerning the present study that must be addressed. Participation in studies where participants are asked to recall memories of traumatic experiences, may cause them discomfort or stress, and even lead to re-experiencing the trauma. To minimize the effects of the repercussion the participants could be addressed before handing out the questionnaires and given instructions to where they might seek help afterwards if needed.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire.

The present study was based on a questionnaire that consisted of 96 questions, where the researcher chose 15 for analysis to test the above-mentioned hypotheses. The only demographic variable used was “gender” which was measured as 1 = “male” and 2 = “female”. The questions however measured six variables: gender, interfamilial sexual abuse, extrafamilial sexual abuse, parental support, friends support and happiness.

Sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse, concerning participants' experience of interfamilial or extrafamilial sexual abuse, was measured with the questions "Have you experienced sexual abuse where a grown-up individual within your family was involved?" and "Have you experienced sexual abuse where a grown-up individual outside your family was involved?" The options were 1 = "Yes, in the past 30 days", 2 = "Yes, in the past 12 months", 3 = "Yes, over 12 months ago" and 4 = "No". Each answer possibility was labelled by 0 = "Did not mark" and 1 = "Did mark", so that individuals could mark more than one option based on their experience on either intrafamilial or extrafamilial sexual abuse or both. For analysis the variables were computed were for both intrafamilial sexual abuse and extrafamilial sexual abuse. The answer "no" was labelled as 0 = "No", and answers yielding an experience of CSA "Yes, in the past 30 days", "Yes, in the past 12 months" and "Yes, over 12 months ago" were put together and labelled as 1 = "Yes" for a history of CSA. 0 = "No" 1 = "Yes". There were 160 participants missing in the question concerning intrafamilial sexual abuse and 163 missing concerning extrafamilial sexual abuse.

Social support.

Social support was measured with ten questions; five concerning social support from parents and five regarding social support from friends. The main questions were "How easy or difficult is it for you to get the following from your parents?" and "How easy or difficult is it for you to get the following from your friends?" Both questions had five congruent sub questions, which addressed different aspects of social support: (a) Love and kindness, (b) Conversations about personal matter, (c) Advice regarding homework, (d) Advice concerning other work (or projects) and (e) Assistance with other endeavour. These questions were measured on a four point Likert scale where 1 = "Very difficult", 2 = "Rather difficult", 3 = "Rather easy" and 4 = "Very easy" For statistical analysis, social support was divided into two scales for parental support and friends support. All sub questions for each form of social

support were computed into scales, one for "Parental Support" and another for "Friends support". The reliability of the scales was measured by Coefficient Chronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) which is most often used to calculate internal reliability of statistical scales.. Cronbach's alpha for parental support was $\alpha = 0,882$, and for Friends support it was $\alpha = 0,886$, indicating high internal reliability of both scales.

Happiness

Happiness, the dependent variable, was measured on a four point Likert scale where participants were asked to declare how well the statement "I am happy" applied to them. The answer options were 1 = "Doesn't apply to me", 2 = "Doesn't quite apply to me", 3 = "Applies quite well to me" and 4 = "Applies to me". It was then recoded into a new variable where options 1 and 2 were computed together and labelled as 0 = "Unhappy" and options 3 and 4 as 1 = "Happy".

Statistical analysis

Various statistical analyses were performed to test the above-mentioned hypotheses. Comparison of the gender difference in rates of CSA experiences was portrayed by running frequencies on the sample and comparing results from chi square test of independence. The second hypothesis was tested by running a crosstabulation on both types of sexual abuse and happiness. Social support was measured with a one-way Anova which portrayed to what extent adolescents perceived social support from their parents and friends. Then the main statistical analysis used in the study was binary logistic regression. It was used to test the remaining hypotheses and formularise models for assessment of the relationship between intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse, parental support, social support from friends and happiness. It provided a statistical model of how the odds of the dependent variable, happiness, decrease or increase due to the effect of the independent variables (Field, 2009).

The logistic regression tested interactions between the variables to indicate whether social support buffered the relationship between intrafamilial or extrafamilial sexual abuse and adolescents' happiness.

Results

The characteristics of the sample showed that 73 (2.1%) of the boys reported having experienced CSA inside their family, similar percentage of girls, 85 (3.2%) had also suffered intrafamilial sexual abuse, which made 158 of the whole sample (2.2%). The significance was measured by using a chi-square test of independence where Pearson's Chi-square $p = 0.499$, indicated that the difference between the genders was not significant. When looked at experiences of extrafamilial sexual abuse 2.3% (83) of boys claimed to have experienced it and 3.2% of girls, or 202 (2.8%) of all the participants. A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant difference between the genders ($p < .05$).

As shown below in Table 1, there was a significant difference between the percentage of adolescents claiming to be unhappy, based on whether they experienced either type of sexual abuse or not. Of those who had experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse 43.6% claimed to be unhappy. When looking at adolescents who had not experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse only 12.6% claimed to be unhappy. Similar results were found among those who had experienced extra familial sexual abuse where 39.9% claimed to be unhappy, but only 12.5% of those who had not experienced it reported as being unhappy. The difference between groups in both intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse was significant ($p < .001$).

The difference between intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse and happiness was tested with a chi-square test of independence. The relation between intrafamilial sexual abuse and happiness was significant $X^2(1, N = 7269) = 128.159, p < .001$ as well as the relation between extrafamilial sexual abuse and happiness which was also significant $X^2(1, N = 7269) = 125.369, p < .001$.

Table 1

Adolescents' happiness based on experience of CSA

		Unhappy	Happy	Chi-square	Sig.
Intrafamilial	Yes	43.6% (68)	56.4%(88)	128.159	P<.001
sexual abuse	No	12.6%(893)	87.4% (6220)		
Extrafamilial	Yes	39.3%(81)	60.7% (125)	125.396	P<.001
sexual abuse	No	12.5%(882)	87.5% (6181)		

The results from a one-way Anova on intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse and social support were as displayed in Table 2. The results yielded that adolescents who had experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse reported significantly less perceived parental support $F(1,7250) = 22.723, p < .001$ than those who had not suffered intrafamilial sexual abuse. When looked at friends support and victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse, adolescents who had experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse reported significantly less friends support $F(1,7184) = 55.110, p < .001$ than those who had not experienced that type of sexual abuse. Likewise, adolescents who had suffered extrafamilial sexual abuse reported significantly less parental support $F(1,7249) = 310.702, p < .001$ and friends support $F(1,7183) = 11.672, p < .001$ than the participants did not report experience of extrafamilial sexual abuse.

Table 2

One-way Anova on parental support and friends support perceived by adolescents, by experiences of intrafamilial or extrafamilial sexual abuse.

		Parental support				Friends support		
		N	Mean	S.D.	P	Mean	S.D.	P
Intrafamilial	Yes	160	9.019	5.132	P<.001	9.075	3.379	P<.001
sexual abuse	No	7092	12.600	2.930	P<.001	11.102	4.730	P<.001
Extrafamilial	Yes	160	8.902	8.902	P<.001	9.378	9.378	P<.001
sexual abuse	No	7252	12.627	12.627	P<.001	11.105	11.105	P<.001

In Table 3 logistic regression models are presented, predicting happiness based on intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse, parental support and friends support, both using main effects and as interaction between both types of sexual abuse and social support.

First, looking at in Model 1 the results indicated that intrafamilial sexual abuse predicted less likelihood of adolescents' happiness ($\beta = -1.016, p < .001$) which indicates that experiences of intrafamilial sexual abuse is related to less likelihood of happiness. The odds ratio (OR) yielded that the odds of an adolescent with an experience of intrafamilial sexual abuse reporting as happy was 0.362 times lower than the ones who had not experienced it. The odds of adolescents who had experienced extra familial sexual abuse being happy were 0.354 times lower than of the ones who had not experienced it. Extra familial sexual abuse also showed a significant negative relationship with adolescents' happiness ($\beta = -1.039, p < .001$). According to Cox & Snell's R square and Nagelkerke's adjusted value the model explained 1.5% to 2.8% of happiness, the dependent variable's variance.

In Model 2, social support, both parental and from friends, were added to the analysis. The results yielded that both types of sexual abuse, as well as both types of social support were significantly related to happiness. The results showed strong and significant negative relationship between intrafamilial ($\beta = -.704, p < .01$) and extra familial ($\beta = -.533, p < .05$) sexual abuse and adolescents' happiness. Those findings indicate that adolescents who have experienced either intrafamilial sexual abuse (OR = .495) or extrafamilial sexual abuse (OR = .587) are significantly less likely to report as being happy than those who have not. Counter to the negative effects of sexual abuse. Furthermore, the results indicated significant positive relationship between both parental support ($\beta = .193, p < .001$) and friends support ($\beta = .135, p < .001$) and adolescents' happiness. This yielded that adolescents who perceive high levels of parental support (OR = 1.213) and friends support (OR = 1.144) were more likely to consider themselves happy than those who did not receive support from

their parents or friends. The model explains 9.5% - 17.7% of happiness' variance, according to Cox & Snell's R square and Nagelkerke's adjusted value.

In Model 3 the interaction terms were added to the previous models. Two interactions turned out to be significant. That is parental support was a weaker predictor for victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse's happiness ($\beta = -.150, p < .05$) and extrafamilial sexual abuse and social support from friends ($\beta = -.126, p < .05$). Conversely, the interaction for intrafamilial sexual abuse and social support from friends was insignificant ($\beta = -.018, p = .762$) and so was the interaction for extrafamilial sexual abuse and parental support ($\beta = -.036, p = .439$). Model 3 explains 10.1% - 18.8% of the dependent variable's variance, according to Cox & Snell R square and Naglkerke's adjusted value.

Table 3

Models for intra- and extrafamilial sexual abuse, parental and friends support and interactions between sexual abuse and social support along with it's effect on adolescents' happiness.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	β	S.E.	Exp(B)	β	S.E.	Exp(B)	β	S.E.	Exp(B)
Gender	-.098	.071	.907	-.508**	.084	.602	-.520**	.084	.594
Intrafamilial sexual abuse	-1.016**	.208	.362	-.704*	.233	.495	.763	.695	2.144
Extrafamilial sexual abuse	-1.039**	.186	.354	-.533*	.210	.587	1.033	.651	2.811
Parental support				.193**	.011	1.213	.210**	.012	1.233
Friends support				.135**	.012	1.144	.148**	.012	1.159
Intrafamilial sexual abuse by Parental support							-.150*	.048	.861
Intrafamilial sexual abuse by Friends support							-.018	.060	.982
Extrafamilial sexual abuse by Parental support							-.036	.046	.965
Extrafamilial sexual abuse by Friends support							-.126*	.054	.881
Constant	2.155**	.155	8.291	-.940**	.178	.391	-.231**	.184	.292

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.001

Discussion

The current findings provided a non-significant difference between the ratio of girls and boys who experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse, which does not support the first hypothesis, concerning gender differences found in previous studies where girls experience sexual abuse more often than boys do. However there was a significant difference between genders when looking at experiences of extrafamilial sexual abuse, where a higher percentage was found among girls than boys who reported to have experienced it which does support the hypothesis and is consistent with former studies (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Asgeirsdottir, Sigfusdottir, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2011; Dube, Anda, Whitfield, Brown, Felitti, Dong & Giles, 2005; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1999; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; Putnam, 2003, Wellman, 1993).

The results did support the second hypothesis, which yielded that adolescents who report having experienced sexual abuse would be less likely to describe themselves as happy compared to adolescents who do not report history of sexual abuse. There was a highly significant difference between the groups of victims of both types of sexual abuse when compared to the participants who claimed to not having a history of sexual abuse. That was consistent with the one study found and portrayed a loss of childhood happiness for those who suffered sexual abuse (Murthi and Espelage, 2005).

When looked at social support, both types had a significant positive effect on adolescents' happiness. It turned out to be a relatively strong predictor for their happiness, that indicated that higher levels of perceived support increasing the odds of participants claiming to be happy. That supports the third hypothesis which indicated that high parental support increased the likelihood of happiness among adolescents.

The fact that the interactions between intrafamilial sexual abuse and friends support, as well as extrafamilial sexual abuse and parental support proved to be insignificant yielded that social support has a main effect on adolescents' happiness and is not a stronger predictor for either group. They seemed to receive similar amount and equally effective support from their parents and friends. That is consistent with Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner's findings from 2001, which indicated that social support was equally effective for both victims of sexual abuse as well as non-abused individuals. These findings from the present study are though inconsistent with what the author hypothesized, that is about parental support being a stronger predictor for adolescents' happiness who have experienced extrafamilial sexual abuse and conversely that social support from friends would be a stronger predictor for and have a buffering effect on adolescents' happiness that had experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse..

Finally, the interactions between intrafamilial sexual abuse and parental support turned out to be significant. That indicates that parental support buffers the negative effects of sexual abuse on adolescents' happiness. The interaction between extrafamilial sexual abuse and social support from friends also proved to be significant, which yielded that friends support is a stronger predicting factor for adolescents' happiness that have suffered sexual abuse outside their family than those who have not.

What was also interesting in the current findings was that only 2.2% of such a large sample claimed to have experienced sexual abuse of any kind which was inconsistent with former research that shows a much higher percentage (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Asgeirsdottir, Sigfusdottir, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2011). In Asgeirsdottir's article from 2011 27.3% of all participants, 17.8% of boys and 37.5% of girls, claimed to have experienced sexual abuse of any kind. The difference may be explained by the age difference of participants, the participants' age group in the present study was 14-16years (9th and 10th grade) whereas in

Asgeirsdottir's research age group was 16-19 years (mean age 17.2 years SD = 1.1). When interpreting the indicated results from the present study generalisation should be handled carefully since there are certain limitations to the procedure and analysis.

Limitations of the present study

The main limitation of the study is the fact that it was a cross-sectional study. It can not conclude about causal relationships, for example between sexual abuse and happiness. Participants' assessment of their happiness may have depended on their mood while filling out the questionnaire. What future research should hold is to make a longitudinal study on the same subject to exclude extrinsic variables that may have affected the results, which were not included in the present study. Another limitation to the study is the form of measurements. Many researchers use self-reported or self-administered questionnaires for participants to collect information on experience of sexual abuse (Asgeirsdottir, 2011; Kristensen & Lau, 2007; Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner, 2001; Thomas, DiLillo, Walsh & Polusny, 2011). Self-reported questionnaires can be practical in many ways, which would explain how often they are used in studies, but it cannot be ignored that when participants provide information completely on their own there is no guarantee for their understanding to be in harmony with what the researchers had in mind. For example the questions used concerning the sexual abuse variable in the present study use the label "sexual abuse" which in native language could lead to a misunderstanding of the concept. Sexual abuse could be interpreted as an ongoing abuse which lasted over longer periods of time, while labels like "sexual molestation" could be interpreted as any sexual act towards a dissident individual, committed once or over a longer time period. Another limitation of the study is a certain lack of information concerning the relation between the victims and their perpetrators, which might explain the amount of perceived parental support and social support victims receive. What

makes this complicated is that in such a big context, where participants are answering a long questionnaire concerning many demographic factors and variables it is hard to include a great number of questions specific enough for that kind of analysis since there are normally too few which the questions apply to. That might also result in participants opting out of the study before finishing the whole questionnaire.

Strengths of the present study

The main strengths of the study were the size of the sample where a large percentage of adolescents in that age group in Iceland participated in the study. That compliments the measurement for its ability to represent the cohort as a whole. Another great strength is the anonymity of participants and almost equal participation of both genders, which is an advantage to many previous researches that have only focused on female participants (Hyman, Gold, & Cott, 2003; Jankowski, Leitenberg, Henning & Coffey, 2002; Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold & Milner, 2001; Murthi & Espelage, 2005). The sample's size is a great advantage for studies like this one, since not all cases that include sexual abuse are reported to authorities, it then gives a better idea of how many children and adolescents do experience sexual abuse before adulthood.

In conclusion, the findings indicated The results indicated that adolescents who had experienced CSA were less likely to report as being happy. Both social parental and friends support increased the likelihood of adolescents' happiness. However parental support was a less predicting factor of happiness among those adolescents with history of intrafamilial abuse whereas friends support was a weaker predictor of happiness for those who had experienced extrafamilial abuse. The findings were mostly consistent with previous research indicating similar gender difference, where girls are more likely to experience CSA than boys, and that adolescents with experiences of CSA are less likely to be happy than others.

With the emergence of positive psychology, future research should transfer the fixed focus on depression and other negative psychological factors towards happiness and satisfaction in life. That could contribute to focusing on solutions instead of problems. That might improve CSA victims' happiness rather than all research emphasis being directed towards problems.

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