

The Relationship between Childhood Maltreatment and Mental Health with the Mediation of Experiential Avoidance in Girl Students

Leila Shamel^{*}

Zahra Bahraamara^{**}

Mehrnaz Mohammadi^{***}

Habib Hadianfard^{****}

Introduction

Childhood maltreatment is a general issue with serious consequences for individuals' lives. Adults who have been maltreated as children have a higher risk of behavioral, physical, and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Freedman & Enright, 2017; Andreoni, Rao, & Trachtman, 2017). They have also been shown to have childhood maltreatment experiences, long-term effects such as interpersonal problems, decreased emotional self-regulation, and abnormal adaptive strategies, including avoidance strategies (Müller et al., 2015; Ullman, Peter-Hagene, & Relyea, 2014). In other words, adults who experience such experiences have high levels of experiential avoidance (Marx, & Sloan, 2002). Experiences of childhood maltreatment have been increasingly reported by students; So, one of the factors involved in the significant increase in the number and severity of problems in academic counseling centers (Farazmand, Mohammadkhani, Pourshahbaz & Dolatshahee, 2017). The present study aims to examine the structural relationships between childhood maltreatment, experiential avoidance, and mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress).

Method

The present study is descriptive and its design is correlational. Using the

* Assistant Professor, Salman Farsi University of Kazerun, Kazerun, Iran. *Corresponding Author:* dr.shameli@kazerunsfu.ac.ir

** M.A., Salman Farsi University of Kazerun, Kazerun, Iran.

*** M.A., Salman Farsi University of Kazerun, Kazerun, Iran.

**** Professor, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

structural equation modeling method, 366 girl students of the Razi University of Kermanshah were surveyed by Child Abuse Self-Report Scale (SASRS), Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale (DASS-21), and Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II).

Results

The results confirmed the direct effect of childhood maltreatment experience on anxiety and stress as well as the indirect effect of childhood maltreatment on depression, anxiety, and stress through experiential avoidance in girl students. Childhood maltreatment was able to have a significant and positive effect on the variance of depression more than the other two dimensions (anxiety and stress).

Conclusion

In the current explanation, it can be acknowledged that girls who are exposed to childhood maltreatment become psychologically disturbed in a way that leads to the formation of subsequent irrational thoughts and beliefs in their minds. So, the presence of irrational thoughts and beliefs in the mind causes negative emotions, depression, and anxiety in individuals (Vıslā, Flückiger, Holtforth, David, 2016). Thus, whenever childhood experiences are accompanied by maltreatment and neglect of the parent or primary caregiver, it acts as a source of threat and interferes with the ability to relax and undermines his or her mental health (Gilbert, McEwan, Matos & Ravis, 2011). The results show that the impact of such bitter experiences is such that young girls avoid using the strategy in the hope of reducing the negative emotions caused by them, and this process itself leads to increased depression, anxiety, and stress in them. And it is not unreasonable to expect that other areas of their lives (such as education, employment, and marriage) will also be adversely affected.

Keywords: Childhood Maltreatment, Experiential Avoidance, Depression, Anxiety, Stress

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