



# EFFECT OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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**Abstract:** The goal of this study was to investigate how childhood trauma affects the interactions between male and female young adults, to assess the variations in the severity of childhood trauma in young adults of both sexes, and to determine how gender affects the quality of interpersonal connections amongst young people of both sexes. The findings of the study indicate there were no significant differences in childhood trauma and interpersonal relationships among male young adults and female young adults and there were no significant gender differences on the level of childhood trauma as well as interpersonal relationships among male young adults and female young adults. There were several limitations to the study which are discussed. Further research must be carried out to better understand the effect of childhood trauma on interpersonal relationships among young adults.

**Keywords:** *childhood trauma, interpersonal relationships, young adults, male young adults, female young adults*

## I. INTRODUCTION

A single event or several events that a child experiences or witnesses and which "overwhelm the child's capacity to cope and elicit a sense of panic, helplessness, and acute vulnerability" are referred to as childhood trauma (Spinazzola et al., 2014). A psychological reaction to one or more childhood incidents that involves real or imminent death, serious injury, or a harm to one's own or others' physical well-being and that strongly evoked feelings of panic, dread, or despair (van der Kolk, 2005).

Trauma events can interfere with psychological, neurobiological, relational, and cognitive development, particularly if they start early, last a long time, lack quick solace, and/or involve the caregiving system (Cook et al., 2005). Children who have experienced trauma frequently display apparent inappropriate and problematic conduct (Cook et al., 2005).

There are different types of childhood trauma including maltreatment such as physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse, neglect such as physical and emotional neglect, challenging domestic environments, challenging social environments, loss of a beloved individual, natural disasters, serious illness, and mishaps.

Huh, Kim, Yu, et al. (2014) did a study to evaluate how adult interpersonal issues in patients with anxiety and depressive disorders are related to childhood trauma. Physical abuse, emotional neglect, emotional assault, neglect of physical needs, and sexual abuse are the five categories of childhood trauma that the (CTQ) measures, were compared to the adult interpersonal problems measured by the Korean-Inventory of Interpersonal Problems short form (KIIP-SC). The results showed that whereas emotional assault, neglect of emotional needs, and sexual abuse did show a substantial connection with interpersonal distress in adulthood. In people with depression and anxiety disorders, childhood emotional trauma had a more significant impact on interpersonal problems as adults

than did childhood physical trauma. Physically abused people tended to have dominating interpersonal patterns as adults, whereas emotionally abused people tended to have submissive interpersonal behaviours. These results suggest that adult interpersonal problems are significantly influenced by childhood trauma.

The foundation of much of the psychological literature on trauma has been from the psychoanalytic perspective (Garland, 1998; Van der Kolk, 1987). According to the historical perspective on trauma, there have been intense debates concerning the etiology of trauma ever since psychiatry began treating traumatised patients. Is it psychological or organic? Is trauma brought on by the actual experience or by how we choose to interpret it? Or could it be brought on by existing vulnerabilities? Patients who have experienced trauma may either be malingerers or morally weak people who lose their ability to make decisions for themselves (Van der Kolk, Weisaeth & Van der Hart, 1996).

A tight, personal bond between two or more people is referred to as an interpersonal relationship. Strong ties develop in these interactions as a result of the emergence of mutual attraction. There are many different kinds of interpersonal interactions, including friendships, romantic partnerships, ties to one's family, and connections at work. Since they are based on principles of fidelity, loyalty, and trust, they give us support, compassion, and love. The people in our lives have a huge impact on crucial facets of our personalities and values from a young age, and these interactions play a significant role in forming our identity. Our feeling of direction and purpose is influenced by them. Furthermore, our mental and physical health are significantly impacted by our interpersonal relationships. Relationships and emotional well-being are connected, emphasising how crucial it is to surround ourselves with people who make us feel joyful, strong, and comfortable (Klein, 2020).

Family, sexual connections, friendships, professional partnerships, and community relationships are just a few examples of the various kinds of interpersonal interactions that exist.

The objective of Vandevender's (2014) study was to determine whether gender disparities develop and how early abuse and neglect affect later intrapersonal functioning and interpersonal relations. 120 undergraduate students from the University of South Carolina in Aiken made up the sample. According to the findings, those who have been maltreated have a tendency to establish relationships less frequently and to act with less autonomy once they have them. There were gender inequalities, and males who had been mistreated reported receiving less emotional assistance. The self-esteem of people who had suffered abuse was similarly lower than that of those who had not. The study offers proof that abuse suffered as a kid affects adult interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning.

### **Relationship of Childhood Trauma with Interpersonal Relationships Among Young Adults Attachment Style**

The manner that young adults build attachments with others might be impacted by childhood trauma. They might adopt an uneasy attachment style, which can make it challenging for them to articulate their needs clearly, feel secure in relationships, and trust people (Fraley, 2010). Research has indicated that traumatic experiences throughout childhood can result in avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachment behaviours as adults (Liotti, 2004; Riggs, Paulson, & Tunnell, 2011).

### **Trust Issues**

Especially if the trauma was brought on by a close family member, young adults who have undergone childhood trauma may find it difficult to trust others. Due to this, it may be difficult for individuals to establish and sustain healthy boundaries in their relationships (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2016). According to research, those who experienced childhood trauma are more prone to harbour mistrust in interpersonal relationships and to have low levels of trust in others (Briere & Scott, 2015).

### **Emotional Regulation**

A young adult's capacity to control their emotions might be impacted by childhood trauma, which can cause mood swings, strong reactions, and trouble handling stress. It may be difficult to handle the ups and downs of relationships and properly communicate with partners as a result (Cloitre et al., 2010). According to studies, those who experienced childhood trauma are more likely to struggle with emotion management and display impulsive and unhelpful actions in their relationships (Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth, 2006; Kimonis, Frick, Munoz, & Aucoin, 2008).

## Intimacy Issues

The ability of a young adult to feel secure and at ease in intimate situations can also be impacted by childhood trauma. They could find it difficult to be physically or emotionally vulnerable in relationships, which makes it difficult to engage in sexual intimacy and feel a strong emotional connection (Shearer, 2004). According to research, those who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely to struggle with sexual intimacy, including arousal issues, sexual dysfunction, and diminished sexual desire (Classen, Paresh, & Aggarwal, 2005; Lindert et al., 2014).

## Communication

Young adults who experienced childhood trauma may find it challenging to express their needs and emotions in romantic relationships. They may find it difficult to communicate clearly or dread showing their true selves to others, which can result in miscommunication and conflict (Hesse & Main, 1999). According to studies, those who have gone through childhood trauma are more likely to have communication issues, as well as conflict and misunderstandings in their relationships (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Raby, Roisman, Fraley, & Simpson, 2015).

## Gender Differences

Bendall et al. (2013) conducted a study which aimed to look at the gender differences and psychotic-like experiences. Males were more likely to report physical abuse than females, according to the study's findings, which had 1332 individuals with a mean age of 25.7 years. Additionally, the study discovered that childhood trauma was more strongly linked to an elevated risk of psychotic-like experiences in girls than in males.

Roy et al.s (2019) conducted a study on gender differences in the association between childhood trauma and ADHD symptoms in adulthood which looked at gender differences in childhood trauma. In the study, a total of 1066 individuals participated, with an average age of 27.7 years. The results indicated that women were more inclined to report instances of emotional abuse and neglect, while men were more prone to disclose incidents of physical abuse. The study also discovered that adult ADHD symptoms were more likely to be linked to childhood trauma in women than in men, but the relationship was greater in women.

According to Lissak (2018), there are gender disparities in the link between childhood maltreatment and adult obesity. The results of the study, which had 1214 participants and a mean age of 42 years, showed that childhood abuse was linked to a higher risk of obesity in both men and women, albeit the connection was stronger in women.

Svirsky et al. (2020) did a study on the gender variations in the link between emotional maltreatment in childhood and adult ADHD symptoms. It involved 522 people (mean age 33 years), and the findings revealed that both males and girls who experienced emotional abuse as children had an increased risk of developing ADHD symptoms, but the association was stronger for females.

These studies collectively imply that there are gender disparities in the kinds of childhood trauma experienced and the results of these experiences in terms of mental health.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### Aims

The current study's objective is to evaluate how childhood trauma affects young adults' interpersonal interactions.

### Objectives

The following are the goals of the current study:

1. to investigate how childhood trauma affects the interactions between male and female young adults.
2. to assess the variations in the severity of childhood trauma in young adults of both sexes.
3. to determine how gender affects the quality of interpersonal connections amongst young people of both sexes.

### Hypotheses

1. Childhood maltreatment and interpersonal interactions among male young adults will be strongly associated.

2. Childhood maltreatment and interpersonal interactions among female young adults will be significantly associated.
3. There will be significant gender differences on the level of childhood trauma among male and female young adults.
4. There will be significant differences on the level of interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults.

## Sample

The sample comprises 60 young adults, ages 18 to 25, including 30 males and 30 girls. The sample consisted of young adults who are located in the Delhi NCR region. The samples were selected using a random sampling method. The study aimed at recruiting young adults ages 18-25 to look at the effects of childhood trauma on young adults.

## Tools Used

### *Childhood Trauma Questionnaire*

The (CTQ) is a self-report measure developed to assess a wide range of traumatic childhood experiences in a quick, accurate, and valid manner. It addresses physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in childhood, as well as physical and emotional neglect, as well as other components of the child-rearing environment. The CTQ is appropriate for both adults and adolescents, and it includes 70 items separated into four categories: emotional neglect, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and physical and emotional abuse. Based on the frequency of their encounters, participants evaluate their responses on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("never true") to 5 ("very often true"). The questionnaire can be completed individually or in groups and takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. With a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .95 for the overall scale, the CTQ has a high internal consistency. Furthermore, it has strong test-retest reliability, with an intraclass correlation value of .88 for the entire scale in a subset of 40 participants across a 2- to 8-month period.

### *FIAT-Q-SF Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaire*

The FIAT-Q-SF is a self-report questionnaire with 32 questions. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with statements on interpersonal interactions using a number scale. The scale runs from 3 (Strongly Disagree) to 1 (Mildly Agree), with multiple degrees of disagreement or agreement available. The questionnaire produces an overall total score as well as five subscale scores relating to various FIAT Classes. A higher questionnaire score suggests the presence of interpersonal functioning difficulties. The absolute value of the response is used to score four items, while the remaining 31 items are reverse-scored, so that a response of 2 (Moderately Agree) receives a score of 2.

## Procedure

The study was conducted in the Delhi NCR region. Prior to their involvement in the study, participants were given detailed information about the research. Once written informed consent was obtained, participants completed the questionnaires independently. Eligibility criteria for participation included being aged between 18 and 35 and having a history of childhood trauma. The study procedure involved participants completing a demographic questionnaire, followed by the CTQ-SF and the FIAT-Q-SF questionnaires.

## Statistical Evaluation

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. Independent t-tests were carried out to discern whether there would be gender differences on the level of childhood trauma among male and female young adults and vice versa. Correlation was also carried out to discern whether childhood trauma would significantly predict interpersonal relationships among male young adults and female young adults. At  $p = 0.05$ , two-tailed significance was assigned to all results.

**III. RESULTS***Table 1. Correlation between childhood trauma and interpersonal relationships among male young adults.***Correlations**

		fctq	mctq
fctq	Pearson Correlation	1	-.035
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.427
	N	30	30
mctq	Pearson Correlation	-.035	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.427	
	N	30	30

*Table 2. Correlation between childhood trauma and interpersonal relationships among female young adults.***Correlations**

		fipr	mipr
fipr	Pearson Correlation	1	.005
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.490
	N	30	30
mipr	Pearson Correlation	.005	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.490	
	N	30	30

*Table 3.1 Mean and standard deviation of childhood trauma among male and female young adults*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
fctq	30	54.8000	16.51624	3.01544
mctq	30	46.9333	7.04632	1.28648

*Table 3.2 T-test results of relationship between childhood trauma among male and female young adults  
95% confidence interval of the difference*

	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
fctq	18.173	29	.000	54.8000	48.6327	60.9673
mctq	36.482	29	.000	46.9333	44.3022	49.5645

*Table 4.1 Mean and standard deviation of interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults.*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
fipr	30	101.5000	19.39739	3.54146
mipr	30	96.5333	14.63282	2.67158

*Table 4.2 T-test results of relationship between interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults  
95% confidence interval of the difference*

	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
fipr	28.660	29	.000	101.5000	94.2569	108.7431
mipr	36.133	29	.000	96.5333	91.0693	101.9973

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The goal was to assess childhood maltreatment on interpersonal relationships among young adults. Hypothesis 1 examined that childhood trauma will significantly predict interpersonal relationships among male young adults. As can be inferred from Table 1, it can be said that at t value, the variables are not significant at  $p < 0.05$ . As a result, there is not a statistically significant distinction between the variables.

Paradis and Boucher (2015) carried out a research investigation on a representative group of 1,728 college students who completed an online survey to investigate the relationship between interpersonal difficulties in adult partner relationships and childhood maltreatment. Interpersonal problems in partnerships were more common among abuse victims. Furthermore, males are more closely associated with couple interpersonal troubles than females when they have experienced childhood maltreatment. Emotional abandonment in females is more usually associated with interpersonal concerns in marriages, such as aloofness, nonaggression, and self-sacrifice. Physical abuse is highly linked to a male's proclivity to be domineering, distant, and self-sacrificing.

Majority of studies have been conducted on romantic relationships which studied gender differences among males and females. This study, on the other hand, looks at interpersonal relationships of males and females in young adulthood. It is noteworthy for future researchers to study the effect of childhood trauma on interpersonal relationships among male young adults.

Hypothesis 2 examined that childhood trauma will significantly predict interpersonal relationships among female young adults. As can be inferred from Table 2, it can be said that at t value, the variables have a positive weak correlation at  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, there is no significant difference between the variables.

Fitzgerald, Ledermann, Grzywacz et al. (2020) conducted a study which looked at whether depressed symptoms, a mediator of childhood maltreatment, are linked to both good and bad qualities of romantic relationships. Data from 544 women who participated in the Longitudinal Study of Childhood Abuse and Neglect were analysed using structural equation modelling. According to the results, women's depressive symptoms had a strong indirect impact on both good and bad relationship quality. Childhood abuse had a stronger detrimental impact on relationships than it did a favourable one. Depressive symptoms as a result of childhood abuse may also have an adverse effect on women's love relationships, according to the study.

Although there was a weak positive correlation between the variables, it isn't enough to validate that there is a relationship between the variables. However, previous research has indicated that childhood trauma affects females' romantic relationships. This study, however, looked at interpersonal relationships among female young adults.

Hypothesis 3 examined that there will be significant gender differences on the level of childhood trauma among male and female young adults. As can be inferred from Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, there are no significant gender differences on the level of childhood trauma among male and female young adults.

Thomas, Rossell and Gurvich (2022) conducted a study which aimed to investigate gender variations in the relationship between schizotypy, negative emotions, and early trauma. 33 men and 28 women, ages 18 to 45, who were not clinical patients in the study completed questionnaires to assess early life trauma, schizotypy, and negative emotions. Women who experienced early life trauma were found to have higher schizotypy personality features, notably cognitive disorganisation, and were also more susceptible to depression, anxiety, and stress later in life, even though men and women had identical amounts of childhood trauma. In contrast, there were no such associations in men. According to the study, there may be a gender difference in how early life adversity affects people. Women may be more susceptible to the effects of childhood trauma, which could raise adult psychopathology.

Prussner, King, Vracotas et al. (2019) conducted a study which looked at how gender differed in how childhood trauma (CT) affected individuals who were experiencing their first psychotic episode. The study included 210 patients (144 men and 66 women), and the findings revealed that whereas female patients reported higher rates of emotional abuse, male patients reported more physical or emotional neglect. In men and women, severe CT was linked to negative symptoms and higher levels of depression in women. Emotional abuse was the most potent predictor of depression in both sexes, and CT had a more significant effect on long-term outcomes in male patients. The results lend credence to the idea that gender differences in susceptibility to stress may be responsible for the comparatively short illness duration in male psychosis patients.

Although various studies show that men and women are affected differently due to childhood trauma, the same was not replicated in this study. There could be various reasons for the same, for instance, it could be said that the many individuals who had undergone childhood trauma may have repressed their memories of the same or they may have classified such memories as mundane or even not traumatic for them. However, all of these are hypotheses and further investigations should be conducted to find out whether the same is true or not.

Hypothesis 4 examined that there will be significant differences on the level of interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults. As can be inferred from Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, there are no significant gender differences on the level of interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults.

Ariyani and Hadiani (2019) conducted a study to examine the variations in interpersonal communication between male and female students as well as the effects of gender. 88 students (66 men and 22 women) from a state polytechnic in Bandung, Indonesia, served as the subjects, and a descriptive methodology was used. Data on interpersonal communication and gender were gathered for the study. According to the results, male students performed marginally better in interpersonal communication than female students. Additionally, there were notable discrepancies between male and female students in the key elements of interpersonal communication. Male students showed a higher capacity to communicate honestly, with empathy, support, and a positive attitude, but female students were found to be more dominating in establishing comfortable dialogue by portraying themselves as equals.

An interpersonal relationship, often known as a social bond between two or more people, is a social attachment. Their degree of closeness, honesty, length, mutuality, and power dynamics varied. Despite previous literature stating that there are gender differences in interpersonal relationships among males and females, the present study failed to find a significant difference between the two. This could be due to the number of sample that was collected, the population that was chosen, or even the age range. There could also be problems with the

scale that was employed due to which individuals may have given socially favourable answers. Further study using multiple scales is needed to see whether there is a substantial difference in interpersonal connections between male and female young people.

## V. LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to the study. Data that was collected cannot be generalised to the community as it was collected in one specific region only, that is, Delhi NCR. Another limitation is that the self report measures that were employed do not always give accurate information. Individuals may have given answers that were socially favourable and may have down played their childhood trauma, if they had experienced any. Gender is a social construct which varies from society to society and individual to individual. The study did not take into account other genders, that is, non-binary people. Therefore, it isn't inclusive of all genders.

Despite its limitations, this study is an essential attempt to establish the impact of childhood trauma on interpersonal interactions in male and female young adults.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The goal was to assess the effect of childhood maltreatment on interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults. The findings found that there were no significant differences in childhood trauma and interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults; it can be helpful for future researchers to investigate the same using different scales of measurement to assess interpersonal relationships.

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