Childhood Psychological Maltreatment and Neglect, Intimate Relationships, Adult Attachment, and their Relation to Depressive Symptoms in Young Adults

by

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Abstract

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Early life experiences such as childhood maltreatment are important contributors to depression, one of the most significant mental health problems in Canada; approximately 11.2% of Canadian adults will experience major depression at some point in their life (Knoll & MacLennan, 2017). Although psychological maltreatment and neglect are the most common forms of child maltreatment, and it has been suggested that they are linked to later depression, the underlying mechanisms explaining this relation have yet to be determined. The current investigation examined the role of adult attachment and relationship satisfaction in the prediction of depressive symptomology in 676 university students (74% female). Both anxious and avoidant attachment were mediators of the relationship between childhood psychological maltreatment (CPM) and adult depressive symptoms. Only avoidant attachment was a mediator of the relationship between childhood psychological neglect (CPN) and depressive symptoms. Relationship status did not moderate the relationship between maltreatment and attachment. However, for those currently in romantic relationships, the effect of CPM on avoidant attachment was moderated by relationship satisfaction. Specifically, those with a history of CPM who were currently in a satisfying relationship experienced heightened attachment avoidance along with subsequent depressive symptoms. Implications and strategies for clinical intervention are discussed.