Early Life Adversity, Depressive Symptoms, Marital Satisfaction, and Chronic Stress: A Moderated Moderation Model

Stress, Interpersonal
Relationships and
Health Laboratory
(SIRH)

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Background

- Early life adversity (ELA), defined as various childhood abuse or neglect, is positively associated with greater depressive symptomology (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005).
- Poor marital satisfaction may exacerbate consequences of ELA (Cheong, Sinnott, Dahly, Kearney, 2017).
- Mothers raising an adolescent on the autism spectrum tend to experience greater caregiving stress than mothers raising a neurotypical adolescent (Hayes & Watson, 2013), especially during the transition period out of high school (Blacher, 2001).

What is lacking in the literature is how chronic stress moderates the effect that poor marital satisfaction has on the consequences of ELA on psychological functioning.

Research Question

Does marital satisfaction moderate the relationship between ELA and depressive symptoms, and is this further exacerbated by chronic stress?

Methods

Participants

- Mothers raising an adolescent on the autism spectrum may be used as a proxy to study chronic stress.
- N = 145**; Mothers raising an adolescent on the autism spectrum (**high chronic stress**; **n = 70**), were compared to mothers raising a typically developing adolescent (**low chronic stress**).
- English or French speaking; no history of psychiatric disorders

Procedure

- Online questionnaires

Measures

- ELA**: *Childhood Trauma Questionnaire* Short-Form (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003), 28 items, $\alpha = .83$
- Depressive Symptoms**: *Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale* (CES-D; Radloff, 1977), 20 items, $\alpha = .91$
 - Covariate**: age (Stordal, Mykletun, & Dahl, 2003)
- Marital Satisfaction**: *Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), 7 items, $\alpha = .72$

Data used from the Transition study; funded by the CIHR.

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Methods (continued)

Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations for Scale and Categorical Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	46.66	5.85
Ethnicity ^a		
Caucasian	(108)	(74.48)
Other	(37)	(25.52)
Household pre-tax Income (CDN \$)	72,027.95	43,654.55
Highest level of Education completed ^a		
High school	(27)	(18.62)
CEGEP	(21)	(14.48)
University	(68)	(46.90)
Other	(29)	(20.00)
Years in Relationship	16.83	9.64

Note. ^aNumber of participants are provided in parentheses: (n) under *M* column and (percent) under *SD* column

Results

Analyzed with PROCESS (model 3; Hayes, 2018), with SPSS, alpha set at .05

Highest Order Unconditional Interactions

Interactions	<i>R</i> ² -change	<i>F</i>	df1	df2	<i>p</i>
ELA x MaritalSatisfaction x ChronicStress	.029	5.07	1	136	.026

Post-hoc Analysis: Conditional ELA x MaritalSatisfaction Interaction given Values of ChronicStress

Groups	Effect	<i>F</i>	df1	df2	<i>p</i>
Low chronic stress	-.0093	.0084	1	136	.93
High chronic stress	-.36	9.21	1	136	.0029

Results (continued)

Interactions between ELA, Marital Satisfaction, and Chronic Stress, and its effect on Depressive Symptoms

Conclusion

- Marital satisfaction moderated the association between ELA and depressive symptoms among mothers experiencing chronic parenting stress, but not among mothers of typically developing adolescents.
- The positive association between ELA and depressive symptoms was only exacerbated among participants with lower marital satisfaction.
- These findings provide a better understanding of the interpersonal factors exacerbating the long-term consequences of ELA on psychological functioning.
- Research is needed to see how these associations hold longitudinally.

References

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