The role of childhood trauma, early maladaptive schemas, emotional schemas and experimental avoidance on depression: A structural equation modeling

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation was designed to examine disconnection and rejection (DR) schemas, negative emotional schemas (NESs) and experimental avoidance (EA) as mediating variables of the relationship between the childhood trauma (CT) and depression. Specifically we examined the mediating role of NESs and EA between DR schemas and depression. The study sample consisted of 439 female college students (M age=22.47; SD=6.0), of whom 88 met the criteria for current major depressive disorder (MDD) and 351 who had history of MDD in the last 12 months. Subjects were assessed by Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV (SCID) and completed the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), the Early Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire (SQ-SF), the Leahy Emotional Schemas Scale (LESS), the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II), and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). The findings showed that DR schemas were mediator of the relationship CT and depression but CT through the NESs and EA did not predict depression. NESs were mediator of the relationship between DR schemas and depression and EA was mediator of the relationship between DR schemas and depression. In general, results suggest that intervention of depressed women may need to target the changing of DR schemas, NESs and reduction of EA.

1. Introduction

Cognitive model (Beck, 1983) of depression shows that negative cognitive styles work as key vulnerability factors for depression, especially when interacting with early adverse relational experiences. Cognitive therapy model (Beck, 1983) and schema theory (Young et al., 2003) are two of the most important models to explain the development and sustenance of psychopathology including depression. According to cognitive therapy, the key vulnerability factor to depression are negative core beliefs, or “schemas” about the world, the self, and the future (Beck, 1983).

Young et al. (2003) identified a variety of early maladaptive schemas that are hypothesized to underlie several psychological disorder, including depression by integrating the Beck's cognitive model (1983) and others (e.g., Bowlby, 1980). According to schema therapy (Young et al., 2003), abused children are at risk for developing early maladaptive schemas. More specifically, early maladaptive schemas arise when psychological needs (e.g., freedom to express valid needs and emotions, autonomy, secure attachment) are not met. Therefore, early maladaptive schemas act as pattern for information processing which affect an individual’s emotional response to life events (Doxois et al., 2009).

In cross-sectional studies, early trauma (abuse and neglect) have been found to be predictors of adulthood depressive disorder (Schulz et al., 2014; Suzukia et al., 2014; Agorastos et al., 2014; Pompili et al., 2014). For example Comijs et al. (2013) revealed that individuals who experienced early trauma have greater tendency to be diagnosed with major depressive disorder. Demirci et al. (2016) established positive correlations between the type D personality and depression, emotional neglect, physical neglect, and emotional abuse in university students. In fact, some studies revealed that childhood trauma can predict depression directly (Kounou et al., 2013; Michopoulos et al., 2015; Miron and Orcutt, 2014) and indirectly, through early maladaptive schemas (EMSs; Calvete et al., 2013), emotional schemas (ESs; Leahy, 2013), and experimental avoidance (EA; Bell and Higgins, 2015). However, none of the mentioned studies considered these variables consistently in a structural equation model. The first objective of this study was to test early maladaptive schemas, negative emotional schemas and experimental avoidance as mediators of childhood trauma on depressive symptoms. Therefore, in the present study we hypothesized that childhood trauma would contribute to the depressive symptoms through early maladaptive schemas, emotional schemas...