

The Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Borderline Personality Disorder: The Mediator Effect of Insecure Attachment

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Abstract. Childhood trauma is a major cause of borderline personality disorder. Research shows that most patients diagnosed with borderline personality disorder report unhappy or shadowy childhood experiences in psychological assessments. Attachment may be one of the important mechanisms by which childhood trauma affects borderline personality disorder. Attachment styles have a strong influence on people. People with insecure attachment styles often show distrust of others and extreme language and behaviour. This is also a core symptom of borderline personality disorder. The aim of this study was to investigate whether insecure adult attachment styles mediate borderline personality disorder as a result of childhood trauma. In addition, a secure attachment style may have a positive effect on alleviating or even treating Borderline Personality Disorder. This study will investigate this aspect. It is hoped that this research will advance researchers' understanding of the impact of childhood trauma on Borderline Personality Disorder and its mechanisms, and provide theoretical and empirical support for interventions aimed at reducing Borderline Personality Disorder caused by childhood trauma.

Keywords: Childhood trauma; insecure attachment; borderline personality disorder.

1. Introduction

Childhood trauma (including abuse, neglect, etc.) is very common in today's society [1]. As a long-term, hard-to-heal negative experience, childhood trauma can have a negative impact on a person's development. have lasting effects. The most common are abuse and neglect. Abuse includes physical and psychological abuse. It refers to adults expressing or venting their emotions to children in a rough or overly direct way, or even demanding unconditional obedience from children. If they are unhappy with their children, they will not try to communicate in a normal way, but will use insults or even beatings to force the children to get the results they want.

Of the many types of child maltreatment, neglect is the most common. Research suggests that neglected children make up about 60% of all abused children [2]. Although parental neglect is usually seen as the result of children's rebellious psychology and excessive demands, neglect is ultimately a form of parenting. It refers to the low level of parental responsiveness to their children's material and emotional needs, which can lead to alienation in the child-parent relationship. Children who have experienced childhood neglect may long for closeness to others but may not trust others. They often display behaviours that reject others. Neglect causes more psychological trauma in the child, which is difficult to heal. This study explores the impact of childhood trauma on borderline personality disorder and the role of attachment in this relationship.

2. The Effects of Childhood Trauma on Borderline Personality Disorder

A number of studies have shown that childhood maltreatment is strongly associated with borderline personality disorder. Zanarini et al. study [3] showed that patients diagnosed with borderline personality disorder who had not been emotionally or physically abused in childhood, including those who had not witnessed traumatic behaviours, had better symptom indicators in the clinic. In addition, individuals who find it difficult to fully express their early feelings and who often suffer neglect or intolerance from others are also likely to become potential patients with BPD.

In addition to direct violence, neglect of children is considered by most to be a form of childhood trauma. Neglect is seen as a form of psychological abuse. Widom et al. [4] reported in their 2014 study that childhood experiences of neglect partially mediate symptoms assessed as BPD in adulthood. Martin-Blanco et al. [5] investigated the relationship between psychological abuse and BPD. More than 100 BPD patients were asked to self-report their childhood trauma history and BPD symptoms. Studies have shown that patients who were abused in childhood have some loss of normal social skills and that the two are negatively correlated. In addition, patients who have been emotionally abused in childhood may develop high levels of anxiety, which can lead to more severe BPD symptoms.

In an environment where children cannot learn to express their feelings and needs appropriately, they have difficulty controlling their emotions and are prone to becoming extreme. These are the core symptoms of BPD [6]. If children have been abused or neglected for a long time, they must be in such a repressive environment. Research shows that prolonged high-pressure environments have a certain effect on children's central nervous systems. Childhood is a time when neural formation is extremely vulnerable. Traumatic events such as abuse can damage a child's nervous system. In severe cases, symptoms such as endocrine dysfunction and overreaction occur. These can become potential factors in triggering BPD.

3. The Mediator Effect of Insecure Attachment

3.1. The Effect of Trauma on Attachment

Attachment style refers to whether a person has the confidence and ability to form close relationships with other people. It has to do with self-agency. In the PDM-2, attachment and personal agency are a very important aspect of testing people's mental functioning. In general, people with insecure attachment have lower levels of personal agency (conversely, people with secure attachment have higher levels of personal agency). Avoidant attachment refers to one's avoidance of some form of closeness to others and willingness to be dependent on others. It manifests itself in low self-esteem. They crave the approval of others, but distrust them. Fearing rejection by others, they ultimately avoid close relationships with others [7]. Anxious attachment is less severe than avoidant attachment, but it is also an insecure attachment style. People with anxious attachment will feel uneasy and anxious about close relationships, and they will always need to confirm the stability of the relationship, sometimes appearing suspicious and anxious. People with anxious attachment also have difficulty forming long-term intimate relationships.

Childhood experiences are important factors in the development of different attachment styles. Styron et al. study [8] proposed that subjects who experienced childhood abuse reported less secure intimate relationships. Sometimes they can't control their emotions. Attachment patterns formed early in life may influence the long-term effects of childhood abuse, but abused individuals may also use impulsive behavioural patterns in interpersonal interactions. Briere et al. study [9] suggest that both physical and psychological child abuse is strongly associated with the development of insecure attachment styles in childhood. Adult attachment styles develop from childhood attachment styles and are generally more secure. So, childhood abuse can affect adult attachment styles. In 1983, Maccoby and Martin proposed 'disengaged parenting' (DP). It refers to a state of neglect by adults towards children for whom they are responsible. They found that children who grew up in such neglected environments were more likely to develop insecure attachment styles. In addition, DP can also lead to a higher risk of child abuse. But in general, childhood abuse and neglect are important factors in the formation of insecure attachments.

3.2. The Effect of Attachment on Borderline Personality Disorder

By inviting participants to use Borderline Personality Disorder Screening Tool (MSI-BPD), Mental Health Control Point Scale (MH-LOC) [10] and other assessment methods, Hashworth and Reis et al. collected data from a sample of several hundred online forums and found that people with BPD reported higher levels of fear-based attachment and lower levels of personal agency [11].

In addition, attachment affects BPD through several mechanisms. Peter [12] proposed in 2000 that people who have experienced early trauma develop a defensive attachment style that inhibits the child's psychological ability to resist the perpetrator's violent behaviour or wishes. This type of attachment style that inhibits the child is an important feature of severe borderline personality disorder, the researchers pointed out. Many clinical symptoms of borderline personality disorder (such as emotional instability, insecurity, etc.) may be caused by insecure attachment styles. For people with insecure attachment styles, normal separation in a close relationship may also be seen as betrayal or abandonment, and closeness and intimate knowledge may be seen as an invasion of private territory. Most people with BPD show such clinical symptoms, and most report insecure attachment styles [13].

3.3. The Mediating Role of Attachment

Researchers conducted a study to determine the potential mediating effects of different attachment styles between early childhood experiences and the development of BPD-related dysfunction. The researchers recruited a cohort of patients who had previously been diagnosed with BPD. These participants were administered a battery of questionnaires designed to assess key aspects of their psychological profile. These included the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R) [14], which assesses adult attachment styles; the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire Brief Form (CTQ) [15,16,17], which assesses potentially traumatic childhood experiences; and the Dysfunctional Personality Pathology Dimension Assessment Questionnaire (DAP-BQ), which measures general personality dysfunction. The methodology of the study involved an extensive data collection process followed by a rigorous analysis phase. The results indicated a significant relationship between attachment anxiety and the manifestation of specific BPD symptoms. Specifically, the findings suggested that individuals who experienced physical and emotional abuse in childhood were more likely to develop an anxious attachment style. This style is characterized by emotional dysregulation, a hallmark of BPD [18,19]. The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that attachment styles, particularly those formed in response to childhood trauma, may play a central role in the development and expression of BPD symptoms. This research contributes to the growing body of literature highlighting the importance of early life experiences in shaping long-term mental health, and provides a basis for further investigation into the mechanisms linking attachment and BPD [20].

In conclusion, researchers provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between childhood experiences, attachment styles and the development of BPD. It highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the disorder and provides a basis for the development of targeted therapeutic interventions aimed at addressing the underlying issues associated with BPD.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the research underscores the profound impact of childhood trauma on the development of borderline personality disorder (BPD). It highlights how experiences of abuse and neglect can lead to the formation of insecure attachment styles, which in turn are significantly correlated with the core symptoms of BPD, such as emotional dysregulation and interpersonal difficulties. The findings that attachment insecurity mediates the relationship between childhood trauma and BPD symptoms suggest that therapeutic interventions focusing on attachment styles may be beneficial in the treatment of BPD. Furthermore, the findings call for a deeper understanding of the role of insecure attachment in the trajectory from childhood trauma to BPD, and highlight the need for early intervention and support to mitigate the long-term psychological effects of adverse childhood experiences.

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