



# Two-thirds of child abuse survivors thrive as adults

Published: Nov. 22, 2019 at 8:15 PM

HealthDay News

Nov. 22 -- Two in three survivors of childhood sexual abuse have good mental health, but a new study suggests that social isolation, chronic pain, substance abuse and depression can hinder recovery.

Researchers looked at 651 Canadian survivors to identify factors associated with what the researchers call complete mental health.

"Remarkably, two-thirds [65 percent] of the childhood sexual abuse survivors in our sample met the criteria for complete mental health -- defined as being happy or satisfied with life most days in the past month, having high levels of social and psychological well-being in the past month, and being free of mental illness, suicidal thoughts and substance dependence in the past year," said lead author Esme Fuller-Thomson. She is director of the Institute for Life Course and Aging at the University of Toronto.

"While the prevalence of complete mental health among childhood sexual abuse survivors is higher than we had expected, it is still substantially less than that found in the general population [77 percent]," Fuller-Thomson said in a university news release.

Survivors who'd been depressed at any point in their life were significantly less likely to have complete mental health, a finding that highlights the importance of mental health treatment for these patients, according to the authors.

"Having a confidante was found to be the second-strongest single predictor of complete mental health, increasing the odds of past-year complete mental health nearly sevenfold," said co-author Deborah Goodman, director of the Child Welfare Institute, Children's Aid Society of Toronto. "Given the importance of family and social support systems, brief interventions to address trauma post-experience and bolster social and familial support are also called for," Goodman said.

Also, childhood sexual abuse survivors who had chronic pain were half as likely to have complete mental health as those without chronic pain.

"By expanding our research focus from the devastating consequences of childhood sexual abuse to factors correlated with well-being in adulthood, we may be able to help design more effective interventions for those affected to not only survive, but thrive," Fuller-Thomson said. The study was published Nov. 19 online in the journal Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology.

## **More information**

Survivors of sexual abuse can find more at the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#).

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