

What is the Relationship Between Childhood Maltreatment and Self-Constraint Among Adults?

Elizabeth Schandoney

California State University Fullerton, Department of Social Work



INTRODUCTION

- 674,000 reported cases of childhood maltreatment in a single year (Child Trends, 2019)
- Of 17,000 adult respondents,
 - 10.6% experienced emotional abuse
 - 28.3% experienced physical abuse
 - 20.7% experienced sexual abuse
 - 14.8% experienced emotional neglect
 - 9.9% experienced physical neglect (Middlebrooks & Audage, 2008)
- Childhood maltreatment has serious consequences for the individual and society: (Child Trends, 2019; Gelles & Pearlman, 2012; Shonkoff et al., 2012; Varese et al., 2012)
 - Increased chance of mental health problems, criminal justice involvement, substance use, reduced educational attainment, reduced economic participation, poorer health outcomes, and reduced life span
- In 2012, childhood maltreatment had direct and indirect costs of \$80 billion to the United States (Gelles & Pearlman, 2012)

PURPOSE

To contribute to the body of knowledge regarding how child abuse affects personal perceptions of independence and interdependence and inform clinical therapy treatments

HYPOTHESIS

Experiences of childhood maltreatment will cause differences in self-construal



LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework: Attachment Theory

- Attachment Theory: attachment to a figure, such as a parent or guardian, provides a base through which children explore the world, create meaning, and provide safety (Bretherton, 1992)
- 3 attachment styles: Secure, Insecure, Ambivalent
- Mediated by parent-child interaction, early experiences, genetics, temperament (Bretherton, 1992; Fresno et al., 2018; Levy et al., 2011; Sroufe, 2005)

Adult Survivors of Childhood Maltreatment

- Childhood maltreatment links to:
 - Poor mental health outcomes
 - Higher levels of incarceration
 - Reduced educational attainment
 - Shorter lifespan
 - Increased suicide attempts
 - High levels of PTSD
 - Higher rates of psychosis
 - High rates of self-harm and violent acts among military servicemen (Harford et al., 2014; MacManus et al., 2015; Raphael & Widom, 2011; Varese et al., 2012)



Self Construal

- Self construal is defined as the aggregation of thoughts, behaviors, and actions as they relate to individual and others (Cross et al., 2010)
- Self construal is made up of 2 subscales: Independent Self-Construal & Interdependent Self-Construal (Cross et al., 2010)

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Secondary data analysis of the MIDUS 2 and Biomarker Project
- MIDUS 2: Midlife in the United States (Ryff et al., 2019)
 - Longitudinal, cohort design
 - 5,900 participants
 - Computer-assisted telephone interviews, self-administered questionnaires, phone interviews, and mail surveys
 - MIDUS 2 Biomarker Project (Ryff et al., 2017)
 - 1,255 participants
 - 24 hour stay at a facility for in depth biopsychosocial assessment

SAMPLE

From the 1,255 participants of original sample the subsample consisted of those who participated in both MIDUS 2 and the Biomarker Project and answered all the questions in the relevant dependent, independent, and demographic items. This resulted in a sample of 1,042 participants.

VARIABLES

Independent Variable: Childhood Maltreatment

- Childhood Trauma Scale: 25 questions regarding childhood experiences of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect
- 7-point Likert Scale
- Ex: “parents wished I was never born”, “was hit badly enough to be noticed”, “parents were drunk/high”

Dependent Variable: Self-Construal

- Singelis Self-Construal Scale: 23 questions measure self-reported attitudes regarding self-perception of independence and interdependence
- 7-point Likert Scale
- Ex: “I do my own thing, regardless of what others think”, “I feel good when I cooperate with others”

Demographic Variables

- age, gender, education, marital status, number of children, ethnicity, and a white indicator

RESULTS

Table 2
Regression Model for Total Self-Construal

Predictor	B (SE)				
Constant	4.868 (.097)***	4.816 (.095)***	4.815 (.091)***	4.981 (.093)***	4.842 (.092)***
Age	.005 (.001)***	.005 (.001)***	.006 (.001)***	.005 (.001)***	.005 (.001)***
Employed	-.046 (.033)	-.039 (.033)	-.037 (.033)	-.051 (.032)	-.044 (.033)
Marital Status	0.46 (.033)	.053 (.033)	.050 (.033)	.031 (.032)	.047 (.033)
Emotional Abuse	-.007 (.004)*				
Physical Abuse		-.003 (.005)			
Sexual Abuse			-.005 (.004)		
Emotional Neglect				-.022 (.003)***	
Physical Neglect					-.014 (.006)**

Reference groups: Not Employed; Not Married. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

- No significant correlations found between self-construal and physical abuse and sexual abuse
- Weak but statistically significant relationship between childhood emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect and self construal. As experiences of these types increased, self-construal went down.
- Employment and marriage had no statistical significance at all
- Age had a minor effect on self-construal: as age increased, so did self-construal

STRENGTHS

- Used established, reliable, and validated measures to measure self-construal and childhood trauma
- Large sample size

LIMITATIONS

- Secondary analysis of a racially homogenous sample group and cannot be easily applied to the general public
- The secondary data analysis could have been more thorough and included multiple linear regressions for each subscale of self-construal
- Other theoretical perspectives that would have different methods for analyzing human behavior such as psychosocial theory

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

Future Research

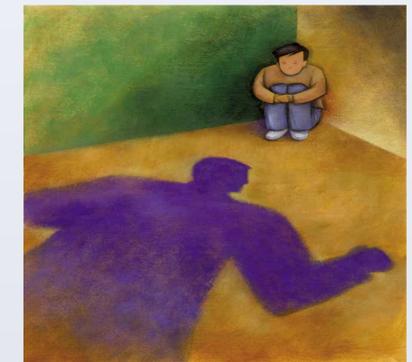
- More diverse sample is needed for generalizability
- Final analysis was total-self construal when more detailed results could have resulted from use of the subscales
- Combining different types of abuse in an analysis could yield more detailed results

Social Work

- Informs assessment and treatment
- Can make interpersonal or group interventions ineffective or challenging
- Makes a case for early intervention as soon as such as case is identified
- Underlines need for trauma-informed prisons, community centers, social services, and hospitals

CONCLUSION

- Childhood maltreatment has pervasive negative consequences on the individual, community, and societal levels
- Physical neglect, emotional neglect, and emotional abuse were correlated with lowered levels of total self-construal
- By understanding how different types of childhood maltreatment affect self-construal, clinicians can make more informed treatment planning decisions for affected individuals



REFERENCES

- Bernstein, D. P., Fink, L., Handelsman, L., Foote, J., Lovejoy, M., Wenzel, K., Sapareto, E., & Ruggiero, J. (1994). Initial reliability and validity of a new retrospective measure of child abuse and neglect. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 151(8), 1132-1136. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.151.8.1132>
- Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 759-775. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759>
- Child Trends. (2019). *Child maltreatment*. <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/child-maltreatment>
- Fresno, A., Spencer, R., & Espinoza, C. (2018). Does the type of abuse matter? Study on the quality of child attachment narratives in a sample of abused children. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11(4), 421-430. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0182-8>
- Gelles, R. J., & Perlman, S. (2012). *Estimated annual cost of child abuse and neglect*. Prevent Child Abuse America. http://www.preventchildabuse.org/images/research/pcaa_cost_report_2012_gelles_perlman.pdf
- Harford, T. C., Yi, H., & Grant, B. F. (2014). Associations between childhood abuse and interpersonal aggression and suicide attempt among U.S. adults in a national study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(8), 1389-1398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.02.011>
- MacManus, D., Rona, R., Dickson, H., Somani, G., Fear, N., & Wessely, S. (2015). Aggressive and violent behavior among military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: prevalence and link with deployment and combat exposure. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 37(1), 196-212. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxu006>
- Raphael, K. G., & Widom, C. S. (2011). Post-traumatic stress disorder moderates the relation between documented childhood victimization and pain 30 years later. *Pain (Amsterdam)*, 152(1), 163-169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pain.2010.10.014>
- Ryff, C. D., Almeida, D. M., Ayanian, J., Carr, D. S., Cleary, P. D., & Coe, C. (2017). *Midlife in the United States (MIDUS 2), 2004-2006*. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR04652.v7>
- Ryff, C. D., Seeman, T., & Weinstein, M. (2019). *Midlife in the United States (MIDUS 2): Biomarker Project, 2004-2009*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR29282.v9>
- Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., Garner, A. S., McGuinn, L., Pascoe, J., & Wood, D. L. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 232-246. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>
- Singelis, T. M. (1994). The measurement of independent and interdependent self-construals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 580-591. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167294205014>
- Sroufe, L. A. (2005). Attachment and development: A prospective, longitudinal study from birth to adulthood. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(4), 349-367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500365928>
- Varese, F., Smeets, F., Drukker, M., Lieveer, R., Lataster, T., Vlechtbauer, W., Read, J., van Os, J., & Bentall, R. P. (2012). Childhood adversities increase the risk of psychosis: A meta-analysis of patient-control, prospective- and cross-sectional cohort studies. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 38(4), 661-671. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbs050>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my husband for his constant support and encouragement throughout my graduate education. I would also like to acknowledge California State University, Fullerton's contribution to my life in providing a stimulating environment to grow during my undergraduate and graduate school attendance. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank my advisor, Dr. Sean Hogan, for his guidance and expertise throughout this process.