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Early Sexual Experiences Checklist

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The CSAS was also employed in a study of homeless youth (Rew, Whittaker, Taylor-Seehafer, & Smith, 2005). Significant differences among homeless youth by sexual orientation categories on the CSAS were found. Specifically, gay and lesbian youth were more likely to have left home due to sexual abuse than heterosexual and bisexual youth. The authors of the study utilized the full scale as well as individual items in the analysis.

References

Exhibit

Childhood Sexual Abuse Scale

Instructions: These next questions are about activity before you were 12 years old.

1. Someone tried to touch me in a sexual way against my will.
2. Someone tried to make me touch them in a sexual way against my will.
3. I believe that I have been sexually abused by someone.
4. Someone threatened to tell lies about me or hurt me unless I did something sexual with them.

Early Sexual Experiences Checklist

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Self-report biases and definitional problems have plagued studies of sexual abuse of children. Various investigators have forced respondents to label themselves as “sexually abused” (e.g., Kercher & McShane, 1984) or to make subtle distinctions among vague categories (e.g., “kissing or hugging in a sexual way”; Kilpatrick, 1986) in order to be counted as victims of deleterious, unwanted childhood sexual experiences. Miller, Johnson, and Johnson (1991) created the Early Sexual Experiences Checklist (ESEC) to provide an efficient, accessible procedure for detecting such experiences that avoids these methodological and conceptual problems. The ESEC merely asks respondents to check any specific, overt sexual behaviors that occurred when the respondents did not want them to. Coupled with reports of (a) the respondent’s age during the events, (b) the age of the person who initiated the events, or (c) any coercion, the ESEC allows diverse operationalizations of unwanted sexual experience that span the existing literature on sexual abuse (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993). The straightforward, mechanical checklist method eschews evaluative, pejorative terminology and is thus relatively noninvasive. It is also simple and direct and very inexpensive, making it practical for use with large heterogeneous populations.

Description

The ESEC contains nine items listing explicit sexual behaviors and two additional items that allow respondents either to describe a further sexual event or to pick none of the above. The checklist ordinarily includes additional questions—which may vary according to investigators’ needs—that obtain (a) the respondent’s sex, (b) the respondent’s age at the time of the most bothersome event, (c) the age of the other person involved, (d) the identity (e.g., “stranger”) of the other person, (e) the frequency and duration of the most bothersome experience, and (f) the presence and type of any coercion. Items using a 1 (not at

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Response Mode and Timing
Respondents are ordinarily instructed to indicate with a check any sexual behaviors that were unwanted and that occurred before they were 16 years old. (This age limit may be changed for different applications of the checklist.) Thereafter, because many respondents will have encountered more than one type of sexual experience, respondents are typically asked to circle the experience that bothered them the most and to answer any further questions with regard to that specific event. The checklist and any additional questions usually fit on two sheets that take only 4 or 5 minutes to complete.

Scoring
Respondents who report unwanted sexual experiences can readily be distinguished from those who do not, and the percentage of the sample reporting each type of unwanted experience is easily calculated. A useful distinction can also be made, however, between those who have encountered relatively severe events, such as oral-genital contact or anal or vaginal intercourse, and those who have encountered less severe events, such as the exhibition of, or fondling of, sexual organs. Miller et al. (1991) showed that such distinctions are made by lay judges, and Anderson, Miller, and Miller (1995) demonstrated that the two different types of experiences are linked to different adult outcomes.

The results obtained by the ESEC resemble those obtained by the laborious, much costlier face-to-face interviews often advocated by methodologists (Wyatt & Peters, 1986). Anderson et al. (1995) found that 9% of the women and 3% of the men in a heterogenous college sample reported a youthful history of severe victimization by another person 5 or more years older than themselves. An additional 15% of the women and 6% of the men reported less severe experiences that were initiated by substantially older partners. Remarkably, if all such experiences are counted—regardless of the age of the partner—nearly half of the sample (48%) had some unwanted sexual experience during childhood or young adolescence.

Reliability
Using Cohen’s kappa, a conservative statistic that corrects for chance agreement among diverse categories, the average 1-month test-retest reliability of the ESEC is .92 (Miller & Johnson, 1997).

Validity
Importantly, the ESEC captures reports of childhood sexual abuse that escape other paper-and-pencil techniques. Using the ESEC, Miller and Johnson (1997) found that 56% of a college sample who reported abuse in the form of unwanted, bothersome childhood experiences with partners 5 or more years older than themselves nevertheless specifically reported that they had not been “sexually abused.” Thus, fewer than half of those who had encountered sexual abuse actually labeled themselves as “abused.” Nonetheless, their experiences were detected by the ESEC. Anderson et al. (1995) have also found that adult respondents reporting any unwanted experiences on the ESEC evidenced more depression and neuroticism, and lower self-esteem, than did those who had encountered no such experiences. Furthermore, those reporting relatively severe experiences (i.e., unwanted oral-genital contact or anal or vaginal intercourse) were more impulsive, used more alcohol and other drugs, and were less secure and more anxious and avoidant in their interpersonal relations than were those who had not had such severe experiences. The ESEC methodology thus replicated the findings of other techniques for assessing abuse, but also extended those findings by allowing comparison of the sequelae of different types of abuse experiences.

References
Exhibit

Early Sexual Experiences Checklist

Your sex: _____ Male _____ Female

Early Sexual Experiences

When you were under the age of sixteen (16), did any of these incidents ever happen to you when you did not want them to?

Please check those that occurred:

_____ Another person showed his or her sex organs to you.
_____ You showed your sex organs to another person at his or her request.
_____ Someone touched or fondled your sexual organs.
_____ You touched or fondled another person’s sex organs at his or her request.
_____ Another person had sexual intercourse with you.
_____ Another person performed oral sex on you.
_____ You performed oral sex on another person.
_____ Someone told you to engage in sexual activity so that he or she could watch.
_____ You engaged in anal sex with another person.
_____ Other (please specify): __________________________________
_____ None of these events ever occurred.

If any of these incidents ever happened to you, please answer the following questions by thinking about the one behavior that bothered you the most.

In addition, please circle the behavior above that bothered you the most.

1. How old were you when it happened? _____
2. Approximately how old was the other person involved? _____
3. Who was the other person involved?
   _____ relative _____ friend or acquaintance _____ stranger
4. If the other person was a relative, how were they related to you? (i.e., cousin, father, sister, etc.) ____________
5. How many times did this behavior occur?
   _____ just once _____ twice _____ 3 or 4 times _____ 5 times or more
6. Over how long a period did this behavior occur?
   _____ just once _____ a month or less _____ several months _____ a year or more
7. How much did the experience bother you at the time?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all moderately extremely
8. How much does the experience bother you now?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all moderately extremely
9. What kind of psychological pressure or physical force did the person use, if any? Please check all that apply:
   _____ They tried to talk you into it.
   _____ They scared you because they were bigger or stronger.
   _____ They said they would hurt you.
   _____ They bribed you.
   _____ They pushed, hit, or physically restrained you.
   _____ You were afraid they wouldn’t like or love you.
   _____ They physically harmed or injured you.
   _____ They threatened you with a weapon.
The What-If-Situations-Test (WIST; Nemerofsky, 1986) was developed to measure performance of preschool-age children in sexual abuse prevention programs. The WIST is constructed from the learning objectives of the Children’s Primary Prevention Training Program (Nemerofsky, Sanford, Baer, Cage, & Wood, 1986) and is composed of situations that require the child to determine how he or she would respond. The test items measure the skills and concepts taught in the prevention program and address skills and concepts thought to be essential in reducing the risk of sexual victimization (Conte, Rosen, & Saperstein, 1986; Wurtele, 1987). The WIST can be used as a pretest measure, as well as a measure of performance in sexual abuse prevention programs.

Description

The WIST consists of 29 items addressing (a) the names and location of the child’s “private parts,” (b) appropriate requests to touch or to examine the child’s genitals by physicians, (c) requests for the child to touch another individual’s genitals, (e) the child’s right to refuse to be touched, (f) appropriate requests to touch (hug/kiss) the child by others, (g) requests to keep secrets, (h) requests to keep secrets about genital touching, (i) attempts to provide gifts/bribes/presents/incentives to touch child’s genitals or have the child touch the genitals of another person, (j) actions to be taken if the child was afraid and/or uncomfortable, and (k) the child’s role in potential abuse situations.

Eleven items require the child to make a determination about the appropriateness of an action or situation (e.g., If someone touches a child’s private parts, should the child tell?). Seventeen items deal with actions that a child should take in abuse situations (e.g., What would you do if someone touched your private parts?). One item addresses the names and locations of the child’s private parts.

Response Mode and Timing

The WIST is administered, on an individual basis, by the child’s teacher. The child’s responses are written down verbatim and scored by comparison to a key. The test requires approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Scores can range from 0 to 64, with higher scores indicating greater understanding of child sexual abuse prevention skills and concepts. WIST items are differently keyed according to the nature of the item. The 11 WIST items requiring the child to make a determination about the appropriateness of an action or situation are scored 0 points for a wrong answer and 1 point for a correct response. The 17 items addressing actions a child could take in abuse situations receive 1 point for an assertive or motoric response, 2 points for disclosure, and 3 points for both an assertive and a disclosure response. The WIST item that requires the child to name and locate his or her private parts receives 0 points for a wrong answer, 1 point for a partial answer (e.g., child names only one private part), and 2 points for a complete correct answer (e.g., a girl’s private parts are her vagina, buttocks, and breasts).

Reliability

In a sample of 1,044 3- to 6-year-old children (Nemerofsky, 1991), the Cronbach’s alpha for the WIST was .83, indicating good reliability.

Validity

In a study using the WIST pretest mean score as the covariate, WIST posttest mean scores of children who had completed a sexual abuse prevention training program were compared to the control group of children who had not received the training. A significant difference was found between groups, with the experimental group of children scoring significantly higher on the WIST posttest following participation in the sexual abuse prevention training program than the control group of children who had not received the training (Nemerofsky, Carran, & Rosenberg, 1994).