

*Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
University of Connecticut School of Medicine
Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
Yale University School of Medicine*

664 Prospect Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06105
Tel: (860) 236-8087, ext 108
Fax: (860) 586-7422

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Andrew W. Meisler, Ph.D.
Date: April 1, 2019
Re: Committee Bill No. 3, Section 19

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to provide a summary of facts and observations regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and its effects, pertinent to the proposal before Connecticut's legislature to extend the statute of limitations for personal injury filing which is currently set at 30 years past age 18.

I have worked with trauma survivors in several capacities for the past 28 years. I served as Director of a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) outpatient treatment program within the Department of Veterans Affairs, have conducted thousands (literally) of evaluations of individuals who have suffered trauma, and have treated trauma survivors – including those who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse – throughout my career. I have also received research grants, published, and presented widely on the topic of PTSD, and am familiar with the extensive body of research on childhood trauma and its psychiatric sequelae.

Although there are many points to be made, I will summarize and enumerate as follows:

1. Large scale studies have demonstrated that childhood sexual abuse is associated with a variety of mental disorders including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. In addition to diagnosable disorders, survivors of CSA are at increased risk for deeply rooted and persisting problems with shame, humiliation, self-esteem, trust, and interpersonal relations. The consequences and comorbidities of CSA are substantial, and affect social and vocational function throughout a survivor's lifetime.
2. Once PTSD (and other trauma- and stressor-related disorders) persist for a year or more – particularly without early intervention – the likelihood of the condition becoming chronic is significantly increased. Because childhood is a period of vulnerability and malleability, CSA causes damage during a critical developmental period and is thus more likely to become permanent.
3. For survivors who have been fairly successful at "burying" or living with their traumatic past, they remain more vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of future stressors. For example, survivors of CSA are more likely to develop PTSD later in life in

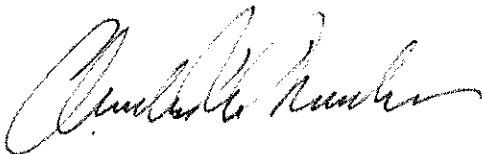
response to subsequent stressors or losses, and do not respond as well to treatment targeting later stress reactions when compared to individuals who were not victimized as children. Thus, even if not visible initially or later into adulthood, CSA has insidious effects that makes survivors more vulnerable to psychological problems throughout the lifespan.

3. Survivors of trauma typically attempt to avoid distressing thoughts, reminders, and discussions of the abuse; indeed, avoidance is one of the defining features of Posttraumatic stress conditions. Thus, CSA survivors often never disclose the abuse to others and do not seek treatment. Although survivors may pursue litigation for monetary compensation, the opportunity to seek redress through the courts can and does provide survivors with the incentive to break through fear and avoidance and, in doing so, confront their traumatic past and open the door to treatment that had previously been avoided.

4. The litigation process itself, though stressful and at times upsetting as memories are fueled and rekindled, can provide psychological healing for survivors through several different clinical mechanisms. In addition to providing the incentive and resources for treatment, litigation in and of itself can provide a means by which survivors transition from a feeling of powerless victim to that of active self-advocate.

In summary, childhood sexual abuse has severe emotional, social, and vocational impacts on survivors, and these effects often becomes chronic and lifelong. A statute of limitations on CSA and other childhood abuse or trauma claims is not consistent with the actual clinical impact and course of childhood trauma sequelae. Unfortunately for survivors, there is no "statute of limitations" on the suffering and impairment related to CSA.

I trust this brief statement is useful for consideration by the Judiciary Committee and State legislature. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any additional information or clarification.



Andrew W. Meisler, Ph.D.
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