

## **Abstract**

**Title** - The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Sexual Satisfaction through Sexual Shame and the Moderating Role of Self Forgiveness

**Program of Study** – M.S. Psychology (Industrial and Organizational/Developmental)

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**Mentor(s) and Mentor Email** - Dr. Fred Volk (fvolk@liberty.edu)

**Student name(s) and email(s)** – Turner Welborn (twelborn2@liberty.edu) and Abigail Wibbing (awibbing@liberty.edu)

**Abstract:** Childhood sexual abuse is associated with adverse effects that can extend to all stages of a victim's life. This study was conducted to determine if sexual satisfaction in the context of committed relationships is impacted by CSA experience, and to determine whether this impact is direct or is mediated by sexual shame. Self-forgiveness was also examined to ascertain what moderating effect it may have on the relationship between CSA, sexual shame, and sexual satisfaction. It was hypothesized that CSA would have both a direct and a mediated effect on sexual satisfaction and that self-forgiveness would act as a protective factor against the impact of CSA on sexual satisfaction. A regression analysis was conducted to determine significant relationships between the variables. Results found that CSA negatively impacts sexual satisfaction, but only through an indirect relationship mediated by sexual shame. Additionally, self-forgiveness was found to moderate the effect of CSA on sexual shame significantly enough to be protective of sexual satisfaction. These results have implications for future research and treatment development as they contain evidence that self-forgiveness could possibly act to mitigate the effects of CSA, not only in terms of personal outcomes such as sexual shame, but also interpersonal outcomes like sexual satisfaction.

**Christian worldview integration:** The introduction of sin into the world as outlined in Genesis 3 has been the catalyst for the many negative circumstances we face in today's society. Perhaps one of the most unfortunate is the occurrence of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). As Christians, we are instructed to love our neighbors (Mark 12:31), and this sentiment supplies the rationale for the current research design. We believe that one of the many ways we can love our neighbors who have been victims of CSA is through actively researching the resulting effects in order to not only better understand the impact on victims, and by extension victims themselves, but also to aid in the construction of treatments to help victims improve their outcomes. Keeping this in mind, we conducted the current research to examine the relationship that past experiences of CSA have with outcomes of sexual shame and sexual satisfaction for victims who are now involved in committed relationships as adults. We were also interested in the potential impact that self-forgiveness, which is an important component of forgiveness identified by psychological research, can have on these outcomes. The Bible stresses the importance of forgiveness, usually in the context of forgiving our Christian brothers and sisters (Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:14-15, Luke 17:3-4, etc.), or in the context of God's forgiveness towards us (Acts 3:19, Isaiah 1:18, Ephesians 1:7, etc.). While the Bible does not directly include the concept of forgiveness towards self, it is implied in Romans 8:1-12, which explains that there is no condemnation for us in Christ, as through Christ, we have been set free from sin. Since we are forgiven through Christ, we should not hold on to the guilt and condemnation we experience as a result of our failures, but rather we should "draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience ..." (Hebrews 10:22). In the context of the present study, we believed that this biblically implied ability of self-forgiveness to relieve the negative effects of sin would be reflected in our results. Ultimately, we found that CSA has a direct relationship with

sexual shame, and an indirect one with sexual satisfaction. We also found that self-forgiveness does appear to protect victims of CSA from sexual shame, and by extension, from a lack of sexual satisfaction in their relationships. Through these results, we wish to communicate the ramifications that a sin-driven event can provoke, and the hope that inwardly directed biblical forgiveness can influence positive change in the lives of victims. The potential impact of these results could be to support the future development and implementation of forgiveness-based treatments targeting the effects of CSA. If successful, such treatments could change the lives of countless victims for the better.