

ABSTRACT

Childhood Neglect and Risk of Revictimization by an Intimate Partner: A Prospective Investigation of Mediational Pathways

by

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Childhood maltreatment increases risk of revictimization in adulthood, although knowledge is limited. Very few studies focus on children with histories of neglect or include males. In addition, while some studies have begun to examine potential pathways from childhood victimization to adult revictimization, there is heavy reliance on data from cross-sectional or short-term longitudinal studies. This dissertation examines data from a large prospective cohort design study to examine potential mediators between childhood neglect and revictimization by an intimate partner in adulthood. Children with official records of neglect experienced before age 12 and non-maltreated children matched on the basis of age, sex, race, and approximate family social class were identified using court records from a Midwestern jurisdiction of cases that were processed between 1967 and 1971. The sample is approximately half male and half female and is approximately 60% White non-Hispanic and 40% Black and/or Hispanic. Participants were interviewed at mean ages 29.2 (N = 1,196) and 39.5 (N = 896). Potential mediators, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), dissociation, self-esteem, avoidant coping style, and locus of control, were assessed at mean age 29.2. The outcome variable – revictimization via intimate partner violence -- was measured at mean age 39.5.

Childhood neglected increased risk of being revictimized by an intimate partner through coercive control and serious injuries. Avoidant coping in young adulthood was the only risk factor examined that mediated risk of revictimization by both coercive control revictimization and serious injuries. Symptoms of PTSD and low self-esteem in young adulthood also partially mediated the relationship between childhood neglect and coercive control revictimization. For women, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and use of avoidant coping in young adulthood predicted coercive control revictimization, while only avoidant coping predicted coercive control revictimization for men. For men, PTSD predicted being seriously injured by an intimate partner, while none of the potential mediators were significant predictors of serious injuries for women. For White individuals, neglect indirectly predicted coercive control revictimization through its effect on PTSD symptoms, dissociation, use of avoidant coping, and low self-efficacy. For Black individuals, dissociation increased risk of revictimization through serious injuries. Clinical implications for treatment of survivors of childhood neglect and future research directions are discussed.