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Culture

Study Refutes Finding That Boys Benefit from Sex With Adults

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(CNSNews.com) - Three-and-a-half years after the American Psychological Association (APA) published a study concluding that sex between adults and minors is not necessarily abusive and may even be a positive experience for the children, a new study attempts to debunk that notion.

The 1998 study contained "fundamental flaws that are an embarrassment to science," charged the authors of the new study, whose work has also been published in the APA's Psychological Bulletin.

"Some of the paper's most glaring misrepresentations led to the conclusions most celebrated by pedophiles," said co-author Joyanna Silberg, Ph.D., a child psychologist at Sheppard Pratt Hospital in Baltimore, Md. In fact, the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) did praise the 1998 study.

"From a public health standpoint it is very dangerous, as pedophile websites and newsletters are using these erroneous claims to justify abusing children," said Silberg's colleague and co-author, Stephanie Dallam. According to Dallam, an Arizona elementary school teacher who was convicted of abusing young boys used the 1998 study to argue for a reduced sentence.

"They had absolutely no data to support ... an assertion" that "consenting" boys aren't harmed by sex with adults, said Silberg. The 1998 "meta-analysis" (a compilation of 59 independent studies) concluded that college students who had been sexually abused as children were only "slightly less well adjusted" than their peers. The study also found that women were more likely than men to remember childhood sexual contact negatively: 72 percent of women recalled it negatively, compared to less than half of men. According to the study, a minority of men and women said they suffered long-term

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negative effects.

"In short," wrote authors Bruce Rind, Phillip Tromovitch and Robert Bauserman, "the self-reported effects data do not support the assumption of wide-scale psychological harm from CSA (child sexual abuse)."

The authors went on to recommend that psychologists no longer label a "willing encounter with positive reactions" as child abuse and instead call it simply "adult-child sex."

When it first debuted, the 1998 study drew a firestorm of criticism from conservative groups and members of Congress, like House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Texas), Rep. Matt Salmon (R-Ariz.) and Rep. David Weldon (R-Fla.). On July 12, 1999, the House actually voted 355-0 to condemn the article.

After initially calling the 1998 report "a good study," APA Chief Executive Officer Raymond D. Fowler was forced to back-peddle when critics attacked the APA for publishing the report. Fowler subsequently labeled it "inflammatory" and "inconsistent" with APA's condemnation of child abuse.

Even one of the study's authors, Robert Bauserman, who works for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, no longer defends his report. He declined to comment on the new evidence refuting his findings, saying he's already spent a lot of time addressing criticisms of his study.

Silberg criticizes the methodology used in the 1998 study. She said none of the survey's participants were asked whether they had participated "willingly" in the sexual contact, including those who had been victims of assault or incest.

Silberg and her colleagues also criticize the first study for reporting that most men did not suffer negative effects from childhood sexual abuse. They "failed to note that the men's subjective perceptions did not correlate with their results on objective measures." For example, compared to their non-abused peers, more than twice as many abused men said they had used illegal drugs, three times as many had sought therapy for emotional problems and five times as many said they had attempted suicide.

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