

Among College Students, Depressive Symptoms Mediate the Association between Childhood Emotional Abuse and Binge Eating Behavior



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN
COLORADO

Julia Rosales, Marilyn Welsh, Eric Peterson, & Susannah Moore

INTRODUCTION

Research has demonstrated a complex relationship between childhood maltreatment (CM), and mental health symptoms, and binge eating. Childhood emotional abuse has been shown to correlate with both mental health symptoms and binge eating. However, literature has shown mixed findings on the relationship between mental health symptoms and binge eating. The relationship between all three constructs is also unclear. **This study examined the relationship between childhood maltreatment, binge eating symptoms, and mental health symptoms in a nonclinical population of college students.**

METHODS

Participants

- 233 college students
- 73% female
- Ages 18-34 ($M = 19.04$)

Measures

CTQ (Childhood Trauma Questionnaire)

A 28-item questionnaire assessing childhood abuse and neglect experiences. It has five subscales:

- Emotional Abuse
- Emotional Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Sexual Abuse

TSC-40 (Trauma Symptom Checklist-40)

A 40-item questionnaire that evaluates symptoms associated with traumatic experiences. It has six subscales:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Dissociation
- Sexual Abuse Trauma Index
- Sexual Problems
- Sleep Disturbance

BES (Binge Eating Survey)

A 16-item questionnaire that assesses the presence of binge eating behaviors. It includes statements about thoughts, behaviors, and emotional states and asks the participants to select the statements that best describe how they feel.

RESULTS

CTQ Emotional Abuse and Binge Eating Symptoms were **significantly positively correlated**. All other types of childhood maltreatment were **not significantly correlated** with Binge Eating Symptoms.

TSC-40 Depression had the **strongest significant correlation** with Binge Eating Symptoms. TSC-40 Anxiety and Binge Eating Symptoms were **significantly positively correlated**. TSC-40 Dissociation and Binge Eating Symptoms were **significantly positively correlated**.

The indirect effects analysis demonstrated that TSC-40 Depression **completely mediated** the effect of CTQ Emotional Abuse on Binge Eating Symptoms. Together TSC-40 Depression and CTQ Emotional Abuse **predicted 10% of the variance** in Binge Eating Symptoms.

Correlations of CTQ and BES-TOT subscales

	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Neglect	Physical Neglect	Total Score
Binge Eating Survey Total Score	.227**	-.016	.058	.092	-.063	.103

Correlations of TSC-40 and BES-TOT subscales

	Dissociation	Anxiety	Depression	Sexual Abuse Trauma Index	Sleep Disturbance	Total Score
Binge Eating Survey Total Score	.158**	.205**	.295**	.159**	.282**	.260**

** Correlation is significant at .01 level (1-tailed)

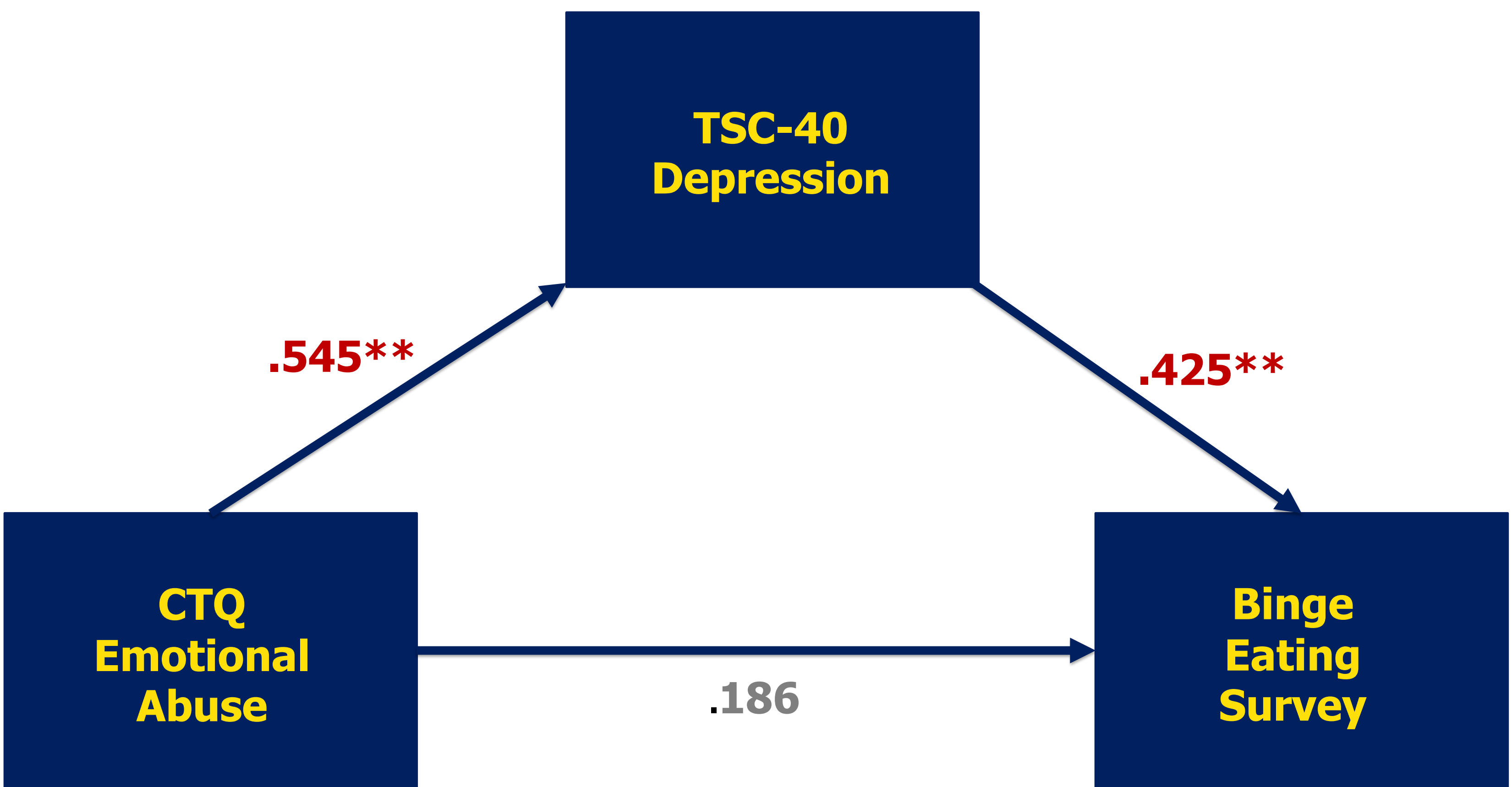
DISCUSSION

Childhood emotional abuse was the only type of childhood maltreatment that had a significant correlation with binge eating symptoms, which **differs** from past research. This may be due to this study involving college students rather than clinical samples in past studies.

Although both anxious and dissociative symptoms were positively associated with binge eating symptoms, depressive symptoms had the strongest positive correlation, and previous findings are **mixed**.

These findings suggest that depressive symptoms are a key factor in the relationship between a history of childhood emotional abuse and increased binge eating symptoms.

Mediational Pathway



** Correlation is significant at .01 level (1-tailed)