

Introduction

Growing up in an environment with childhood maltreatment (CM) can present many obstacles later in life and is related to mental health challenges. It has been found that CM can adversely affect mental health in young adults.

Additionally, research has found associations between poor coping strategies and mental health challenges, and it is reasonable to expect that exposure to CM may lead to negative coping styles. However, there is a lack of studies exploring the relationship between CM and college students' ability to cope with daily stressors. This is particularly important given the incredible stress that the global pandemic has caused young adults in the past year.

Research Question

How do college students with a past history of childhood maltreatment cope in general with the stressors, and specifically with the current stress of COVID-19, and how is this mediated by mental health challenges?

Methods

Quantitative methods were used by collecting and analyzing survey data. A preliminary sample of 46 female and male college students were administered the following surveys online:

- Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)
- Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-40) and Symptom Checklist (SCL-90) mental health measures.
- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) measured a history of maltreatment, including: EA=Emotional Abuse, PA=Physical Abuse, SA=Sexual Abuse, EN=Emotional Neglect, PN=Physical Neglect.
- Students were given 3 credits through SONA for

Key Terms

Childhood Maltreatment

- physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect that occurs to children (CDC, 2020).

Coping

- An effort to minimize distress associated with adverse life experiences (Carver, 1997).



Important Concepts



Preliminary Results

Mental Health and Coping Correlations.

- SCL Dep and TSC Anx with CIS Task-oriented Coping, r 's $-.41$ and $-.26$.
- SCL Dep and TSC Anx with CIS Emotion-focused Coping, r 's $.38$ to $.55$.
- TSC Dep and Anx with CIS Avoid (Social Distraction), r 's $.29$ to $.33$.

CTQ and Mental health positive correlations.

- CTQ EA with TSC and SCL Anx and Dep, r 's $.44$ to $.57$.
- CTQ EN with TSC and SCL Anx and Dep, r 's $.25$ to $.34$.
- CTQ Total correlated with TSC and SCL Anx and Dep, r 's $.32$ to $.46$.
- CTQ SA with SCL Anx, $r(43) = .299, p = .03..$

CTQ and Coping

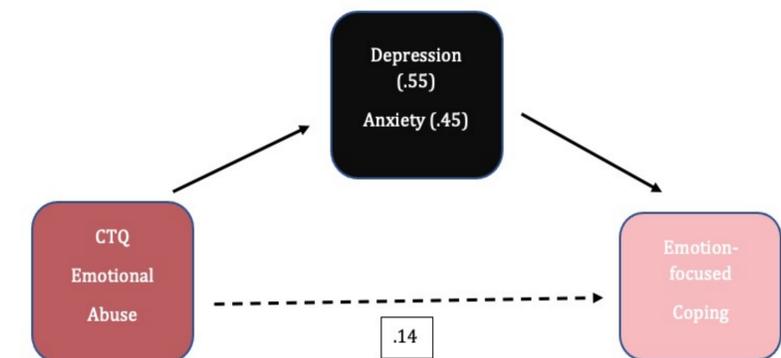
- All maltreatment sub-scale and total CTQ scores positively correlated with CIS-Avoid-Distraction with r 's $.31$ to $.51$.
CTQ
- CTQ EA with CIS Emotion-focused Coping, $r(44) = .34, p = .01$.

CTQ and Change in Coping in past year

- CTQ SA and CTQ Total Score with positive change in Coping, r 's $.29$ to $.35$.

Preliminary Results

Both SCL-90 Depression and SCL-90 Anxiety **fully mediated** the pathway between CTQ Emotional Abuse and CIS Emotion-focused Coping.



Discussion

- History of maltreatment predicted greater use of the maladaptive coping skill of avoidance using distraction. Avoidance distraction involves using external items/activities/people to distract oneself from the problem. This is not adaptive because this coping style does not help someone tackle the problem.
- Current depression and anxiety predicted greater use of the maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategy which includes focusing on one's primarily negative emotions instead of facing the problem.
- Unexpectedly, participants with a more severe maltreatment history, and specifically a history of sexual abuse reported improved coping in the past pandemic year, suggesting resilience. This is an intriguing finding that requires further research.
- A mediated pathway was identified from a history of emotional abuse to current depression and anxiety to the use of emotion-focused coping. Mental health support for college students with a maltreatment history may, in turn, improve their ability to cope with daily stressors and shift to more adaptive coping strategies.

Sources



