

**INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: AN INVESTIGATION
OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON THE FEMALE VICTIM,
TREATMENT MODALITIES, AND SOCIETAL ATTITUDES**

SHEILA HOLMES

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An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sheila Holmes
May, 1986

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was two-fold. One was to examine the literature concerning the psychological impact of intrafamilial child sexual abuse on females and the different treatment modalities available for the victims and their families. The second was to examine societal attitudes toward female victims of child sexual abuse through an original research study constructed by the author.

The subjects were eighty undergraduate students in upper and lower division psychology courses. Volunteers read a story about an applicant for a day care position who was a victim of child sexual abuse. The applicant possessed both positive and negative attributes. All subjects read the story/questionnaire and ranked their answers on a Likert type scale.

Results were analyzed by comparing means, frequency of responses, and percentage scores. A significant difference was found between the persons who would hire or not hire the applicant based upon the factor of sexual abuse.

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A Thesis

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Master of Arts

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May, 1986

To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Sheila Holmes entitled "Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse: An Investigation of the Psychological Impact on the Female Victim, Treatment Modalities, and Societal Attitudes." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.


Major Professor

We have read this Thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Child sexual abuse has become a major focus of attention within the past few years, as reflected by the proliferation of professional literature and the rising incidence rate as reported. Statistics indicate that one in four girls are sexually exploited by age eighteen. However, the most recent unpublished research conducted at UCLA by Dr. Gail Wyatt suggests that the incidence of female child sexual abuse may be one in two (Wyatt, 1985).

These statistical findings are staggering and suggest a need for greater understanding of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse by clinicians to help them be prepared to treat victims and their families. Along with the need for understanding and treatment is the need to have universal definitions on what constitutes sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse as defined by Kempe (1978) consists of:

The involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of families. (p. 43)

Benward and Densen-Gerber (1975) defined incest as "sexual contact with a person who would be considered an ineligible partner because of his blood and/or social ties to the subject and her family" (p. 326). For the purpose of this

paper, the author has chosen the following definition of intrafamilial child sexual abuse: "Exposure of a child to sexual stimulation inappropriate for the child's age, level of psychosocial development, and role in the family" (Brant & Tisza, 1977, p. 80). The sexual activity may range from exhibitionism to intercourse (Sgroi, 1982).

The purpose of this research is two-fold. One is to examine the literature concerning the psychological impact of intrafamilial child sexual abuse of females and to discuss the different treatment modalities available for the victims and their families. The next portion of the paper will include an original research study examining the societal attitudes to female victims of child sexual abuse.

Literature Review on the Psychological Impact

The psychological impact of intrafamilial sexual abuse on female children can be devastating. One reason is because they are involved in a sexual activity with a family member which is considered taboo in most cultures. Another reason is because they are prematurely introduced to a sexual experience when they are not developmentally ready for such an experience.

The psychological impact may be exacerbated as the young girl approaches adolescence and makes the developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. Anderson (1981) found that:

Many children who have been sexually abused over a

period of time in their earlier years are extremely vulnerable to feelings of guilt, depression, and unworthiness which are exacerbated once they reach adolescence and have to come to grips with their own sexual development and urges. (p. 159)

One of the primary tasks of adolescence is to develop identity. Lubell and Soong (1982) report that this growth is interrupted in the sexually abused adolescent female. Because she has been sexually abused, she feels different from her peers. Since she doesn't feel accepted by family or friends, it is impossible for her to maintain a sense of self-esteem. Thus, the abuse affects every aspect of her life.

Other psychological problems may not present themselves until several years after the sexually traumatic events. They may occur during adolescence or in the female's adult life. Collins et al. (1982) found that the psychological scarring could appear in the form of frigidity, depression, uncontrolled violence and rage, and other anti-social behaviors. Similar findings have been reported by Sidney and Brooks (1984) and Summit (1983).

Many researchers have found the prevailing feelings of anger and betrayal experienced by the adolescent female and adults who were abused. Knittle and Tuana (1980) found these feelings to be intense and usually unexpressed because the sexual abuse was by someone the victims loved and looked to for guidance. Angry feelings also are directed

toward herself because the victim somehow feels responsible for the sexual contact.

Several documented studies indicate that the anger turns inward causing the victim to feel self-hate, self-revulsion, and low self-worth (Slager-Jorne, 1978; Summit, 1983; Knittle & Tuana, 1980). These feelings often are expressed in self-punishing behaviors. Giarretto (1982) reported that many adolescents referred to the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program disclose participating in various forms of self-punishing behavior which included truancy, heavy drug use, and promiscuity.

A study conducted by de Young (1982) further substantiates Giarretto's report. Over half of her clinical sample (57.7%) reported self-injurious behavior as youngsters. These behaviors ranged in type from cutting and slashing, bruising, scratching, and burning, to deliberate attempts to break bones.

Other researchers (Sgroi, 1982; Janas, 1983; Courtois & Watts, 1982) have found that the female victim of child sexual abuse suffers from a poor self-image. The poor self-image may be partially attributed to the perception of the child and society that the victim has been somehow damaged by the sexual experience. Sgroi labels this attitude the "damaged goods syndrome." This attitude has a negative impact upon the person's self-image because of the perception of being treated differently by others. The present study will include reactions of others to a victim of child sexual

abuse in an attempt to determine if the abuse is considered a negative personal attribute of the victim.

Other problem areas of the sexual abuse victim include poor social skills, faulty relationships with others, and sexual problems. Many victims are plagued by multiple phobic or psychosomatic problems often resulting in serious dysfunction or disability. The female victims of child sexual abuse often have difficulty reaching emotional self-sufficiency and independence. In addition, Janas (1983) predicts "they (the victims) are likely to turn into child sex abusers or marry spouses who are likely to abuse them or their children" (p. 75). In view of the negative consequences of incest in the lives of the victims, it is important for the clinician to be well informed of the different treatment modalities available for the victim and her family.

Review of the Literature on Treatment Modalities

The treatment of intrafamilial child sexual abuse has evolved over the past decade. Many programs are new and it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of them because of the short period of time they have been in existence. One of the longest existing programs is the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program developed by Henry Giarretto in San Jose, California. Giarretto's comprehensive treatment program incorporates a humanistic approach to enable self-awareness and self-management.

According to Giarretto (1982), individual treatment to the child, mother, and father must occur before family

therapy becomes productive. The treatment procedure is usually applied in the following order: individual counseling; father-daughter counseling; marital counseling; family counseling; and group counseling. The procedure is tailored to meet the needs in each individual case. Of the 4,000 children treated in this program, about 90% have been returned to their families. The recidivism rate in the families who have completed the program remains less than 1%.

Sgroi (1982) approaches the treatment of child sexual abuse in a manner similar to that of Giarretto. The Sexual Trauma Treatment Program beginning in 1977 formulated a multiple-impact approach to the intervention and treatment of the incestuous family. The primary objectives of the program were to "(1) protect the child; (2) stop the sexually abusive behavior; (3) minimize and treat the sexual trauma; and (4) stabilize the family" (p. 81). The treatment modalities employed in this program are individual, group, marital, family, and art therapy. Sgroi notes that in many cases family therapy is not possible because the parents refuse to accept responsibility for the sexual abuse of the child. In such cases, individual, group, and art therapy are more beneficial. Some of the issues addressed in therapy include guilt, fear, believability, anger, trust, and self-esteem. Another issue is to assist the victim on responding to others who may view them negatively.

Other researchers who concur with the multiple treatment

modalities employed by Giarretto and Sgroi included Deaton and Sandlin (1980) and Dixen and Jenkins (1981). Knittle and Tuana (1980) found group therapy to be more effective in addressing the needs of the victim than individual or family therapies. Lubell and Soong (1982), Forward and Buck (1978), and Meiselman (1978) also recommend group therapy to be the treatment of choice. Further research is needed in order to more fully assess the existing treatment modalities and to develop more treatment programs for the victims of child sexual abuse.

Present Study

The present research study addresses societal attitudes to female victims of child sexual abuse. No known studies have been conducted in this area at this writing. The author postulates that this unexplored area is critical because it involves the reactions of others to the victim which in turn affect the victim's perception of herself. If others view the victim in a negative manner, the victim may internalize the negative perceptions. It is, therefore, therapeutically beneficial for clinicians to be aware of societal attitudes in order to treat the client more effectively and to educate the public.

For the purpose of this study, it is hypothesized that:

1. Having experienced sexual abuse is viewed by respondents as a negative personal attribute.
2. This negative attribution relates to negative evaluations of the person as a desirable day care worker.

CHAPTER 2

Method

The Subjects

The sample consisted of 23 male and 57 female undergraduate students attending Austin Peay State University during the summer quarter of 1985. All subjects were volunteers. The subjects were obtained from upper and lower division psychology courses. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18-49 with the mean age of 26.

Description of the Instrument

The instrument used in the study was an original story/questionnaire constructed by the author. The story was a description of a twenty-four year old Caucasian female who was sexually abused as a child. The person in the story was applying for the position of a day care worker.

Positive and negative variables were drawn from the story and included in the questionnaire portion. The subjects were asked to rate the importance of the variables on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being not important to 7 being very important to their perception of her being a good candidate for the job. The only variable to bear significance in this study was that of the applicant's having been sexually abused as a child. The purpose for treating variables in this manner was to determine if this factor weighted in the decision-making process of the subjects.

Other questions in the study included whether or not

the female was a good candidate and whether or not the respondent would hire her. In addition to answering the questions and rating variables, the subjects were asked to state their age, gender, and academic classification.

Administration and Scoring

The questionnaire was administered to 5 different undergraduate psychology classes over a period of 3 days. The first 10 minutes of 3 classes and the last 10 minutes of 2 classes were used to fill out the consent form and answer the questionnaire. Confidentiality was maintained by asking the subjects to read the consent form and sign it if they were willing to participate and by suggesting that they not write their names on the questionnaire form. Subjects could refuse to participate at any time without penalty.

As to who would hire or not hire, a percentage score was obtained. The other questions, based upon a Likert type scale, were analyzed using means and frequency of responses at extreme ends of the scale.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Results show that 63.75% of the subjects would hire the applicant and 36.25% would not hire her. Of the 23 male subjects, 69.57% would hire her; and of the 57 female subjects, 57.89% responded that they would hire her. The difference between male and female acceptance is small but noticeable (see Table 1).

A comparison of mean ratings for variables influencing the subject's decision to hire shows that excellent references ($\bar{x}=7.8$), sincere desire ($\bar{x}=6.5$), favorable impression ($\bar{x}=5.7$), and high G.P.A. ($\bar{x}=4.9$) were considered important in that order (see Table 2).

Negative variables were ranked in the following order of importance by those who decided to hire the applicant: no experience ($\bar{x}=4.5$), drug experimenting ($\bar{x}=4.1$), sexual abuse ($\bar{x}=3.1$), having affairs ($\bar{x}=2.5$), and being divorced ($\bar{x}=2.1$) (see Table 2).

A comparison of mean ratings for variables influencing the subject's decision not to hire the applicant shows that sincere desire ($\bar{x}=6.1$), excellent references ($\bar{x}=5.4$), favorable impression ($\bar{x}=5.3$), and high G.P.A. ($\bar{x}=4.7$) were considered important in that sequence (see Table 3).

Negative attribute variable means ranked in the following order from highest to lowest by respondents who decided not to hire: drug experimenting ($\bar{x}=5.8$), sexual abuse ($\bar{x}=5.4$),

no experience ($\bar{x}=4.5$), having affairs ($\bar{x}=3.3$), and being divorced ($\bar{x}=3.1$) (see Table 3).

The majority of respondents who would hire the candidate rated sexual abuse as a neutral variable ($\bar{x}=3.1$). Subjects who elected not to hire viewed the sexual abuse issue as more important in their decision making process ($\bar{x}=5.4$). The frequency of responses on the sexual abuse factor according to the hire and not hire variable are represented in Figure 1.

Differences between male and female respondents who decided to hire was minimal on the sexual abuse factor. Both genders viewed sexual abuse as a neutral variable (male, $\bar{x}=3.3$; female, $\bar{x}=3.2$) (see Figure 2).

Male subjects who elected not to hire viewed sexual abuse as an important variable in their decision making process ($\bar{x}=6.3$). Female subjects also viewed sexual abuse as important, but not as important as the male subjects ($\bar{x}=4.9$) (see Figure 3).

The majority of subjects who elected to hire rated drug experimentation as a neutral variable ($\bar{x}=3.5$). Respondents who decided not to hire viewed drug experimentation as more important ($\bar{x}=5.8$). Differences between the two groups can be seen in Figure 4.

Female respondents who would hire considered the drug experimentation factor as neutral ($\bar{x}=3.8$), while males viewed it as slightly more important ($\bar{x}=4.6$) (see Figure 5).

Both males and females who decided not to hire rated drug experimentation as an important variable in their decision making process (males, $\bar{x}=6.4$; females, $\bar{x}=5.6$) (see Figure 6).

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the majority of respondents would hire the applicant and not view sexual abuse as an important factor. However, the sexual abuse factor was viewed as a negative personal attribute by the respondents who would not hire the candidate for the day care worker position, thus supporting the hypothesis that having experienced sexual abuse is viewed as a negative personal attribute which relates to negative evaluations of the person as a desirable employee.

A gender difference was detected in the category of persons who viewed sexual abuse as being important in deciding not to hire the candidate for the day care position. While females viewed sexual abuse to be an important variable, males tended to view sexual abuse as a very important variable.

The author chose to analyze the drug experimentation variable in the same manner as the sexual abuse variable. Respondents who would hire the candidate for the day care position viewed drug experimentation and sexual abuse as neutral variables. The importance of drug experimentation and sexual abuse were rated almost identically as variables as why not to hire the applicant.

The gender difference again was detected in the category of persons who viewed drug experimentation as being important in deciding not to hire the candidate for the day care

position. While females viewed drug experimentation as important, males tended to view drug experimentation as very important.

It is interesting to note the similarities between the respondents on the sexual abuse and drug experimentation variables because of the differences of the candidate having or not having control over the attributes. The candidate had no control over being sexually abused. It was not her choosing to be abused. The candidate did have control over experimenting with drugs. It was an activity in which she chose to participate. It is interesting that both attributes were important in making the decision to not hire the candidate regardless of her not having control over being abused yet having complete control over experimenting with drugs.

It is also important to note that sexual abuse ranked higher in making the decision not to hire than the applicant having no experience working with children. In the group who would hire, no experience ranked higher than sexual abuse. The group of respondents who would not hire placed more emphasis on the applicant being a victim of sexual abuse than having no experience and an almost identical emphasis on drug experimentation.

The results of the present study indicate that society's attitudes toward sexually abused victims may influence the manner in which they view and/or treat the abused person. As stated earlier in the paper, such an attitude may affect

the victim's self-perception. The verification of negative societal attitudes toward the victims would thus bear clinical importance concerning treatment of the victims and educating the public. Other studies are needed in the area of examining societal attitudes toward sexually abused victims to further prove or disprove the results of the present study and to investigate gender differences which may exist.

CHAPTER 5

Summary

The purpose of this research was two-fold. One was to examine the literature concerning the psychological impact of intrafamilial child sexual abuse on females and to discuss the different treatment modalities available for the victims and their families. The next portion of the paper included an original research study examining the societal attitudes to female victims of child sexual abuse.

The research examined indicated several negative effects that child sexual abuse inflicts on female victims. The negative effects include feelings of low self-esteem, guilt, anger, betrayal, and depression. Behavioral changes, ranging from withdrawal to destructive acting out, are also symptomatic of child sexual abuse. In addition to these dysfunctional feelings and behaviors are difficulties in social skills, relationships with others, and sexuality which may plague the victim throughout her life if the abuse is left untreated. Another effect of child sexual abuse may be a negative self-perception which may in part be due to the reaction of others to the victim which in turn affects the victim's perception of herself. The research study included in this paper dealt with the attitudes of others toward the victim.

Treatment of child sexual abuse is a relatively new

area in psychotherapy. The psychological impact of the abuse is addressed through several different treatment modalities which may include one or a combination of the following: individual, family, group, marital, art, or dyad therapy. Treatment of the victims of child sexual abuse also may include assisting the victims on responding to others who may view them differently by helping them to gain a higher level of self-esteem.

The present study examined societal attitudes to female victims of child sexual abuse. While the sexual abuse variable was not important in making the decision to hire the applicant, it was important in making the decision to not hire her. Being sexually abused ranked second only to drug experimentation for the respondents who would not hire the applicant. Gender differences were detected in this group as well.

Other studies are recommended in this area of research to further the understanding of social perceptions of sexually abused females. Such research will be beneficial in educating the public and treating the victims of child sexual abuse.

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TABLES

Table 1

Percentages of Subjects Who Would Hire and Who Would Not Hire by Gender

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Hire/Not Hire</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Male	Hire	69.57%
Female	Hire	57.89%
Male	Not Hire	30.43%
Female	Not Hire	42.11%
Total	Hire	63.75%
Total	Not Hire	36.25%

Note. N=80; Male, N=23; Female, N=57.

Table 2

Comparison of Means on Each of the Variables by Subjects
Who Would Hire

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Excellent References	7.8
Sincere Desire	6.5
Favorable Impression	5.7
High G.P.A.	4.9
No Experience	4.5
Drug Experimentation	4.1
Sexual Abuse	3.1
Affairs	2.5
Divorced	2.1

Table 3

Comparison of Means on Each of the Variables by Subjects
Who Would Not Hire

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Sincere Desire	6.1
Excellent References	5.4
Favorable Impression	5.3
High G.P.A.	4.7
Drug Experimentation	5.8
Sexual Abuse	5.4
No Experience	4.5
Affairs	3.3
Divorced	3.1

FIGURES

FIGURE 1
Frequency of Responses on the Sexual Abuse Factor
According to the Hire and Not Hire Variable

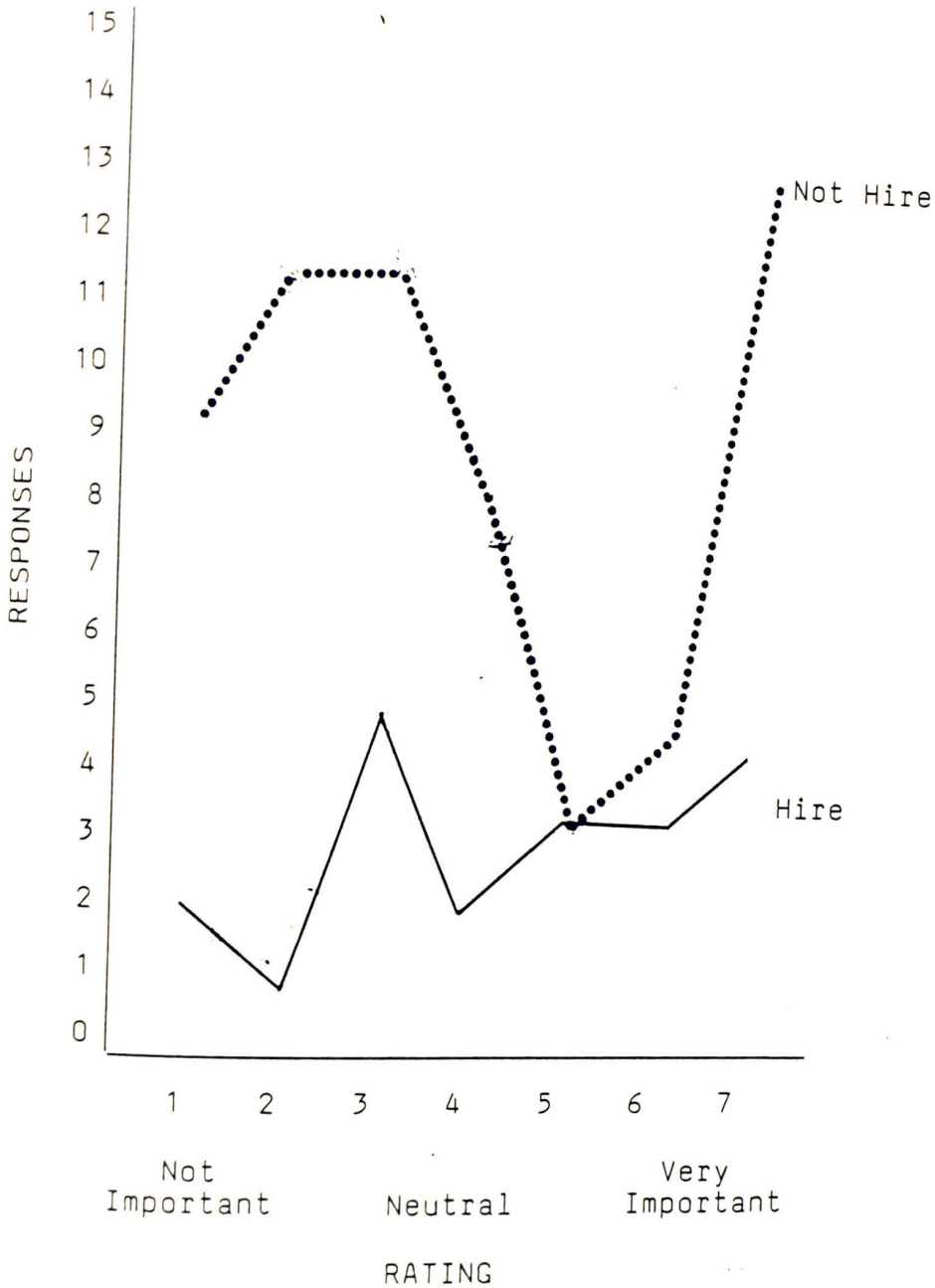


FIGURE 2

Frequency of Responses on the Sexual Abuse Factor
by Those Who Would Hire by Gender

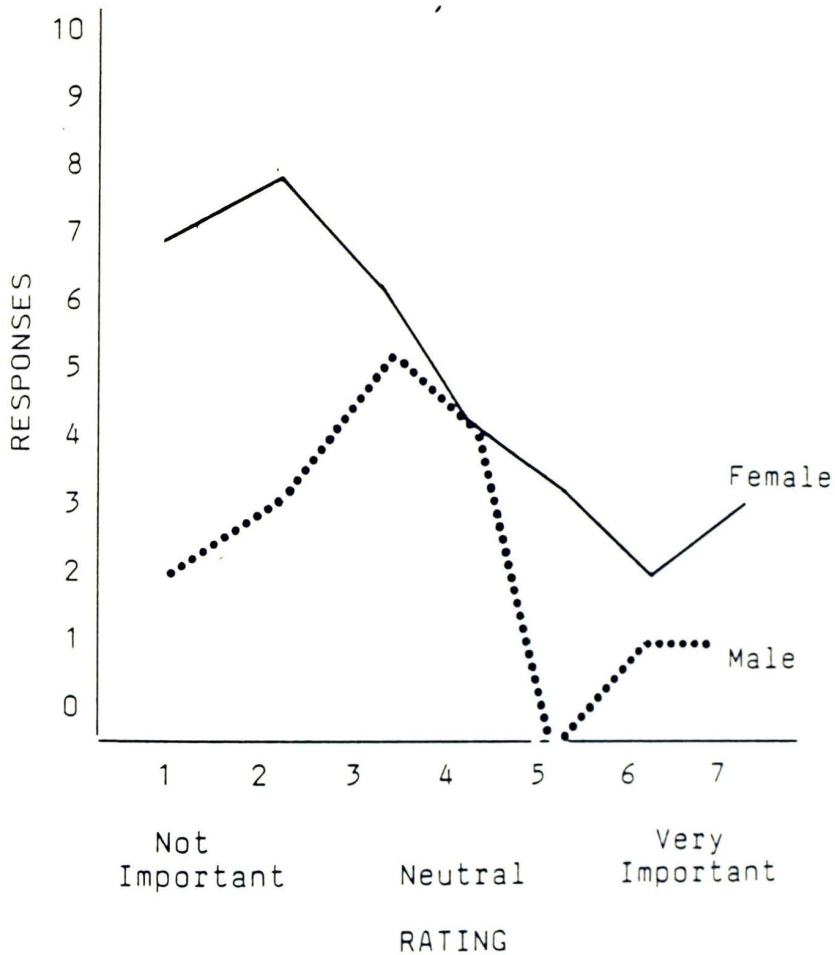


FIGURE 3

Frequency of Responses on the Sexual Abuse Factor
by Those Who Would Not Hire by Gender

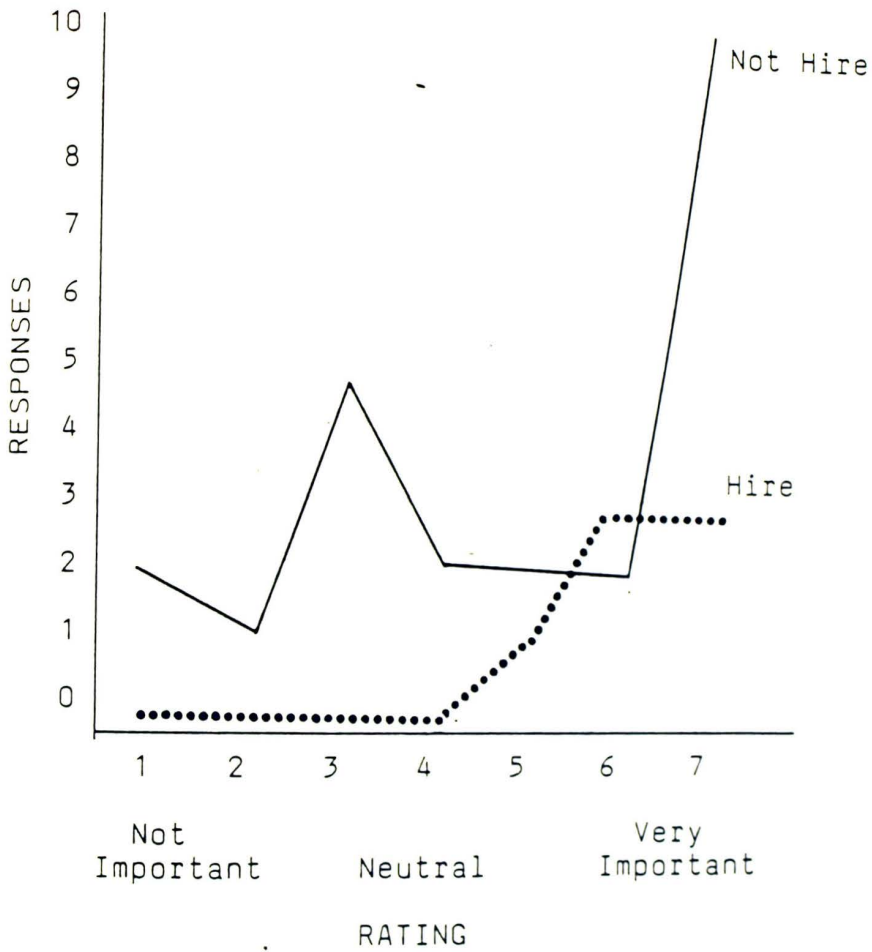


FIGURE 4

Frequency of Responses on the Drug Experimenting Factor
According to the Hire and Not Hire Variable

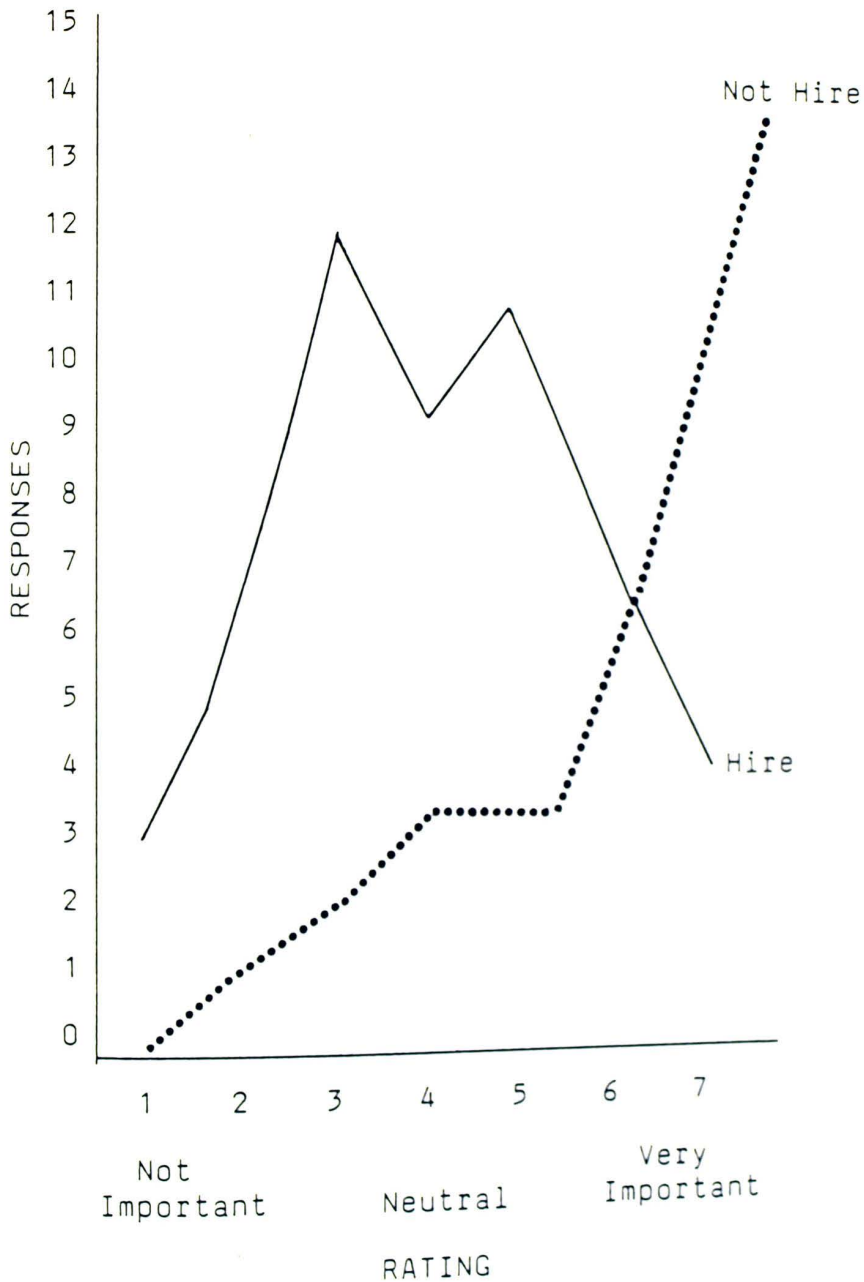


FIGURE 5

Frequency of Responses on the Drug Experimenting Factor
by Those Who Would Hire by Gender

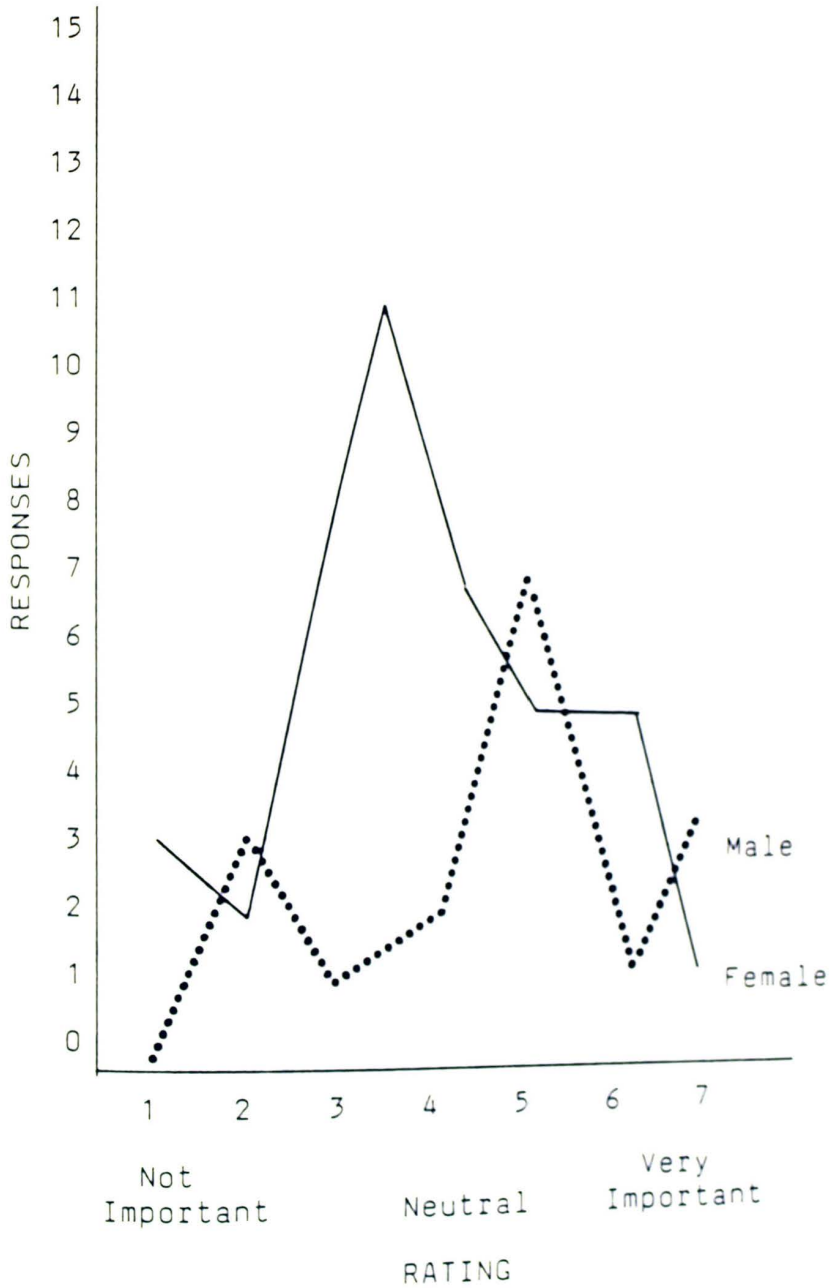
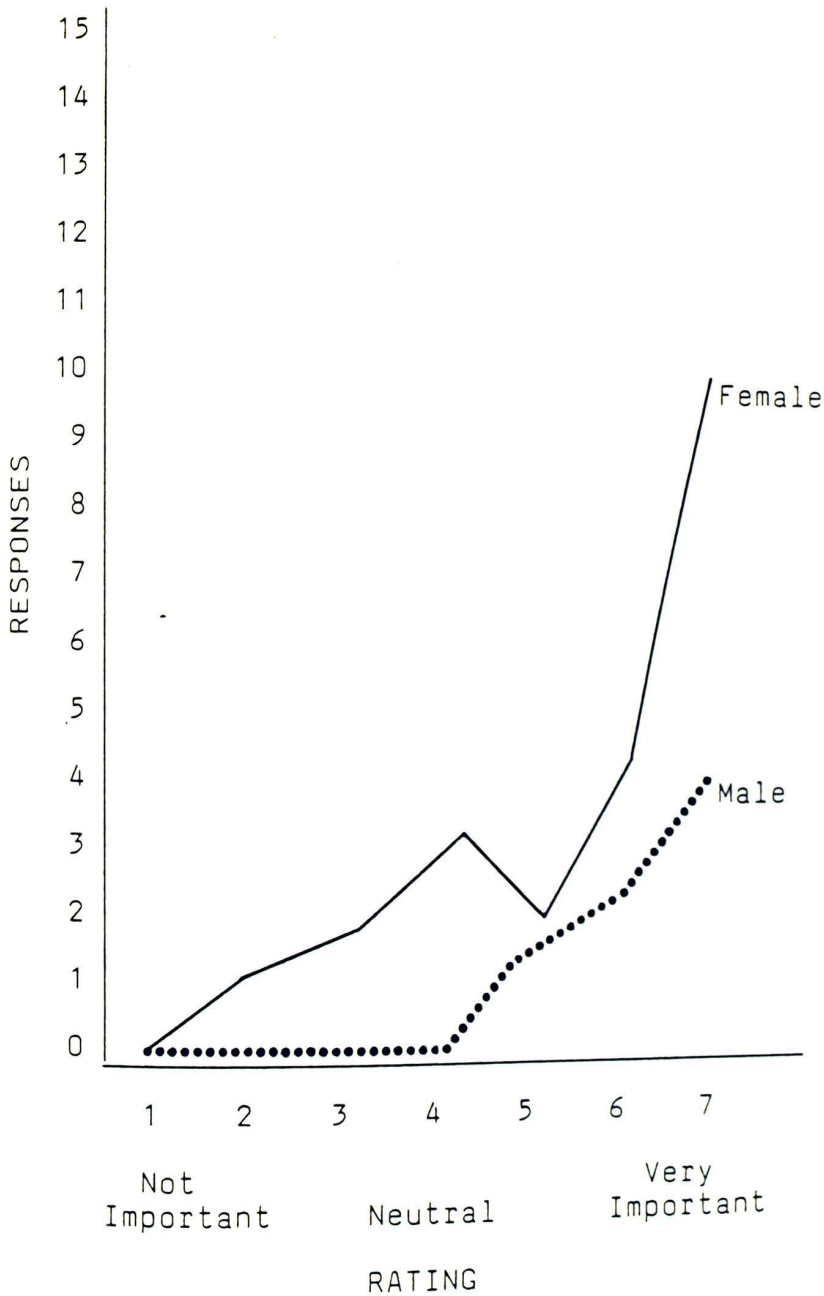


FIGURE 6

Frequency of Responses on the Drug Experimenting Factor
by Those Who Would Not Hire by Gender



APPENDIX

The purpose of this investigation is to study the attitudes of the community concerning appropriate candidates for a Day Care job. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified or linked to your responses. Your name will appear on this form only. It will not be on your response sheet.

The potential hazards which may occur from participation in this research are at a minimum. You may experience an emotional response but it should not be harmful in any way. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

The scope of this project will be explained to you upon completion. Also the results of this study will be available upon request.

Thank you for your cooperation

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed either orally or in writing or both, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries I may have regarding the procedures. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

SIGNATURE

DATE

The following information is a brief description of a person applying for the position of a Day Care worker. This person will be in charge of children ages 2-4 for 40 hours/week. Your task as a board member of the Day Care Center is to read over this person's description and make the decision to hire or not hire her.

After you finish reading the description, please answer the questions that follow. Please do not write your name on this form in order to insure anonymity.

APPLICANT DESCRIPTION

Jill is a twenty-four year old Caucasian female. She has a bachelors degree in sociology from an accredited school in the mid-west. While in school, Jill maintained a grade point average of 3.8 and was active in her sorority. She has no work experience with children but her references were excellent and she made a favorable impression during the first interview.

Jill is the second child in a family of three and is the only daughter. Her father died in an automobile accident when she was four years old. When she turned seven, her mother remarried. This marriage lasted for six years. Jill was sexually abused by her step-father from the age of eight until she was thirteen.

Jill married at age sixteen and divorced at age eighteen. During the two year gap before she began college, Jill had several affairs and began to experiment with drugs. She also gained a considerable amount of weight.

At the age of twenty, Jill began therapy. She lost weight and gave up her newly acquired vices. She now feels much better about herself and is ready to begin her career. She loves children and really wants to work with them.

QUESTIONS

Is Jill a good candidate for the position?
Would you hire Jill?

CIRCLE ONE

Yes	No
Yes	No

CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER

If you would hire Jill it would be because:

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. She made a favorable impression. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. Her references were excellent. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. She had a high G.P.A. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. Of her sincere desire to work with kids. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

If you would not hire Jill it would be because:

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. She has no experience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. She was sexually abused. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. She is divorced. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. She has experimented with drugs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. She had affairs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

AGE:

GENDER: M F

CLASSIFICATION: FR SO JR SR