

Studying Maltreatment Through Polyvictimization: A Three-dimensional Theoretical Foundation

Abstract

Polyvictimization occurs when children are exposed to multiple forms of violence, neglect, and abuse. This seminar will present a theoretical model to conceptualize polyvictimization according to the unique lived experiences of children when multiple victimization/maltreatment experiences co-occur. It argues polyvictimization must rest on a conceptual foundation of victimization that sits in three dimensions: invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity. The model offers logic and evidence for measuring polyvictimization experiences and their effects using multiplicative interaction effects rather than simple additive (sometimes called cumulative) effects. Conceptually, theorizing polyvictimization according to the unique lived experiences of children extends knowledge on the trauma framework which has informed the study of polyvictimization. Deconstructing polyvictimization experiences grounds the model in lived experiences as the foundation before focusing on environmental potentiating and compensating factors.

The Salar ethnic minority mainly resides in Qinghai province in China. To shed light on the theory, a new qualitative approach has been developed using in-depth river of life oral history method with polyvictimized Salar women. The qualitative study focused particularly on the proposed theoretical dimensions of invasiveness, exploitativeness, and severity. Preliminary quantitative measures of these dimensions are proposed. Converging evidence is provided using a small random sample quantitative study of 200 Salar mothers. This is the first quantitative study to directly measure the three dimensions of 3-D theory, examining depression, suicidality, and child maltreatment as outcomes. It is also the first known study of child maltreatment among the Salar people. The seminar will conclude with implications for policy, theory, research and practice with this model.