The Effects of Child Neglect on Early Adulthood Depressive Symptoms

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Research Questions
• Does experiencing neglect as a child increase the chance of individuals experiencing depressive symptoms as young adults?
• Are men and women affected differently by childhood neglect?

Significance
• The rates of child neglect grew dramatically between the years of 1976 and 1992 (Finkelhor, n.d.).
• Depression is an epidemic: The rate of depression among young adults had increased greatly from 1998 to 2017 (“Young Adult Depression,” 2018).

Background
• Childhood neglect strongly predicts poor psychiatric and physical health outcomes in adulthood, including depression (Arnow, 2004).
• Child neglect may be a marker of other family problems; it often co-occurs within the context of other family dysfunction, social deprivation, and other environmental stressors (Norman, 2012).
• Families with lower socioeconomic status have higher rates of child neglect, including care neglect due to inadequate food or medical provision (Mcleigh, 2018).

Hypothesis
• Those who experienced child neglect have more depressive symptoms than those who were not neglected.
• Both males and females who were neglected as children have significantly more depressive symptoms than those who were not.

Data and Sample
• The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health
• Research began: 1994-95; respondents were 12 to 17 years old
• Wave 3 in 2001-02; respondents were between 18 and 26 years old
• Public access (N=4,882)

Dependent Measures
Depressive Symptoms: Experienced by 12.5%
• The sum of 7 questions: In the past week, how often respondents (a) were bothered by things; (b) could not shake the blues; (c) had trouble focusing; (d) were depressed; (e) were too tired to do things; (f) were sad; (g) felt that people disliked them. (0 = never or rarely, 1 = sometimes, 2 = a lot of the time, 3 = most of the time or all of the time)
• Dichotomized: total score of 0 – 6 = No depressive symptoms; 7 or more = Depressive symptoms

Independent Measure
Child Neglect: Experienced by 10.5%
• “How often had your parents or other adult care-givers not taken care of your basic needs, such as keeping you clean or providing food or clothing?” (1 - one time, 2 - two times, 3 - three to five times, 4 - six to ten times, 5 - more than ten times, 6 - never happened)
• Dichotomized: 1 – 5 = Neglected, 6 = Not Neglected

Control Measure
Gender of Participants:
- Male: 54%
- Female: 46%

Analytical Plan
Cross tabulation and Chi-square test on SPSS was used to analyze my data

Results
FIGURE 1. % DISTRIBUTION OF DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS OF ALL RESPONDENTS BY NEGLECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neglected</th>
<th>Not Neglected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically Significant p = .000

FIGURE 2. % DISTRIBUTION OF DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG MEN AND WOMEN BY NEGLECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neglected</th>
<th>Not Neglected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women:</td>
<td>Men:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The differences by neglect are significant at p < .001 for women and at p = .001 for men.

Summary of Findings
• Both men and women who were neglected as children had more depressive symptoms than those who were not neglected.
• These results suggest that experiencing neglect as a child is positively related to one’s depressive symptoms into early adulthood.
• My hypothesis was supported.

Implications
• Child neglect is an important risk factor for depression in adulthood; strategies for preventing child maltreatment are needed.
• Research that examines the individual, family, community, and social factors that influence neglect improve understanding of the causes and should be supported.

References