

The Link of Childhood Abuse and Personality Pathology

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Abstract. Along with the advanced development of current society, personality disorders have attracted more attention. They can drive people to more stressful and unhealthy states. To develop corresponding treatments, studying the etiology of personality disorders is crucial. One proposed contributor is childhood maltreatment, which is pervasive and often result in severe damages to the victims. The childhood maltreatment basically can be divided into five types: physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and mental neglect. Different types of maltreatment, the co-existence, and the severity may contribute to various degrees of personality disorders. Childhood maltreatment may not cause disorders directly but may be a mediator in this relationship instead. Common mediators in this link can be gender difference, relevant personality traits, and deviated attitudes toward self, such as consistent self-criticism. The existence of diversified mediators suggests that the relationship between child abuse and personality pathology can be a complex one. One of the limitations in the previous studies is that the methodology of most experiments is self-report. Although self-report can effectively reflect one's personal experience, the subjectivity of self-report can lead to possible biases in the findings. Another limitation is that the sample size is not large and abundant enough. Plus, there is also a lack of tracking victims' life experiences after the abuse, to understand how abuse can impact their daily lives. To address this limitation, future research should adopt longitudinal experimental designs. This review can provide some insights and clinical emphasis to the family intervention studies and practices for those children that are at risk of child abuse.

Keywords: childhood maltreatment; personality pathology; mediating effect; self-criticism.

1. Introduction

Ever since Allport and Murray first conceived personality psychology as an essential scientific field of individual uniqueness, psychologists have investigated the most significant distinctions in social and emotional functioning that can distinguish one person from others for decades [1]. Studying personality pathology can deepen the understanding of personality as a whole, and it has gradually garnered a lot of attention as a result of the direct impacts it has on a variety of life functioning, emotion regulation, relationships, life satisfaction, societal involvement, morality, and health etc. Tracing the etiology of personality disorders, many scholars would argue that child maltreatment may play an important role since maltreatment can easily cause different levels of physical and mental damage. According to The World Health Organization, child maltreatment can be defined as anything from physical and/or mental abuse to sexual abuse, neglect, and carelessness, as well as any commercial or other types of exploitation existed in a relationship of trust, obligation and authority that results in risks to children's health, well-being and future growth [2].

After doing extensive study on the subject over a long period of time, psychologists were able to identify many distinct forms of personality disorder and categorize them into clusters A, B, and C based on the similar characteristics they shared. Cluster A personality disorder is defined as a pattern of unusual thought or behavior that affects a person's daily life. Personality disorders such as paranoid personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and schizotypal personality disorder are included in this category. Dangerously dramatic, excessively emotional, or erratic thought and conduct are hallmarks of the cluster B personality disorders. Among them are antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder. Anxious, frightening thoughts or actions are symptoms of a Cluster C personality disorder, which fall into avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. Many popular studies focused on the symptoms and treatments of each of these personality disorders. Child abuse, on the

other hand, has also been the subject of ongoing research related to personality development due to its severe repercussions, which may lead to a variety of psychiatric disorders and behavioral issues [2].

Previous research mainly concentrated on diversified aspects of either personality disorders, or child maltreatment separately, and these findings are important in advancing human developments in psychology field. Studies that investigated the link between child mistreatment and personality pathology, however, is scarce. This review aims to demonstrate studies that relate to this gap and discussing them by evaluating the cause-and-effect relationship between various childhood mistreatment types (mental abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical and mental ignorance) and personality pathologies for the purpose of providing further insight into the present state of these two. This review will demonstrate more details and relevant factors in the relationship between childhood mistreatment and personality disorders for the purpose of spreading the destructive influence of child abuse and providing possible directions to fill the gap of previous studies.

2. The Effect of Childhood Abuse on Personality Disorder and Relevant Constituents

2.1 Different Forms of Childhood Abuse and Personality Disorders

Different forms of abuse or a mixture of forms, may lead victims to suffer varying degrees of damage. These harms can include physiological, psychological, and behavioral aspects that can have an inevitable effect on a person's life over the long term. Identifying latent classes, which refers to homogeneous class based on shared response patterns to some events, is significant because it not only helps to identify the many forms of abuse that occur, but it also helps to organize and simplify the data that show how these forms of abuse are associated with certain populations [3]. In Charak, Tromp, and Koot's research, they employ latent class analysis (LCA) to investigate the correlation between childhood mistreatment and several aspects of personality disorder. There were participants aged 12 to 22 from the Netherlands participated in this study. The three latent classes in this study were based on harmful incidents happened before the 13 years old. These latent classes were differentiated from one another based on the sorts of victimization they were exposed to and were categorized as the low trauma group, the violent exposure group, and the sexual assault group. The findings reveal that many personality dysfunctions would strongly and uniquely link to types of abuse such as sexual abuse, non-sexual abuse, and neglect. For instance, submissiveness, oppositionality, intimacy issues, and social avoidance were all substantially and adversely connected with physical abuse, whereas stimulation seeking, conduct issues, and intimacy issues were all positively correlated with sexual abuse. Either emotional or physical neglect was not specifically associated with any pathological personality. Moreover, the latent classes were shown to have a higher probability to report increased signs and symptoms of a personality disorder and has a higher probability of exhibiting symptoms consistent with personality disorders, if they have experienced combined types of maltreatment at a more severe level, which indicates that not only abuse forms drive to various level of pain, but the intensity of the abuse will also function as a variable that leads to different degrees of harm [3]. These findings strongly suggest the necessity of considering latent class and the severity and frequency of childhood maltreatment.

In addition to its relationship with distinct personality disorder, child abuse will also produce various outcomes in terms of personality disorder clusters. Child abuse like physical abuse and sexual abuse, are likely to produce distinct influences from neglect. The potential discrepancies are important guidelines for psychologists to trace the origin of some symptoms and come up with corresponding clinical treatments. The research conducted by Cohen et al. aims to study the precise associations between the various forms of child abuse and adult personality traits through patients suffered from mental illness using different corresponding self-report data. The results revealed that there are independent links between bodily abuse and antisocial personality disorder features; mental abuse and cluster C attributes; maternal neglect and personality disorder characteristics from Cluster A even

when other classes of maltreatment and personality disorder features were taken into account. There are neither independent associations between sexual abuse and borderline personality disorder symptoms, nor mental abuse and narcissistic personality disorder symptoms. Narcissistic and paranoid tendencies were independently and positively connected with physical abuse whereas cluster C was adversely linked to physical abuse in the study [4]. In place of focusing just on the correlation between abuse and mental health issues in general, the researchers Charak et al. and Krause-Utz et al. conducted studies that consistently demonstrated the link between specific forms of abuse and distinct or co-occur personality disorders. Krause-Utz et al., on the other hand, has a tendency to investigate associations between different forms of abuse and certain clusters of personality disorder, for which is an innovative point of view.

2.2 Relevant Factors in This Relationship

Since gender may create a wide variety of distinctions in psychological research, it's possible that gender plays a role interacting with both the childhood traumatic experience and the formation of a person's character nature. In the study by Waxman et al., they focused on the causes and effect relationship between specific types of child abuse and personality formation, and also takes into consideration the ways in which gender influences the correlations. Psychological studies have shown that males are more prone to suffer from antisocial, narcissistic, or schizophrenic personality disorders than women do, whereas the prevalence of avoidant, borderline, dependent or paranoid personality disorders in women was higher than in males. Furthermore, excessive sexual abuse was shown to be linked to antisocial, borderline and narcissistic personality disorders. Antisocial borderline and schizotypal personality disorders were linked to bodily mistreatment. Disorders, such as borderline, narcissistic, and schizotypal personality disorder have found to be linked to emotional abuse. Borderline, narcissistic, and schizotypal personality disorders were linked to physical neglect. Emotional ignorance was related to avoidant, paranoid, and schizoid personality disorders, and was exclusively correlated with avoidant and schizoid personality disorders among the five types. The accumulation of multiple forms of abuse raised the likelihood of developing one of these illnesses [5]. There hasn't been a lot of emphasis paid to research that focus on how gender influences the correlations between forms of abuse and personality disorders. Waxman and his colleagues' efforts not only shows that each type of child may initiate distinct personality disorders, but also proves that probability of certain personality disorder occurred in male or female can be varied.

Even though there are abundant resources concentrated on complicated correlations between childhood traumas and personality development or relevant symptoms of particular mental disorder, previous research rarely investigate first degree relatives in these relations as a relevant factor. There is a possibility that family relatives of patients suffering from certain mental illnesses may experience the unnoticed consequences of perceived childhood traumas, which may then lead to a variety of personality characteristics. The purpose of Wen et al.'s research is to investigate the connections between traumatic experiences in childhood or the various subtypes of that trauma and characteristics of personality in first-degree relatives of individuals diagnosed with major depressive disorder. These first-degree relatives, however, are not impacted by the disorder. The research contained three classes: major depressive disorder sufferer, sufferer's first-degree relatives, and healthy participants, who are considered as the control group. Personality questionnaire and childhood trauma questionnaire were used in the evaluation of personality features and childhood trauma experience, respectively. First-degree relatives and the health control group had no statistically significant differences. Neuroticism, psychoticism, and lying were all connected with childhood trauma in first-degree relatives, and the correlation with neuroticism is the strongest. Emotional neglect has the greatest correlation with neuroticism among the subtypes of child maltreatment, and secondary to emotional abuse [6]. The study demonstrates child abuse as a strong predictor of mental disorder, and more specifically, personality disorder traits. Claims that personality disorders or all of the mental disorders in general are strongly predicted by heredity exist as a consistent argument, but this research indicates that first-

degree relatives may perform nothing different from healthy control group, or from strangers in reality, so it is difficult to draw an assertive conclusion on the influence of genetics and the environment.

3. Childhood Maltreatment and Personality Functioning or Traits

The mediating variable is often taken into consideration in psychological research, and this is especially true when the study is focused on determining the association between two variables. The influence of one variable is transmitted to another variable through a series of constructs known as mediating factors. These constructs might be behavioral, biological, psychological, or social in nature. A researcher may choose to describe the process or method by which one variable influences another using mediation as one of the several options. The article written by Freier et al. intends to illustrate a statistical analysis regarding the association amid five types of child abuse and deficits in personality functioning [7]. Information including the mediation study of depression with gender-specific outcomes are collected from surveys of the German population, with close sample size for each child maltreatment subtype. The participants will have a face-to-face interview, including some socio-demographic questions, such as gender, individual income, age, and educational level. For specific methodology, evidence of child maltreatment subtypes is collected from Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, which is a self-assessment measures that lists the five kinds of child abuse. Different analysis is applied to measure depression/anxiety indicators, and to collect the evaluation of personality operating. In the examination of mediation, Emotional abuse was found stronger mediating effect for anxiety than for depression symptoms. Physical neglect creates stronger mediating effect for women than for men, another gender outcome is that sexual abuse also generates stronger mediating effect for women than for men. By examining this study, it can be concluded that research of mediating effect is meaningful and essential because for those relationships that are not directly correlated, understanding the indirect effects or variables clarify the complex relations more accurately.

To explain mediating effect more specifically in terms of its role amid child abuse and personality pathology, a common example can be applied. Father's socioeconomic status will affect son's socioeconomic status through affecting son's educational level, which is the mediating variable in this example. Based on the principle of mediating effect, possible mediating variables can be various personality traits that are potential to evolve to personality disorders in child abuse's relationship with personality pathology. Masuya et al.'s review discussed how neuroticism (a personality trait in Big Five personality traits) is a side effect of being abused or victimized as a child and how neuroticism drives to some depressive indicators. This research aims to explain the correlations among these four factors. Self-managing surveys and diversified functioning scales, ratings, and statistical analysis are utilized to generate precise results. Among all of the possible cause-effect relationships among the four factors, the influence of childhood maltreatment on depressive symptoms with childhood victimization as a mediating factor is not statistically significant, compared with other correlations. As for the findings, the research not only demonstrates that the four factors are independently correlated, but it also shows that they actually produce a chain reaction. Childhood maltreatment influences neuroticism via the indirect effect of child victimization, and this reaction then leads to an increase in adult depressive symptoms, which are mediated by both childhood victimization experience and neuroticism [8]. Therefore, neuroticism and childhood victimization are mediating variables in the context that childhood abuse positively effects depressive symptoms. This study reiterates the significance of considering mediating effect and mediator, through which researchers can dig the deeper effects that independent variables have on dependent variable and the mechanism in this process. The involvement level of mediating variables also can generate different results. For instance, even though depression is more likely to occur in people who are neurotic, not all people manifested in neuroticism exhibit depression.

Moreover, there are more potential mediators other than common personality traits such as the Big Five. Self-evaluations and self-treatments may also mediate the relationship between child

mistreatment and illness of personality since personality disorders may mutually impact the strength of positive self-treatments such as self-awareness and self-care. For instance, if the individual who receiving criticism is able to maintain a positive attitude toward themselves, then the criticism may serve as a source of motivation rather than being an unfavorable experience. On the other hand, if someone has strong self-criticism rather than self-awareness or self-care, then they will be adversely influenced by this critic and will regard themselves as being negative as a whole. Falgares et al. investigate the connection between various forms of child abuse and suicide likelihood among young people by focusing on the aspect of self-criticism and dependency, both of which are distinct examples of psychopathic characteristics of the personality, as potential intermediary of the correlation between child abuse and suicide likelihood in teenagers. Childhood Experience of Care and Abuse Questionnaire is the main guideline for assessing lack of childhood warmth occurrences, and also mental and physical abuse before 17 years old. Questionnaire related to depression was applied for character features of self-judgment and over-reliance, and suicide risk was rated by the professional suicide self-rating scale. As a result, lack of care, psychological maltreatment, and suicide risk were shown to be linked, with self-criticism serving as a partial mediating factor. A person's risk of suicide does not increase if they have been physically abused. The connection between mistreatment and suicide risk was not mediated by dependence or relatedness [9]. These results imply that the accumulated influence of certain forms of parental mistreatment conducted in early ages and the formation of inflexible and defective personality characteristics may raise the threat for suicide thoughts and behavior throughout growth. Mediating variables are diversified even in just one relationship. This study indicates the necessity of positive self-attitudes and that these attitudes can mediate the link of child abuse and personality disorders. Severe negative attitudes toward self may not only results in deviations of personality formation, but will further diminish one's willingness to live, and eventually cause some suicidal behaviors.

Self-treatments also include self-compassion, which is defined as having an attitude of kindness, consideration and care towards oneself. Cultivating self-compassion can lower anxiety and depression. Self-criticism and the inability of self-compassion, on the other hand, may act as the opposite influence. Early childhood is particularly crucial in cultivating beneficial self-evaluations. Child maltreatment, however, may inhibit the positive growth of self-compassion and therefore stimulate anxiety, depression and other negative responses that are possible to develop as personality disorders in the future. Naismith et al.'s study focused on three key words related to self: self-compassion, self-criticism, and fear of self-compassion [10]. Cultivating self-compassion is one of the most effective methods to quiet down excessive menacing proceeding, such as humiliation and judgment. Fear or avoidance of self-compassion, nevertheless, may impede this ability and effectiveness. The research examined the attachment styles and adverse childhood experiences, marked by maltreatment, invalidation, and lack of warmth of the participants in order to investigate the roots of self-compassion, avoidance of self-compassion, humiliation, and self-criticism. The results indicate that early warmth was shown to be a significant predictor of a person's self-compassion and self-assurance. Self-inadequacy was anticipated uniquely by bodily abuse and invalidation. Avoidance of self-compassion and self-compassion were affected by a combination of factors. There is no significant association between avoidance of self-compassion and self-compassion. The findings suggest that warmth and care given in childhood is crucial for the cultivation of self-sympathy. Fear as well as avoidance of self-sympathy is likely to largely inhibit one's chance of reducing depressions, which may lead to greater negative situations. Likewise, self-criticism always prompt individuals to consider their deficits, so that they may lack of confidence and courage to face and solve problems.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, child maltreatment covers physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, physical and mental neglect. Different types of maltreatment, their co-existence, and the severity level may lead to

various levels of personality dysfunction. Mediating effect also occurs in this association. Mediators, such as gender difference, personality traits, and self-treatments are studied. The use of self-report as an experimental approach is always the main choice available to researchers in this area. This is because studies regarding childhood abuse need to investigate the personal childhood experiences or home environments of participants. Self-reporting is vulnerable to subjectivity, and individuals may have a tendency to hide purposefully or forget certain terrible events, such as child abuse. These two factors combined can make self-reporting occasionally inaccurate and inadequate. Plus, the sample sizes are not large enough to derive a conclusive and all-encompassing explanation about the nature of this relationship. Longitudinal research is needed, because it may record the health state of participants in varying phrases over a long period of time. It can record participants' changes in mental status and validate its association with childhood experience. This review can provide some suggestions to family intervention studies and practices for at-risk children.

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