ABSTRACT

Self-Esteem as a Predictor of Post-Traumatic Growth and Adaptation among Maltreated Adolescents

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Child maltreatment, including neglect and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, affects 12% of American children each year (Wildeman, Emanal, Leventhal, Putnam-Hornstein, Waldfogel, & Lee, 2014). Maltreatment can be devastating to an individual’s development and is associated with considerable negative psychological sequelae, including high rates of depression and problem behaviors, impaired peer relationships, and low self-esteem (e.g., Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998; Cicchetti & Carlson, 1989; Kim & Cicchetti, 2006; Swanston, Tebbutt, O'Toole, & Oates, 1997; Toth, Manly, & Cicchetti, 1992). However, despite a historic emphasis on the negative effects of trauma, not all children experience traumatic reactions (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997) and even among those who do, positive adaptation may occur simultaneously. The concept of posttraumatic growth (PTG) captures this phenomenon, describing the positive adaptation that can occur in the aftermath of tragedy. In this study, PTG was conceptualized as positive change in social competence and cognitive functioning. By weaving together the self-esteem, trauma, and adaptation literatures and examining these constructs simultaneously, this study explores the unique relationship between maltreatment and self-esteem among adolescents and considers means of facilitating and promoting adaptation and growth within this population.
Results: Results of a public use dataset, Longitudinal Pathways to Resilience in Maltreated Children, were examined through hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses to explore the presence of PTG among maltreated adolescents as compared to nonmaltreated adolescents. No significant results were found. A factor analysis was then conducted to identify a subgroup of maltreated adolescents who had experienced PTG and to note the characteristics that differentiate the PTG group from the non-PTG group. No significant characteristics were identified. Lastly, a regression analysis was conducted to consider the role of self-esteem as a predictor of the relationship between maltreatment and posttraumatic growth. The results of this analysis were not significant. Various explanations for these nonsignificant results are proposed.

Keywords: maltreatment, child abuse, adolescence, posttraumatic growth, self-esteem

References


