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Identifying typologies of adverse experiences and psychosocial functioning for youth who sexually harm

Queensland Australia

ANZAPPL, Hobart, December 2025

Make it matter

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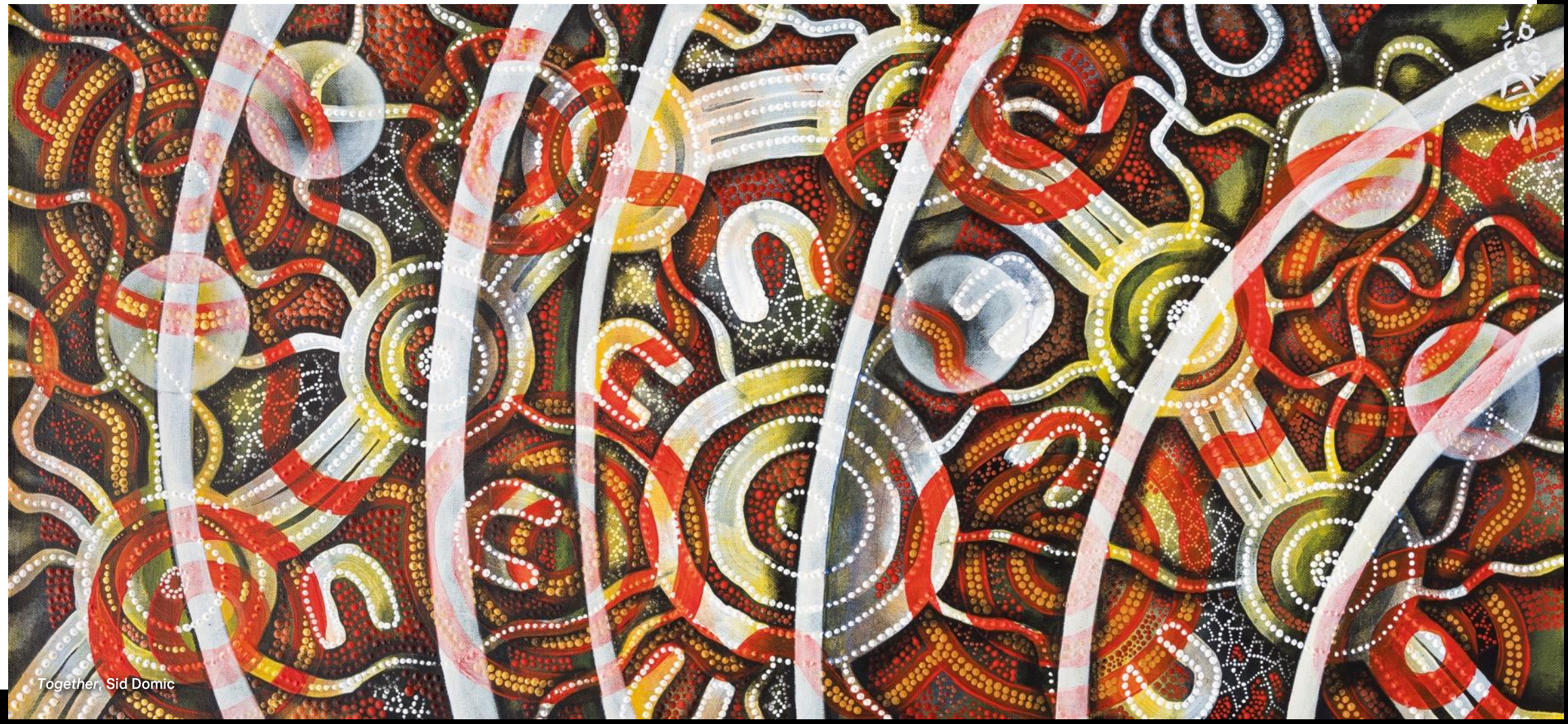
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Together, Sid Domic

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Disclaimer & Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with funding from the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse. The National Centre gratefully acknowledges funding from the Australian Government and other support it received, without which this work would not have been possible. We acknowledge the support of the Griffith Youth Forensic Service in facilitating access to the data.

The findings a views reported in this manuscript are those of the authors.

Please note that the results provided in this presentation are preliminary

No financial disclosures.

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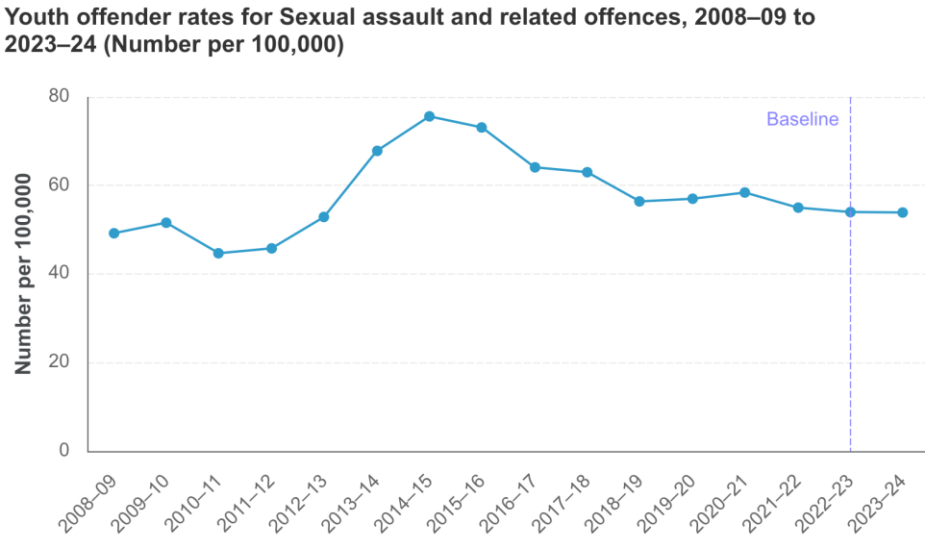
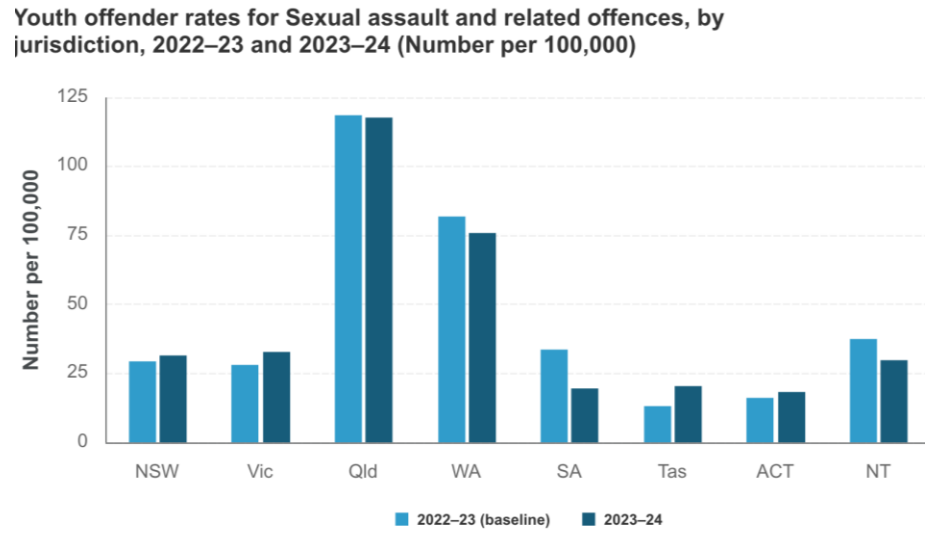
Harmful sexual behaviour

- Terminology
  - Problem sexual behaviour (>10 years)
  - Harmful sexual behaviour/sexually abusive behaviour (< 10 years)
- Young people (10-17 years) responsible for large proportion of sexual offences reported to police (14-20%)
- Youth who sexually harm not a homogenous group
- Identification of subgroups based on developmental pathways





Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Family, domestic and sexual violence.*

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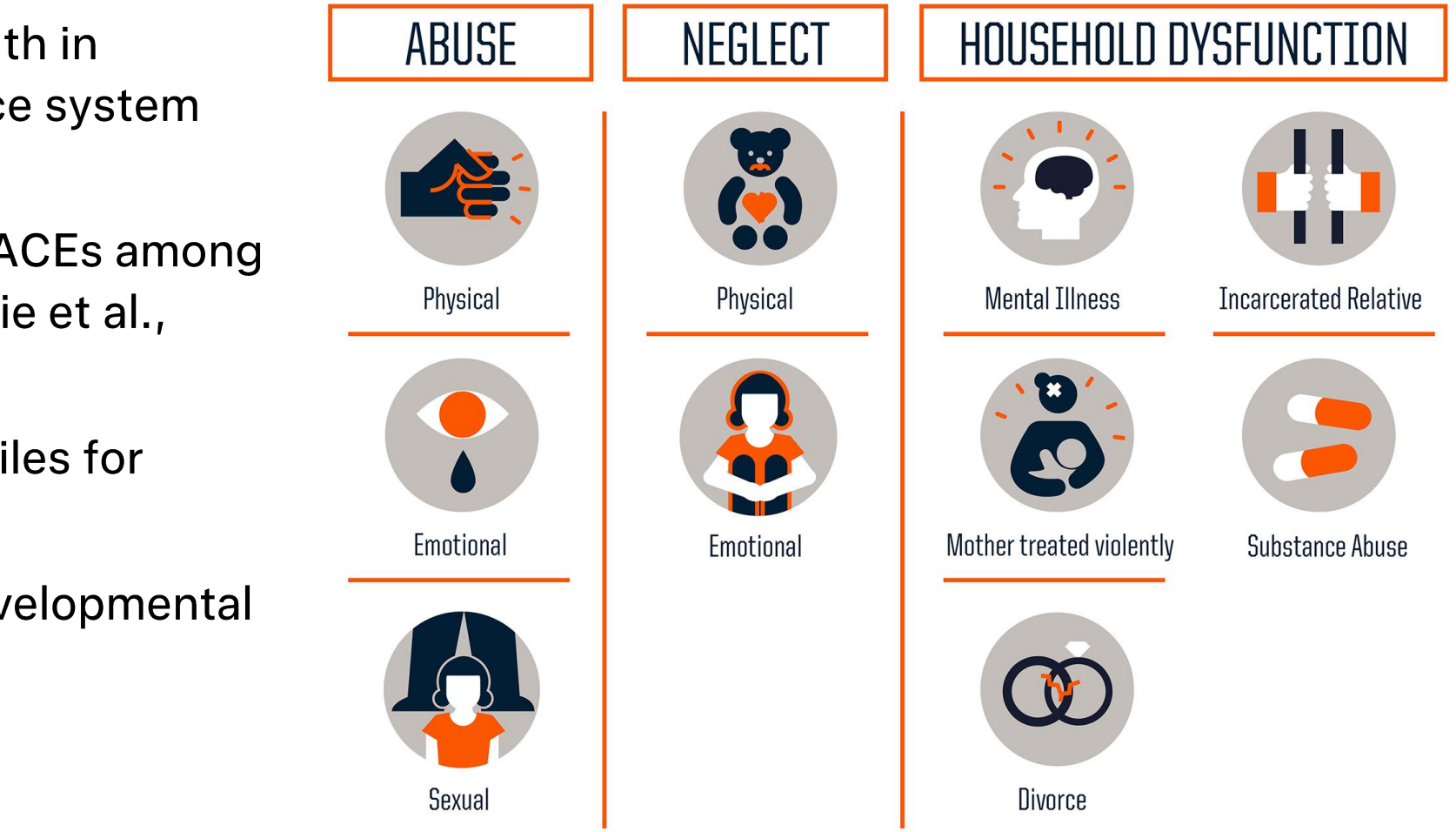
Adverse childhood experiences

- Elevated ACEs for youth in contact with the justice system (Malvaso et al., 2021)
- Higher prevalence of ACEs among youth with HSB (Ogilvie et al., 2022)
- Variability in ACE profiles for youth with HSB
- Expanding ACEs – developmental risk factors



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Typologies of youth with HSB

- Typologies based on:
    - Offence type (contact, non-contact)
    - Victim characteristics (child, peer, adult)
    - Offence setting (intra-/extra-familial)
    - Developmental characteristics (age of onset, disorders, traits)
- "Data driven" approaches to identifying typologies
- Distinct patterns of ACEs/developmental risk factors?

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Current study

- Research questions:
    1. What is the prevalence of developmental risk factors among youth adjudicated for sexual offences?
    2. Can youth with HSB be distinguished by different profiles of developmental risk factors?
    3. Do characteristics of HSB differ across profiles?
- Using Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to identify risk factor profiles

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Data source

- Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS)
- State-wide assessment and treatment service for youth who perpetrate sexual harm
- Field-based: community and custodial settings
- Individualised and collaborative treatment model
- Prioritising complex/high needs and risk youth people, and remote and First Nations communities
- Client case files

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Sample

- n = 386 male youth
- 64.2% First Nations
- Plead/found guilty of sexual offence before age 18 years
- Referred for assessment and treatment between 2001-2020
- Age range of 12 to 19 years at time of referral (m = 16.25; sd = 1.47)

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Risk factors

Individual

- Academic difficulties
- Aggressive behaviours
- Substance use
- Sexualised behaviours
- Inappropriate pornography use

Psychological health

- Suicide risk
- Mental illness (e.g., ADHD, CD, ASD, PTSD, Depression)

Social

- Antisocial peers
- Social difficulties
- Victim of bullying/bullying others

Family

- Poor parenting practices
- Caregiver instability
- Residential stress
- Caregiver substance use/mental illness/sexual victimisation
- Sexualised family environment
- Criminogenic family

Maltreatment history

- Exposure to domestic and family violence
- Physical/emotional/sexual abuse
- Neglect

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RESULTS

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Individual risks

Risk factor	Prevalence (%)
Academic difficulties	71.5
Aggressive behaviours	55.4
Substance use	54.7
Sexualised behaviours	33.4
Inappropriate pornography use	32.1

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Psychological health risks

Risk factor	Prevalence (%)
Suicide risk	30.1
ADHD	29.5
CD	11.9
ASD	10.9
PTSD	9.3
Depression	8.5

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Social risks

Risk factor	Prevalence (%)
Antisocial peers	50.5
Social difficulties	48.7
Victim of bullying	42.2
Bullying behaviours	31.3

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Family risks

Risk factor	Prevalence (%)
Poor parenting practices	75.1
Caregiver instability	71.0
Residential stress	51.6
Caregiver substance use	49.5
Sexualised family environment	33.9
Criminogenic family	33.4
Caregiver mental health problems	32.1
Caregiver sexual victimisation	10.4

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Maltreatment history

Maltreatment type	Prevalence (%)
Exposure to domestic violence	59.6
Physical abuse	47.4
Neglect	46.6
Emotional abuse	42.0
Sexual abuse	27.2

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LCA risk profiles

	High adversity	Limited risk	Antisocial	Socially excluded
n	123	87	73	103
% sample	31.9	22.5	18.9	26.7
% First Nations	43.9	13.8	70.0	20.4
ACEs m (sd)	16.5 (2.82)	3.9 (2.13)	9.3 (2.10)	11.3 (2.88)

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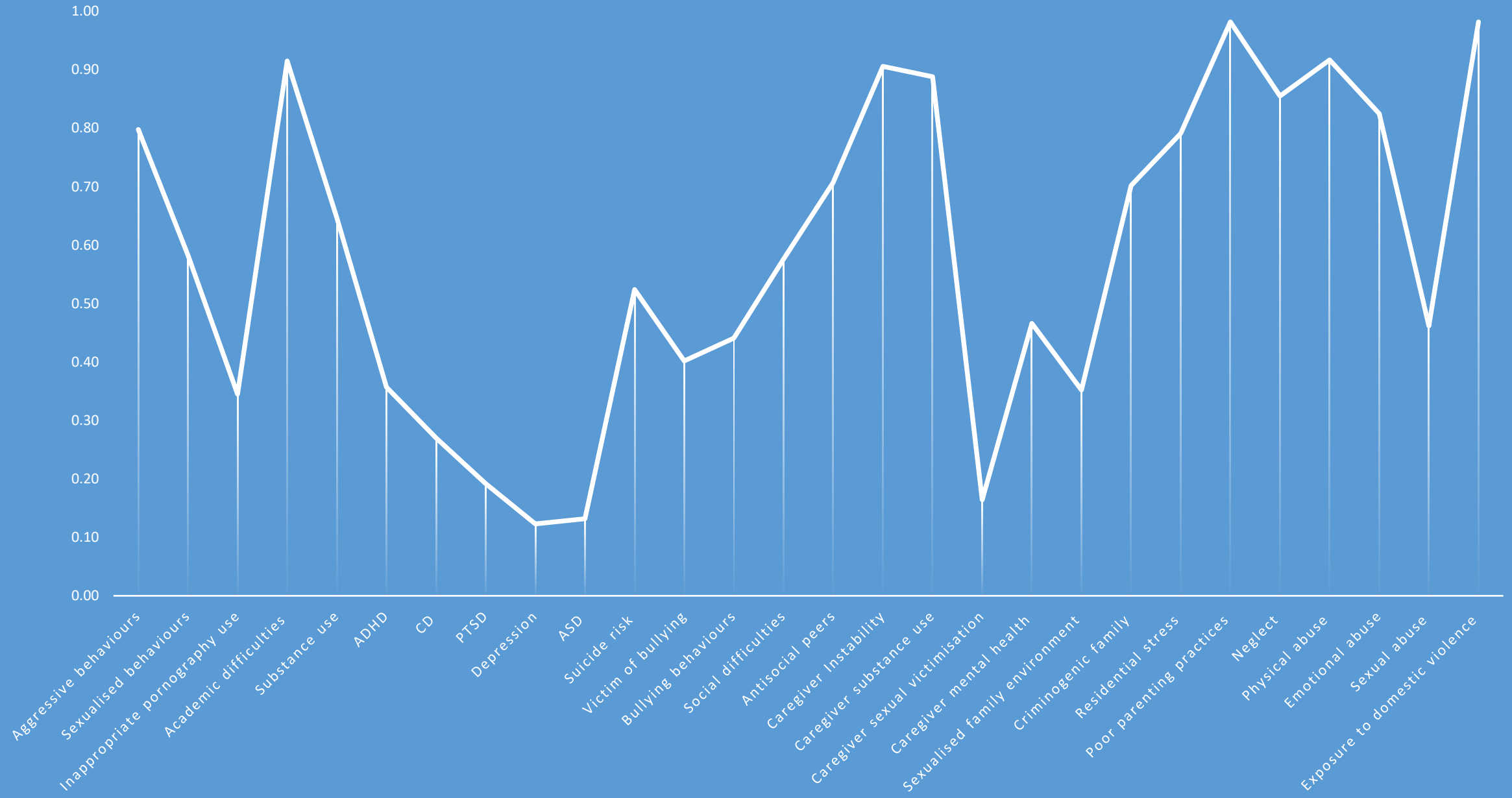
HIGH ADVERSITY N = 123



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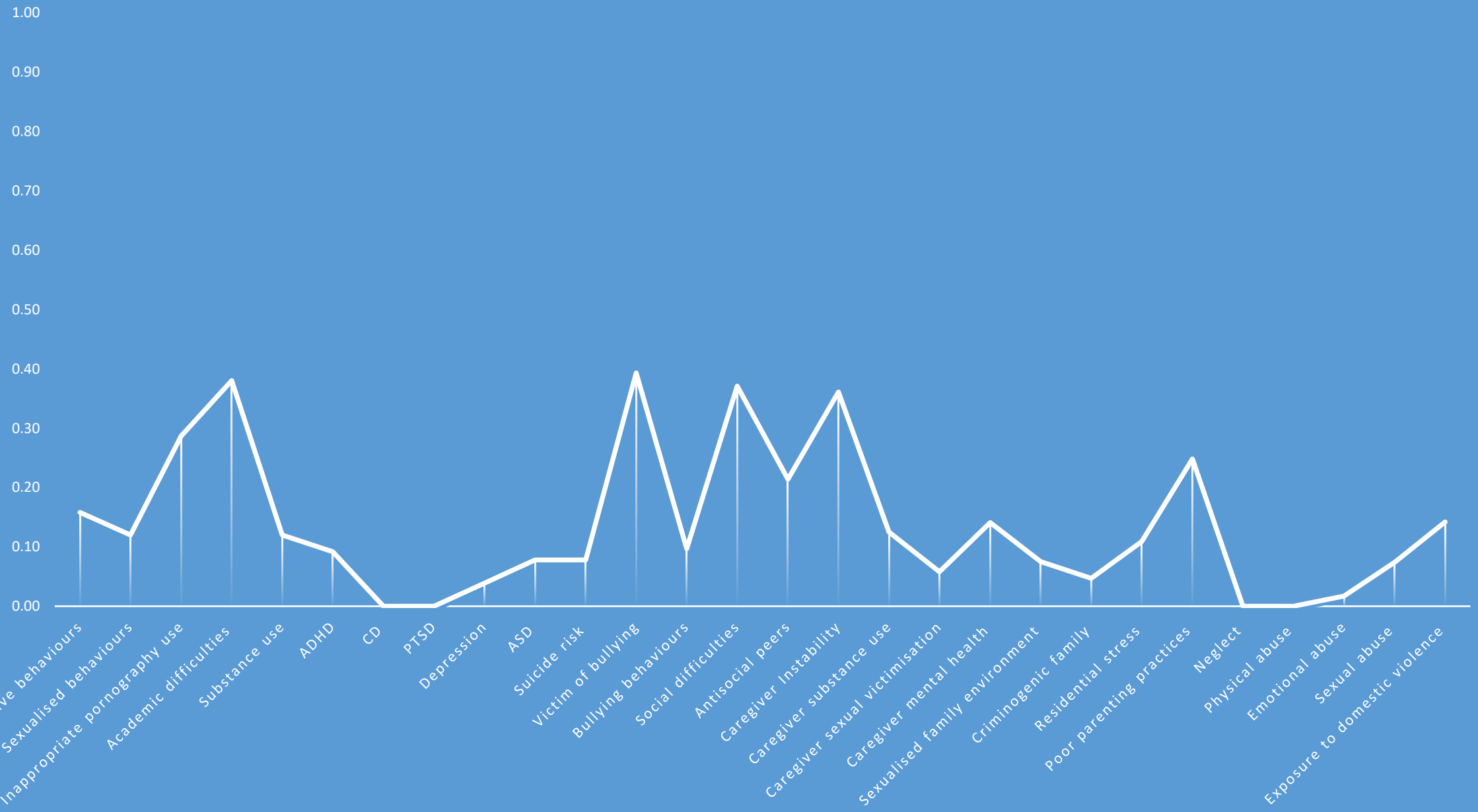
LIMITED RISK N = 87



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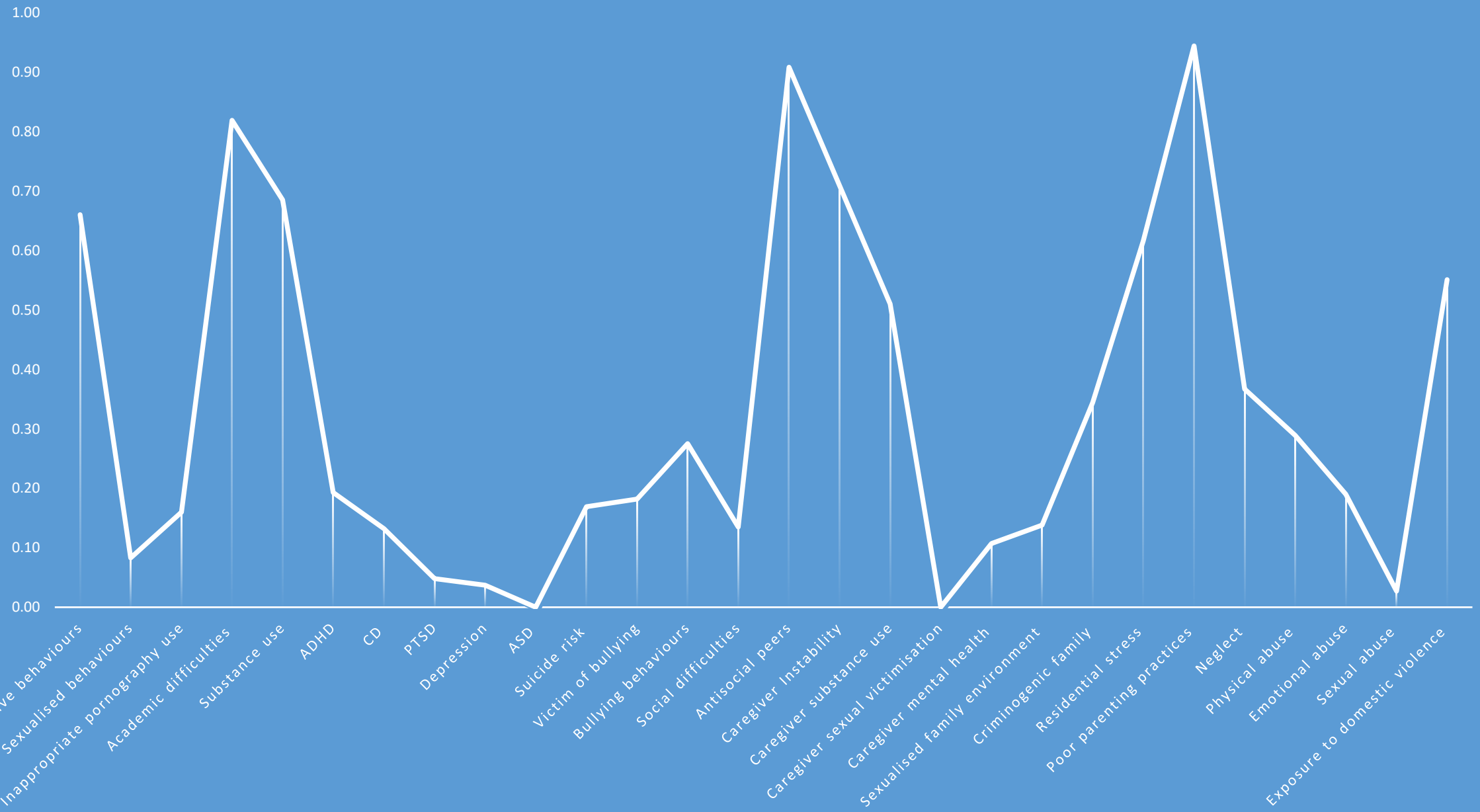
ANTISOCIAL N = 73



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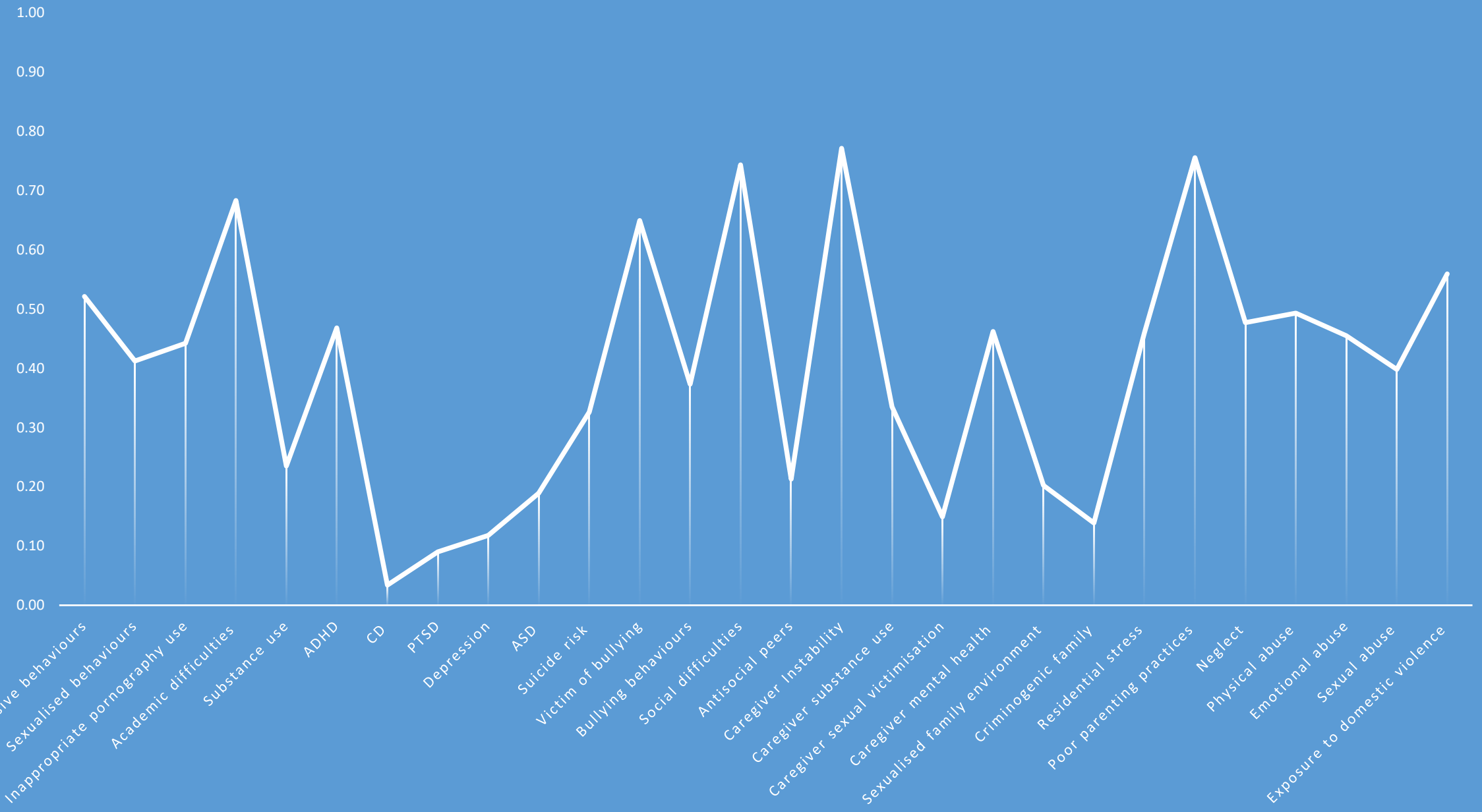
SOCIALLY EXCLUDED N = 103



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Risk profiles and offending characteristics

	High adversity	Limited risk	Antisocial	Socially excluded
Onset age m (sd)	13.78 (1.56)	14.17 (1.55)	14.36 (1.32)	13.79 (1.68)
% Co-offending	6.5	13.8	27.4	11.7
Offence setting				
% Domestic	71.5	78.8	57.5	77.7
% Institutional	6.6	5.9	2.7	7.8
%Public	21.1	15.3	39.7	14.6

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Risk profiles and victim characteristics

	High adversity	Limited risk	Antisocial	Socially excluded
Sex				
% Male	22.0	23.0	5.5	27.2
% Female	72.4	72.4	90.4	66.0
% Mixed	5.7	2.3	4.1	5.8
Age				
% Child < 16	73.2	95.3	55.6	93.1
% Youth/adult	24.4	4.7	40.3	4.9
% Mixed	2.4	0	4.2	1.9

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Summary of findings

- Typologies of developmental risk youth with HSB
    - High adversity
    - Limited risk
    - Antisocial
    - Socially excluded
- Shared and unique pathways to HSB
- Demographic, offence and victim differences

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Implications

- Using typologies to tailor responses (Fox and DeLisi, 2018)
    - Informing timing and nature of interventions
    - Insight into criminological risk/need
- Prevalence of risk highlights importance of early intervention
- Relevance for risk assessment
- **Limitations**
    - Temporal ordering
    - High-risk bias
    - Females with HSB

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