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The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Relationships: The Role of Childhood Attachment

Fei Shen, Ying Zhang, Xiafei Wang

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has consistently been shown to have deleterious effects on survivors' interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships; therefore, it is undoubtedly a prominent public health concern. IPV survivors often experience a violation of trust and a sense of betrayal in the aftermath and develop ineffective coping mechanisms (e.g., distancing themselves emotionally), which could potentially impact their new intimate relationships. Experiencing IPV was found to have detrimental effects on an individual's self-esteem; IPV survivors often have lower levels of self-esteem than non-abused individuals.

Despite the negative outcomes of IPV victimization, limited effort has been put forth to recognize protective factors that contribute to IPV survivors' coping and healing processes. Childhood attachment has been proposed as a potential protective factor for IPV survivors' coping with traumatic experiences and a moderator for buffering the negative psychological outcomes of IPV. In the present study, we aim to investigate the impact of IPV on adult attachment and self-esteem as well as examine the moderating role of childhood attachment on the relationships between IPV, adult attachment, and self-esteem.

Data were collected from various social media platforms via a Qualtrics survey. For the final analysis, 1,708 adult participants were retained, including 507 (29.7%) participants who experienced IPV and 1,191 (69.7%) participants without a history of IPV in adulthood. The results identified a positive association between IPV victimization and adult insecure attachment, including both anxious and avoidant dimensions. Meanwhile, a negative association was observed between IPV victimization and self-esteem. Furthermore, our research determined that childhood attachment acted as a moderator between IPV victimization and self-esteem.

The findings provide insights that may inform clinical interventions for adult survivors who have experienced IPV to rebuild trusting interpersonal relationships and relationships with self. First, clinical interventions could focus on altering survivors' negative internal working models to increase security within non-abusive close relationships. Close friends and family members could remain as a secure base for IPV survivors while they rebuild their personal and social lives that IPV have damaged. Additionally, the therapeutic relationship could potentially serve as a secure base for survivors to explore their attachment behaviors. Furthermore, group therapy is a powerful way to learn about trusting oneself and others and to improve interpersonal relationship skills. Clients' attachment patterns may be activated through interactions with the group members and the facilitators. One of the important findings of the current study is that childhood attachment with the primary caregiver(s) buffered the relationship between IPV on self-esteem. From a clinical point of view, the result may bring hope for adult survivors of IPV regarding their healing process; primary caregivers could still serve as a secure base to offer a crucial opportunity to strengthen the internal working models that would positively affect later adjustment. Counselors could assess survivors' attachment with their primary caregivers and give them autonomy to determine if it is beneficial to get their non-abusive primary caregivers involved in their treatment to provide support.

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Ink-ling of Identity:

Unraveling Tattoo Culture for Mental Health Counselors

Russ Curtis, Lisen C. Roberts, Paul Stonehouse, Melodie H. Frick

Tattoo art, one of the oldest forms of self-expression, has a long and complex history. However, with the rise of colonialism, the practice faced widespread suppression, driven by religious and cultural forces, which resulted in lasting stigma against those with tattoos. Despite the current popularity of tattoos, the bias persists, especially against women and people of color. This article seeks to explore the residual stigma surrounding tattoos, particularly in the context of the counseling profession, and introduces the unencumbered self theory of tattoos as a new framework for understanding tattoo motivation.

Tattoo-related biases have deep roots, with colonialism playing a significant role in discouraging the practice among Indigenous cultures. This historical perspective is crucial for understanding the ongoing discrimination that tattooed individuals face. Research suggests that nearly half of U.S. adults aged 18–34 have at least one tattoo, and the tattoo industry generates over a billion dollars annually, indicating the art form's growing popularity. This global trend has been observed in various countries and cultures, demonstrating the widespread appeal of tattoos. Despite this surge, bias remains. Studies show that discrimination is particularly harsh on women and people of color, reinforcing the intersectionality of tattoo stigma.

The counseling profession, with its focus on inclusivity and mental health, must address this bias, particularly as the tattoo industry itself is shaped by broader social and cultural movements. This article examines whether there is a correlation between tattoo motivation and mental health, how subconscious biases against tattooed clients might affect counselors, and how the profession can foster a more inclusive environment. A key question arises: What motivates individuals to get tattoos, and how does this choice relate to their mental health and well-being?

In response to these inquiries, the authors propose the unencumbered self theory of tattoos, which asserts that tattoos represent a desire to transcend societal norms and external influences. Unlike other theories that may frame tattoos as symbols of personal attractiveness or rebellion, this new theory views tattoos as expressions of individual autonomy and the quest for self-actualization. This aligns with broader counseling trends, which have increasingly emphasized sociocultural influences on mental health and wellness. By shifting from an intrapersonal focus to a more holistic understanding of human behavior, the counseling field mirrors the evolving role of tattoos in contemporary culture.

This theory has practical implications for counseling, particularly in mitigating tattoo-related biases within therapeutic settings. Counselors must remain aware of their potential prejudices and strive to create inclusive spaces for tattooed clients. Furthermore, the theory suggests that tattoos may symbolize empowerment and identity, essential elements in therapeutic conversations about self-esteem, autonomy, and life satisfaction.

Although there is no significant evidence to suggest that tattooed individuals experience more mental health problems than nontattooed individuals, the stigma attached to tattoos persists. The resurgence of tattoo art reflects broader sociocultural shifts, challenging traditional counseling paradigms that White, male, and heteronormative standards have often shaped. The unencumbered self theory of tattoos offers a new way of understanding tattoo motivation, advancing the counseling profession's commitment to inclusivity and recognizing the diverse values, traditions, and customs contributing to individual well-being.

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Read full article and references:

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Rural Mothers' Postpartum Social and Emotional Experiences:

A Qualitative Investigation

**Katherine M. Hermann-Turner, Jonathan D. Wiley,
Corrin N. Brown, Alyssa A. Curtis, Dessie S. Avila**

Every year around 3.6 million women give birth in the United States, a transformative period that can be both exciting and challenging. The experience, which often reshapes a woman's identity, can trigger feelings of vulnerability. In addition to the normative experiences described in the literature, rural mothers often encounter limited access to health care and social support, further exacerbated by factors such as poverty and transportation limitations. These challenges compound with preexisting risks to decrease well-being, which can lead to depression and anxiety. A mother's level of support from friends, family, and the community can significantly influence her emotional wellness.

This qualitative study investigates mothers' postpartum experiences in rural areas, focusing on how social and emotional experiences impact well-being. Researchers aimed to understand the unique challenges of rural biological mothers, a group that has received little attention in previous studies.

The researchers interviewed mothers from four rural communities ($N = 16$) through focus groups, creating a supportive environment for participants to share their experiences and feelings about childbirth and postpartum recovery. A transcendental phenomenological analysis was used to identify four key themes:

1. Powerlessness: Many mothers felt a lack of control during childbirth, often feeling unheard by medical professionals. This sense of powerlessness extended into postpartum recovery, making it difficult to bond with their newborns or seek help.
2. Help seeking: Participants expressed a disconnect between their emotional and physical needs and the available support. Fear and shame often hindered help seeking, as they worried about being judged or misunderstood by health care providers.
3. Recovering power: Many mothers described reclaiming their sense of agency over time. They found ways to create personal time, reflect on their experiences, and learn to advocate for themselves. Despite the challenges, accepting their role as a mother brought a sense of gratitude.
4. Here and now: Group discussions fostered a supportive environment where mothers felt comfortable sharing their stories. The connection with others who understood their struggles led to a sense of belonging and the desire for continued support.

While the study highlights many challenges, it also showcases the mothers' resilience and ability to support one another. The findings underscore the need to address the social and emotional challenges experienced by postpartum mothers in rural areas who may encounter geographic isolation, stigma around mental health, and/or a lack of resources.

Counselors working with postpartum mothers in rural areas are encouraged to focus on empowering mothers, fostering their autonomy, establishing support groups, and leveraging telehealth capabilities. Improved collaboration between mental health and medical services is essential to better meet these mothers' needs.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the unique needs of rural mothers during the postpartum period. Future research would benefit from an ongoing investigation of these experiences and exploration of additional effective support practices for mothers in diverse rural contexts.

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Silent No More:

Exploring the Effects of Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice on Relationship Satisfaction, Mindfulness, and Well-Being in Female Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma

Crystal M. Morris, Priscilla Rose Prasath

The global spotlight on violence against women, particularly sexual assault and harassment, has garnered substantial attention in recent years. The World Health Organization has found sexual violence to be a significant public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. For example, military sexual trauma (MST) is prevalent among female service members and can hinder the development of meaningful relationships. Military culture presents challenges in seeking mental health treatment, especially for female veterans facing barriers to seeking care. MST survivors face heightened risks of psychological, social, physical, and employment-related difficulties. They commonly experience issues such as declining sexual functioning, social support challenges, maladaptive coping mechanisms, PTSD symptoms, and reduced relationship satisfaction.

Positive psychology interventions and mindfulness practices have emerged as promising interventions for trauma survivors. The Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP) program, which combines mindfulness and character strengths practices, has been shown to positively affect well-being and relationship satisfaction. Seligman's theory of well-being and PERMA model incorporate the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being and pose that these two components are necessary for optimal well-being. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the MBSP program on relationship satisfaction, mindfulness, and overall well-being among female survivors of MST.

The research questions that guided the study were:

- 1) Is there a positive relationship between the use of the MBSP program and relationship satisfaction in females who experienced military sexual trauma (MST) as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale?
- 2) Will the MBSP program improve dispositional (trait) mindfulness as measured by the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale in female survivors of MST?
- 3) What is the effect of the MBSP program on overall well-being in female survivors of MST as measured by the PERMA-Profilier?

The study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design with 24 female participants—the MBSP program, consisting of eight sessions, aimed to enhance participants' strengths and well-being. Data collection took place from May 2022 to August 2022, and the results revealed positive changes in mindfulness and engagement in the program while showing a significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness, and well-being and relationship satisfaction; as one increased, so did the other.

Counselors and counselor educators may benefit from learning alternative and non-pathological wellness modalities such as positive psychology and mindfulness-based practices in counseling programs to address trauma survivor symptoms. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) should explore standards to include these alternative modalities. The lack of CACREP guidance on crisis, trauma, and disaster counseling has necessitated creative pedagogical approaches in presenting realistic clinical challenges to counselors-in-training in a supportive and safe learning environment. Teaching wellness modalities could help counselors and counselor educators develop innovative wellness tools and support for clients seeking non-pathology-based treatment for trauma, such as the MBSP program.

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Counseling Emerging Adults: A Phenomenological Investigation of Professional Counselors' Lived Experiences

**Matthew L. Nice, Arsh, Rachel A. Dingfelder,
Nathan D. Faris, Jean K. Albert, Michael B. Sickels**

This article describes a qualitative study that investigated the experiences of professional counselors who primarily counsel emerging adult clients. The authors of this study interviewed 11 professional counselors who met the following criteria: graduation from a CACREP-accredited counseling program, a minimum of 2 years of professional counseling experience post-graduation, and a full-time caseload of at least 60% or more emerging adults (ages 18–29). We discuss how counselors who primarily counsel emerging adult clients experience their role.

Emerging adulthood represents the ages of 18 to 29 and is a distinct human developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by its five defining features of identity exploration, sense of possibilities, self-focus, instability, and feeling in-between. Identity exploration refers to emerging adults' process of self-discovery in education, careers, and romantic partnerships. Sense of possibilities refers to emerging adults' tendency to look to the future optimistically, imagining the many avenues that they may explore in their lives. Self-focus, not to be confused with selfishness, is the normative process in which emerging adults have the opportunity to focus on themselves without parental constraints before they take on the responsibilities of marriage or parenthood. Instability refers to emerging adults experiencing unstable and frequently changing life conditions, such as change in romantic partnerships, transitioning to and from college, or moving in and out of living situations. Lastly, feeling in-between is the developmental limbo between adolescence and adulthood, when emerging adults do not identify as an adolescent or an adult.



Experiencing these normative developmental features often results in challenges to emerging adults' mental health. Although emerging adults are one of the most vulnerable age groups for developing mental health issues and are particularly vulnerable to experiencing anxiety and depression, the counseling field has been slow to adapt to the evolving landscape of individuals in their emerging adult development. Many counselors are challenged with using outdated developmental models to conceptualize their work with emerging adult clients that do not adequately address the nuances in this age group. During high school years school counselors are often tasked with prioritizing students for college and career readiness and not for their upcoming transition into emerging adults. Given these circumstances, counselors who work with emerging adult clients are uniquely positioned to foster resilience, wellness, and navigation of various challenges during this often-tumultuous stage of human development. Thus, the authors of this study aimed to understand the experience of counselors in order to discover the unique needs of this population in the counseling setting.

After interviewing 11 counselors who primarily counsel emerging adult clients, four themes emerged: parental pressures, self-discovery, transitions, and dating and attachment. Counselors reported their clients experiencing stress and anxiety from age-normative experiences. Our findings provide valuable insights regarding counselors' clinical experiences with emerging adult clients, including several practice implications, and demonstrating that counselors encounter unique developmental issues when counseling emerging adult clients. Counselors can benefit from understanding and paying attention to the themes of this study in order to better attend to the needs of emerging adult clients.

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Read full article and references:

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