Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Contribute to the Risk of Adult Criminal Offending?

Derailment Theory in Light of the Evidence

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Proposal

I propose to examine derailment theory as it pertains to the victims of childhood sexual abuse. The premise of derailment theory is that traumatic events occurring during childhood and adolescence, such as sexual abuse, snowball into adult criminal deviance. Derailment occurs because the circumstances of abuse produce behaviors and statuses that often carry deviant labels. Among the proximate mechanisms operating to produce the criminogenic effect are substance abuse and delinquency. Early research indicates that, compared to adults who do not report abuse, victims of child sexual abuse are more likely to criminally offend in adulthood, thus supporting the theory (Widom 2000). More recent findings and different methodologies raise questions about the validity of earlier studies (Austin 2004). I evaluate the merits of derailment theory by critically assessing its assumptions, concepts, and logic, as well examining the theory in light of the evidence. My data source will be secondary, as my planned procedure involves a review of the relevant literature. Determining the effects on child sexual abuse on adult criminal offending contributes to the literature on this topic and may assist professionals in the development of successful interventions.
Works Cited
