What is the Effect of Child Maltreatment on Depression Among Adults?

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ABSTRACT

Trauma inflicted during the early developmental stages may lead to adverse experiences later in life. Childhood maltreatment is a form of trauma that many individuals experience on a national level. These experiences might manifest in mental health issues such as depression. Currently, in the field of social sciences, there is an understanding on the importance of environmental factors and how they lead to mental health complications. Due to this, the objective of the current study was to understand the relationship between childhood maltreatment and depression among adults. This study is a secondary data analysis of the second Midlife in the United States Study (MIDUS 2), which was a follow-up study to the original MIDUS 1 research conducted by the MacArthur Midlife Research Network. The current study consisted of 1,045 participants who were non-institutionalized, English-speaking and between the ages of 35-86 years old. Data was collected through the use of self-administered questionnaires. The current study utilized a subsection of the original study's sample by only incorporating respondents who completed demographic information as well as the self-administered depression inventory and childhood trauma questionnaire. The current study concluded that higher levels of childhood maltreatment was positively associated with higher levels of depression during adulthood. This study confirmed prior research indicating a positive correlation between childhood maltreatment and adult depression. The current study hopes to help adults with depression receive adequate and effective care by understanding the trauma that they have endured in their childhood. Overall, this study wants to guide policy makers and practitioners in learning how to mitigate the negative impacts of depression by understanding risk factors and creating prevention strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study
- This research has significant implications for social work practice in creating knowledge for practitioners on how to help adults suffering with depression who have experienced childhood trauma. Clinical teams and policy makers will learn how to mitigate the negative impacts of depression by understanding risk factors of this mental illness as well as creating prevention strategies and educating the public on the negative effects of child maltreatment.

Purpose of Research
- The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge related to the health and welfare of adults who experience childhood trauma. The current study aims to understand the impact of various forms of child abuse and neglect and the effect it has on depression.

Research Question
- What is the effect of child maltreatment on depression among adults?

Hypothesis
- It is the hypothesis of this study that adults who have experienced childhood trauma will have a higher rate of depression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework: Ecological Systems Theory
- Bronfenbrenner theorized that environmental systems greatly impact individuals.

Review of Past Research
- The history of the physical abuse cycle may impact an individual's understanding of themselves which can lead to adverse outcomes (Ouellet-Morin et al., 2015).
- It has been found that women who experienced sexual abuse as a child, along with revictimization as an adult, are at a greater risk of developing negative psychological outcomes (Cheasty, Clare, & Collins, 1998; Coles et al., 2015).
- Some studies state that emotional abuse and neglect create the greatest risk factor in developing depression compared to all other forms of childhood maltreatment (Mandelli et al., 2015).
- The feelings of abandonment and inadequacy experienced in neglected children have been found to stay with the individual throughout their life course resulting in a negative view of self and others (Paterniti, 2017).

Gaps and Limitations
- A limitation of research in this area is the overwhelming use of clinical or non-representative samples which might exclude the encompassment of the results from the overall population. The current literature also only studies a limited amount of mental health disorders as a consequence to child maltreatment and the majority of research does not focus on cultural considerations.

METHODS

Research Design
- The current study is a secondary data analysis of the data collected from MIDUS 2 survey and biomarker project. The current study consisted of a cross-sectional survey study to investigate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and depression among adults. This study utilized demographic information from the survey portion of MIDUS 2 as well as encompassing data on childhood maltreatment and depression from the biomarker project

Sample and Sampling Method
- The current study consisted of non-institutionalized, English-speaking participants who were between the ages of 35 and 86.
- The current study utilized a subsection of the original study's sample by only incorporating respondents who completed demographic information as well as the self-administered depression inventory and childhood trauma questionnaire.
- The majority of the 4,963 individuals who participated in the MIDUS 2 original survey completed demographic information while the majority of the 1,255 individuals who participated in the biomarker project completed the self-administered depression inventory and childhood trauma questionnaire. However, there were only 1,045 individuals who completed both demographic info and the two specific SAQs, thus concluding the sample size of the current study.

Measures
- The independent variable for this study was childhood trauma. Childhood trauma was defined as experiencing emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect and physical neglect as a child. Respondents self-reported their childhood trauma by taking the childhood trauma questionnaire (CTQ). This questionnaire consists of 25 questions with 5 subscales.
- The dependent variable for this study was depression. Depression was defined as feeling sad, lonely, fearful, having poor appetite, having restless sleep, feeling like a failure, and having low energy. Respondents self-reported their depression by taking the CES-D. This questionnaire contained 20 items that rated how often the respondent was feeling a specific depression symptom in the past week.

RESULTS

Pearson Correlation
- A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to determine the relationship between participants' childhood emotional abuse and adult depression, childhood physical abuse and adult depression, childhood sexual abuse and adult depression, childhood physical neglect and adult depression and childhood emotional neglect and adult depression.
- The results indicated a statistically significant and positive relationship between childhood emotional abuse and adult depression, childhood physical abuse and adult depression, childhood sexual abuse and adult depression, childhood physical neglect and adult depression and childhood emotional neglect and adult depression.

Multiple Linear Regression
- A multiple linear regression was performed to predict a study participant's depression based on their age, gender, marital status along with different forms of child abuse such as childhood emotional abuse, childhood physical abuse, childhood sexual abuse, childhood physical neglect and childhood emotional neglect.
- Older study participants who were married scored lower on depression than other study participants
- Childhood emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect were also significant predictors of adult depression.
- Gender was found to not be a significant predictor of adult depression.

Regression Model for Adult Depression

Predictor	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	10.591 (1.225)***	12.634 (1.228)***	13.305 (1.200)***	10.487 (1.193)***	12.944 (1.177)***
Age	-.051 (.020)**	-.065 (.020)**	-.078 (.020)**	-.065 (.019)**	-.082 (.019)**
Gender	.443 (.465)	-.105 (.473)	.375 (.482)	.015 (.455)	.044 (.465)
Marital Status	-2.020 (.513)***	-2.394 (.524)***	-2.246 (.525)***	-1.934 (.506)***	-2.189 (.517)***
Emotional Abuse	.520 (.057)***				
Physical Abuse		.430 (.082)***			
Sexual Abuse			.337 (.065)***		
Emotional Neglect				.542 (.051) ***	
Physical Neglect					.688 (.087)***

Reference groups: Female; Not Married. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .0

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings
- The results from the Pearson correlation demonstrated that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between childhood emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect and adult depression. These results indicated that adults who had experienced higher levels of childhood abuse were associated with higher levels of depression during adulthood.
- The multiple linear regression results showed that age, marital status, and childhood abuse were significant predictors of adult depression by indicating that older participants who were married and experienced maltreatment during childhood had lower rates of depression than participants who were younger and not married. However, the multiple linear regression did not demonstrate gender as a significant predictor of adult depression; male and female participants had similar rates of depression.
- Overall, the findings from this study supported the hypothesis where increased exposure to childhood maltreatment leads to an increased likelihood of adult depression.
- The findings of this study were congruent with previous literature researching the association between childhood maltreatment and adult depression.

Strengths and Limitations
- The racial demographics of this study are a limitation due to 92.8% of participants being White while only 7.2% of participants were non-White.
- Due to this study being a secondary data analysis, it had to rely on the MIDUS 2 study's constraints which can be seen as a limitation.
- The current study utilized a cross-sectional survey study design in order to investigate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and depression among adults. By encompassing the surveys conducted in MIDUS 2, the data collected were based on participants answers, which ultimately led to participants answering questions based on their discretion and interpretation, which can be viewed as a limitation.
- The core strength of this study is its sample size.
- Another strength of this study is it encompassing a representative sample among many demographic factors such as gender, education level and employment.

Implications for Future Research
- Due to this study's limited racial demographics, it is important for future studies to have a representative sample.

Implications for Policy and Practice
- Due to this study adding to the literature of the harmful effects of childhood trauma, an increased amount of knowledge will be able to be utilized by practitioners working with adults who experience depression.
- Policy makers will also be able to create prevention techniques in order to reduce depression for those who have experienced childhood maltreatment. Policies can be created that educate the public on the negative lifelong consequences to those who are abused during childhood as well as creating policies that teach parents appropriate parenting strategies and techniques.

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