

Undetected Scars? self-criticism, attachment, and romantic relationships among otherwise well-functioning childhood maltreatment survivors

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Abstract

Studies have amply demonstrated the negative impact of childhood maltreatment on intimate relationships. The majority of studies have focused on revictimization in at-risk or clinical samples, with very few addressing the impact of childhood maltreatment on otherwise well-functioning adults and even fewer investigating the psychological mechanisms involved. To fill this gap, we focused on the impact of emotional maltreatment and childhood sexual abuse (CSA) on “normative” romantic relationships in otherwise well-functioning young adults and the mediating role of personality and attachment in this regard. We test this model and investigate whether self-criticism and attachment-avoidance mediate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and romantic relationship satisfaction, while also examining the potential reciprocal associations between these variables.

The hypothesized double-mediation model was examined among otherwise well-functioning young adults in two independent studies, focusing on emotional maltreatment ($N= 99$) or CSA ($N= 59$, including women who had been either sexually abused by a familiar perpetrator or had no history of sexual trauma), using structural equation modeling.

Consistent with expectations, self-criticism mediated the association between childhood maltreatment and romantic relationship satisfaction, cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Findings suggest that childhood maltreatment may lead to elevated levels of self-criticism, which in turn may be linked with reduced satisfaction in romantic relationships, setting in motion a vicious cycle involving relationship satisfaction and attachment-avoidance. Understanding the long-term psychological

dynamics related to childhood maltreatment and identifying mediating vulnerability factors—self-criticism and attachment-avoidance—might have implications for both the assessment and treatment of individuals with a history of childhood maltreatment.

Keywords: childhood emotional maltreatment, CSA, personality, self-criticism, attachment, romantic relationships

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PEER BEHAVIOUR AND MALTREATMENT EFFECT

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CRESCERE is a longitudinal study accompanying through time a sample of about 500 young people and their families in North-Eastern Italy. The children are followed from 11 to 18 years, periodically observing the changes in their way of thinking, acting and relating to the others. It is a prospective panel study, consisting of 8 waves, one a year. In this transition from childhood to adolescence many things occur.

One of the research areas is represented by bullying: it is examined through a battery of items taken by HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children). We ask adolescents how often they had been bullied and how often they bullied others (in a 6-month period) in terms of physical or psychological offences, insults, teasing... In the last year, we added the item “Being teased for my sexual orientation” and “I insulted, teased someone for his sexual orientation”. It emerged that there can be a maltreatment effect of peer behaviour and this can be connected to self-esteem and wellbeing of adolescents. How can peer behaviour become bullying?

Data about the link between bullying and self-esteem and wellbeing will be presented. Also, the “voices” of adolescents will be described on this issue. In this context, their words and messages are a valuable tool for better understanding their world and for supporting them in their growth.

Key words

Bullying, adolescents, self-esteem

**Child Abuse and Cognitive Appraisal of Child Abuse: Do Gender Differences
Exist?**

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ABSTRACT

Gender differences in child abuse and neglect (CAN) have long been of interest to researchers and practitioners due to their adverse impact on the victims. Additionally, the cognitive appraisal of events as abusive or not may also affect the negative consequences of CAN. The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to assess gender differences in CAN; and (b) to examine gender differences in the cognitive appraisal of CAN. The sample was comprised of 247 Israeli prison inmates (49 female and 198 male). The findings indicated significant gender differences in CAN. The female inmates reported higher rates of total CAN, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse than male inmates. No significant gender differences were found in physical abuse and emotional neglect. A high prevalence of CAN was nevertheless found among male inmates. In addition, while no significant gender differences were found in the cognitive appraisal of CAN, there were significant gender differences in ranking the dimensions of the cognitive appraisal of CAN. Moreover, we found paternal partner violence to be a predictor of CAN and a cognitive appraisal of CAN for both genders. Maternal partner violence, however, was found a significant predictor of cognitive appraisal of CAN among female inmates. Finally, crime in the family was found a significant predictor of CAN among female inmates. Our findings, which have shown that both female and male inmates experience many of the same risk factors, such as multiple forms of CAN and IPV, may have clinical implications and are significant for the development of interventions.

Keywords: gender, cognitive appraisal, inmates, childhood abuse, crime.

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**Maternal stress among mothers of latency children: The role of childhood
maternity, childhood trauma of abuse and self differentiation**

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Abstract

Background and objectives: Parenthood is considered a challenging role, which is influenced by parents' past experiences and personality traits and child characteristics. Based on Belsky's (1984) model for predicting parenting behavior towards their children, the aims of the study were first, to examine the contribution of mothers' past maternity experience, childhood trauma of abuse, present level of differentiation and child difficulties (Independent variables) to the perception of stress in current parenthood, as well as, to examine whether the relationship between the independent variables to the current perception of parenting stress, is moderated by mothers' level of differentiation.

Methods: 169 Israeli Mothers of children aged 6-12 completed a set of questionnaires, including childhood maternity, childhood trauma of abuse, level of differentiation, child difficulties and parenting perceived stress.

Results: childhood maternity, childhood trauma of abuse, level of differentiation and child difficulties contributed to current parental stress. Level of differentiation was found moderating in the relationship between mothers past experience and present perception of stress in parenthood.

Conclusions: Intergenerational transmission of mothers past experience together with other characteristics of the child and parent may lead to the perception of parenting stress in the present. Development of interventions aimed to increase parental differentiation may contribute to reduce the link between past experience and present perception of parenting stress.

Key Words: Maternal stress ; childhood maternity, childhood trauma of abuse ; self differentiation