

Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Maladaptive Daydreaming among Adolescents: Moderating role of Trait Mindfulness

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Abstract

The present investigation looked at the effect of trait mindfulness in mediating the relationship between childhood emotional abuse and maladaptive daydreaming in adolescents. A purposive sample of 200 adolescents (100 male and 100 female) from Swabi, age ranges from 13-18 years were selected. Data were collected using Childhood Emotional Maltreatment questionnaire (Clarke, 2015), 16-Item Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (Somer et al., 2016) and Five Facet Mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et al., 2006). The findings demonstrated a positive association between childhood emotional maltreatment and maladaptive daydreaming, but a negative relationship between childhood emotional maltreatment and trait mindfulness. In addition, trait mindfulness acts as a mediator between early emotional maltreatment and maladaptive daydreaming. However, no significant differences in childhood emotional abuse, maladaptive daydreaming, and trait mindfulness were detected across male and female adolescents, school and college students, and in joint and nuclear family systems. The research focused on the protruding importance of child's emotional needs in order to overcome their mental health concerns.

Keywords: Trait Mindfulness, Emotional Maltreatment, Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Introduction

Adolescence has traditionally been associated with increased emotional reactivity and inadequate self-control. WHO (2015) defined adolescence a period of "storm and stress," characterised by parental questioning and conflict, mood upheavals, and irresponsible behaviour (Ciranka et al., 2019). According to various studies, 75% of teens have positive ties with their family (Pringle et al., 2016). Furthermore, Rutter and colleagues (2011) discovered that many of the remaining 25% experienced familial issues previous to the kid entering puberty. Researchers from a variety of disciplines have investigated the impact of parenting on the psychological development of children and teenagers. The parent-child connection has been considered as both salient and volatile during adolescence, as teenagers go through several developmental changes, including a quest for more autonomy and independence, which leads to changes in the parent-child relationship (Ciranka et al., 2019). Individuals who had reasonably excellent relationships with their parents as children had less mental health difficulties than adults who did not have strong relationships with their parents as children (Ciranka et al., 2019).

Childhood emotional maltreatment is defined by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) as a "consistent pattern of care provider behaviour or severe traumatic event(s) which thus impart to children that they really are valueless, blemished, unaccepted, unwelcome, jeopardised, and only of value in having met someone's requirements" (Wekerle et al., 2019). Childhood emotional maltreatment is a largely unexplored kind of abuse, most likely because it is difficult to diagnose and substantiate claims. Many people who are subjected to this type of maltreatment are also subjected to other types of maltreatment that are simpler to prove, which frequently leads to childhood emotional maltreatment being neglected (Wekerle et al., 2019). As a result, it is typically analyzed in the literature of other stressors and maltreatments, rendering determining its distinct influence on outcomes challenging. Childhood emotional maltreatment is present in about half of all confirmed abuse reports, yet it is typically the subject of the inquiry (Taillieu et al., 2016). According to research, childhood emotional maltreatment has a unique function in influencing clinically relevant difficulties during trauma and subsequently in development (Evren et al., 2011; Weiss et al., 2013). Early emotional abuse is associated with a variety of detrimental psychological effects, including maladaptive daydreaming (MD) (Somer & Lowell, 2016).

Maladaptive daydreaming seems to be a disorder-like kind of dissociative absorption that can last for hours and takes up more than half of a patient's waking hours (Bigelsen et al., 2016). Maladaptive daydreaming is the term for prolonged, frequently obsessive fantasy immersion that interferes with functioning in a variety of areas, including academics, interpersonal relationships, and employment (Somer, 2018). Patients with a variety of DSM-

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5 illnesses, such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, and obsessive-compulsive or associated disorders, were shown to have this syndrome (Somer et al., 2017). Children with the natural dissociative capacity can use their innate abilities under persistent pressure or neglect to cause forgetfulness, modifying their identities and speculating about invisible friends or different universes (Somer, 2019). Daydreaming could be the result of childhood mistreatment and, like other dissociative reactions, can be a useful management strategy for removing oneself from these horrific events (Somer et al., 2016). Later studies revealed that childhood trauma is not required for the development of this illness (Biegelisen et al., 2016). Researchers have found, however, that childhood trauma (neglect and abuse) is indeed an independent predictor for maladaptive daydreaming (Somer & Herscu, 2017). As per a recent case study, maladaptive daydreaming is a coping method used to avoid discomfort and pain as well as deal with horrific memories, unpleasant emotions, social ostracization, and isolation (Pietkiewicz et al., 2018).

Child maltreatment is connected with a variety of adverse outcomes, not all survivors suffer severe consequences. Numerous protective variables combine and help certain people be resilient. Mindfulness would be protective element in this cohort, since it has been linked to improve physical and mental health outcomes, even in individuals who had traumatic childhood experiences (Whitaker et al., 2014). Mindfulness may be defined as raising attention to the current moment beyond judgement (Sun et al., 2019). Watching, describing, acting with awareness, non-judgment of subjective experience, and non-reactivity to subjective life are the five characteristics of mindfulness that are frequently emphasised (Sun et al., 2006). As in research, trait mindfulness has been linked to both adaptive and maladaptive aspects. In their normative college and general adult samples, [Goilean](#) et al., (2021) found inverse relationships between dispositional mindfulness and internalised symptoms of psychological distress such as anxiousness, depressed mood, psychopathy, antagonism, lack of impulse control, as well as other indicators. Meta-analyses had found persistent negative relationships among mindfulness indicators and self-esteem, psychoticism, social competence, and positive/negative affect (Randal et al., 2015). Decreased levels of mindfulness have been linked to externalised signs of emotional distress, such as Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire scores, repetitive negative thinking about previous agitated interactions (Peters et al., 2015), and the development of deranged personal attributes (Barlett & Barlett, 2015).

Mindfulness can be viewed as a situational state of mind or a dispositional, trait-like capacity, and increased state mindfulness could result in increased trait mindfulness (Kiken & Gaylord, 2015). As according effective therapies, mindfulness might well be imparted later in life, with concomitant

brain changes (Siegling et al., 2014). Consequently, awareness, either learned (for example, through therapy or meditation exercise) or dispositional, might ensure protection against the negative ramifications of abuse, including mood swings and tension (Goilean et al., 2021). Others with higher amounts of trait mindfulness also exhibit higher optimistic daydreaming, that has been linked to improved psychological outcomes (Siegling et al., 2014). The researchers used mindfulness meditation to shift person's attention towards sensations happening in the present moment for their study on disruptive daydreamers (Somer, 2018).

Theoretical model of the study

Attachment theory.

Bowlby (1973) introduced the attachment theory and defined attachment as "any sort of behaviour that enables an individual to achieve or maintain closeness to another unique and preferred person, typically perceived as tougher and/or smarter" (Fearon et al., 2017). Attachment theory appears to be particularly relevant to Childhood Emotional Maltreatment research since insecure attachment techniques are relatively equivalent to concepts of childhood emotional abuse and childhood emotional neglect, and may lead ideas on future outcomes. Caregiving typified by unexpected or invasive actions, similar to emotionally abusive parenting, puts babies at risk of developing ambivalent attachment techniques characterised by heightened degrees of clinginess, anxiety, and rage during a way to persuade the caregivers (Fearon et al., 2017).

Psychoanalytical approach.

The founders of clinical psychology was fascinated with daydreaming, which they first saw as an attempt to handle deprivation situations and psychological conflicts (Mariani, 2021). Throughout his description of a patient who viewed her maladaptive daydreaming as the departure point for all of her other problems in daily life, such as the apparent lack of attention, the suppression of will, and sleeping problems, Freud's contemporary Pierre Janet tried to offer much more explicit descriptions and theorising about maladaptive daydreaming (Schimmenti et al., 2019). Janet saw maladaptive daydreaming like a type of psychasthenia evidenced by a decrease in mental efficiency and a failure to deal with the intricacies of actual life (Schimmenti et al., 2019).

Janoff-Bulman's Cognitive Appraisal Model.

Janoff-Bulman's theory (1992), also known as the broken assumptions hypothesis, explains a cognitive template or model through which an individual observes the world and makes judgments, similar to other cognitive theories. Janoff-model Bulman's is based on three basic assumptions: the universe is beneficent because I am safe; the planet is impactful or we get what we deserve... good behaviour as well as character

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leads to good outcomes; poor behaviour and character leads to poor consequences; and finally, the self is deserving or I am good and therefore can controlled amounts in my life. As a result, tragic events destroyed one or both of these preconceptions. In the cognitive evaluation paradigm, the world is perceived as nonsensical, chaotic, and disordered (Janoff-Bulman, 2014).

Rationale

Emotional maltreatment is reported roughly twice as commonly as physical or sexual abuse, according to studies, therefore the possible mental health implications of childhood emotional maltreatment are especially important to consider (Chamberland et al., 2011). The majority of maladaptive daydreaming, according to the study, derives from a child's early emotional pain management (Somer, 2014). Negative childhood traumas such as neglect and abuse can lead to this sort of psychopathology (maladaptive daydreaming) (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019). Deep fiction is used by people who engage in maladaptive daydreaming to divert themselves from painful experiences that interfere with important areas of functioning such as study, job, and relationships.

Child emotional maltreatment is connected with a variety of adverse outcomes, not all survivors suffer severe consequences. Numerous protective variables combine and help certain people be resilient. Mindfulness is a protective element and has been linked to improve physical and mental health outcomes (Whitaker et al., 2014). Marchetti et al., (2014) found moderate negative correlation between maladaptive daydreaming and trait mindfulness, while Wisener et al., (2018) in their study on females' emotionally maltreated participants found that participants having trait mindfulness quickly identify emotions and trait mindfulness increases attentional process and executive functioning. However in our current study trait mindfulness will be used as a moderator among childhood emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming and emotional processing.

The literature separately discuss the relationship between childhood maltreatment, trait mindfulness and maladaptive daydreaming. Childhood emotional maltreatment predicts maladaptive daydreaming while according to Whitaker et al., (2014), people having dispositional trait mindfulness be more resilient towards these traumatic childhood experiences, also mindfulness techniques can also be helpful with the individuals who suffers. The current study investigates the function of trait mindfulness as a moderator in the link between childhood emotional abuse and maladaptive daydreaming.

Hypotheses

Following are the hypotheses that are phrased according to the objectives;

H1. There is a negative correlation between childhood emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming and trait mindfulness among

adolescents.

H2. Trait mindfulness work as a moderator between childhood emotional maltreatment andmaladaptive daydreaming among adolescents.

H3. There is a difference between male and female adolescents on childhood emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming, emotional processing and trait mindfulness.

H4. There is a difference between adolescents belonging to nuclear and joint family on childhood emotionalmaltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming, emotional processing and trait mindfulness.

H5. There is a difference between school and college going adolescents on childhood emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming, emotional processing and trait mindfulness.

Method

Research Design and sampling strategy

The research was conducted using a cross-sectional survey approach. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect a sample. The sample of this research was consist of 200 adolescents (n=100 male, n=100 female) from mainstream institutions of Swabi. To control the study's confounding variables inclusion and exclusion criteria were generated. Only those Participants have been selected who had age range of 13-18 years, 8th grade and higher reading ability and having total score above on cutoff scores (i.e, 30) on Childhood Emotional Maltreatment questionnaires. Participants having lower than 8th grade reading level, below age 13 and above age 18, history of brain injury, neurological or movement disorders ware excluded from the study.

Assessment tools

A demographic questionnaire was used to examine the study factors, which included age, gender, education, family type (Nuclear, Joint), city, and history of various disorders. Along with that, Childhood Emotional Maltreatment questionnaire, The 16-Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale and the Emotional Processing scale were used.

Childhood emotional maltreatment questionnaire (CEM).

CEM is a Likert scale item with a 5 point range ranging from 1 to 5. Clarke created the CEM, a 14-item self-report measure, in 2015. It has shown a high level of internal consistency and validity ($\alpha = .84$) (Clarke, 2015). Cut-off scores of the scale is 30.

The 16-Item Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale.

Somer et al. developed the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) (2016). The MDS-16 is a 16-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure MD. A 16-item maladaptive daydreaming measure replaces the preceding 14-item maladaptive daydreaming scale. The scale varied from 0% to 100%, with 10% intervals, and it displayed good internal consistency and temporal

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stability (test-retest reliability, $r = 0.92$). A cut-off score of 60% can accurately distinguish between excessive and typical daydreamers.

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006).

It assesses mindfulness in terms of daily thoughts, sensations, and behaviours. It is a multifaceted measure of trait mindfulness that is examined using five distinct factors: non-reactivity to inner experience, non-judgment of inner experience, observing, acting with awareness, and description. It has demonstrated a high degree of internal consistency and validity (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006). The five dimensions were added together to form a total scale ($\alpha=.89$).

Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to obtain data from 200 students from various Swabi schools and colleges. The study's purpose was explained to all participants, and informed consent was acquired from all participants ahead of time. Participants were also notified before to the survey that there would be no right or wrong responses, that all information obtained would be kept confidential, and that their identities would not be revealed. Participants were given demographic questionnaires as well as test scales after agreeing to participate in the study. Following the collection of all data, it was coded and put into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Results

To guarantee that the data was acceptable for the ensuing studies, it was first verified for missing values, normality, outliers, and multicollinearity concerns. Later, descriptive variables for the research were computed (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequencies and percentages of demographic variables of study (N=200)

Variables	Category	F	%
Gender	Male	100	50
	Female	100	50
	Total	200	100
Age Group	13-15	100	50
	16-18	100	50
	Total	200	100

Educational Background	School students	100	50
	College students	100	50
	Total	200	100
Family system	Nuclear	100	50
	Joint	100	50
	Total	200	100

Note f= Frequency, %= Percentage

Table 1 shows that the sample consisted of 200 adolescents. 50% adolescents were males and 50% were females. In age group category 50% were between age range of 13 to 15 and 50% were between age range of 16-18. In educational background category 50% were school students and 50% were college students. 50% participants were living in a nuclear family system whereas 50% had joint family system.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficient (α) of Scales (N=200)

Scale	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
Childhood emotional maltreatment	48.57	3.29	14-70	.83
Maladaptive daydreaming	58.55	4.88	0-140	.79
Trait mindfulness	68.83	9.01	39-195	.65

Table 2 shows that the alpha reliability coefficient for child emotional maltreatment is .83, for maladaptive daydreaming is .79 and for trait mindfulness is .67. It also shows psychometric properties for the major variables of the study. Values of skewness and kurtosis indicated that the data was normally distributed. Alpha reliability coefficients values shows that all scales have acceptable level of alpha reliability (i.e., $\alpha > .50$).

Table 3

Correlation coefficient matrix for Childhood Emotional Maltreatment, Maladaptive Daydreaming and Trait Mindfulness among Adolescents

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(N=200)

Note. **p<0.01, *p<0.05, ***p<0.001.

Table 3 shows that child emotional maltreatment is significantly

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Childhood emotional maltreatment	48.57	3.29	-		
2. Maladaptive daydreaming	58.55	4.88	.59**	-	
3. Trait mindfulness	68.83	9.01	-.16*	.13	-

positively correlated with maladaptive daydreaming ($r = .59, p < .01$) while significantly negatively correlated with trait mindfulness ($r = -.16, p < .05$). Maladaptive daydreaming is non-significantly negative correlated with trait mindfulness.

Table 4

Linear Regression estimating moderating effect of Trait Mindfulness between Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Maladaptive Daydreaming (N=200)

Maladaptive daydreaming 95%CI

Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	27.49	5.14	3.02	.00	23.24	-13.98
Childhood Emotional Maltreatment	.56	-.47	-.84	.39	1.24	-2.45
Trait Mindfulness	.38	-.96	-2.56	.01	-.43	-.81
Childhood Emotional Maltreatment *Trait Mindfulness	.12	.01	2.51	.01	.10	.14
R ²	.37					
ΔR ²	.36					
F	64.23*					

Note. **p < .01, *p < .05

Table 4 shows that the main effect of child emotional maltreatment

explains 37% variance in maladaptive daydreaming in model ($R^2 = .37, p < .01$), while trait mindfulness explains an additional 36% variance in maladaptive daydreaming in the model ($\Delta R^2 = .36, p < .05$). The interaction effect of child emotional maltreatment and trait mindfulness has significant effect on maladaptive daydreaming which accounts 37% variance.

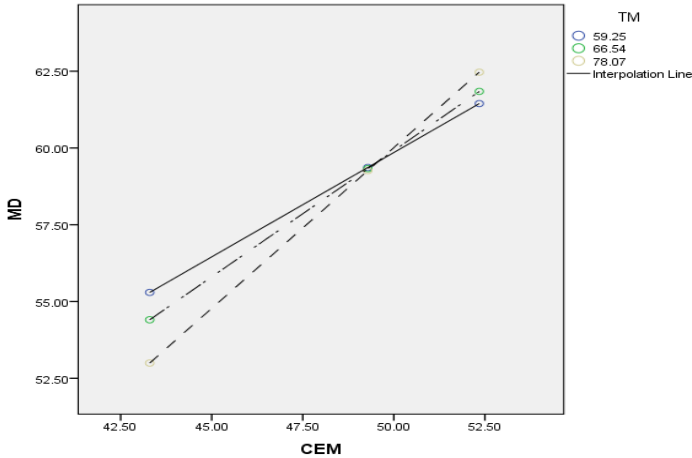


Figure 1

Figure 1 displays significant interaction lines indicating that relationship between Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Maladaptive Daydreaming is stronger at higher level of Trait Mindfulness.

Table 5

Difference across Gender in relation to Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Maladaptive Daydreaming and Trait Mindfulness between male and female students (N=200).

Variables	Male (n= 100)		Female (n= 100)		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Childhood Emotional Maltreatment	49.02	4.24	48.12	4.31	1.47	.14	.21
Maladaptive Daydreaming	58.57	6.55	58.53	7.02	.05	.95	.01
Trait Mindfulness	69.07	11.90	68.78	10.07	.54	.65	.03

Table 7 shows the difference between nuclear and joint family system on child emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming and trait mindfulness. It indicates that there is non-significant difference between nuclear and joint family system on the variables of child emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming and trait mindfulness.

Discussion

According to the findings of the study, childhood emotional abuse is substantially negatively connected with trait mindfulness ($r = -.16, p = 0.05$). Riggs and Brown (2017) postulated that childhood trauma and recurring maltreatment frequently impair the cognitive abilities required to attend to ongoing events thoughtfully rather than reactively. They reported mindfulness decreases with time (4 months) among 152 seventh and eighth grade kids who had experienced various kinds of childhood abuse (Riggs & Brown, 2017).

According to study results, maladaptive daydreaming is non-significantly negatively correlated with trait mindfulness ($r = -.13, p > 0.05$). Williams & Vess (2016) concluded that Positive constructive daydreaming predicted higher levels of trait mindfulness and lower levels of true self-alienation, whereas guilty/fear-of-failure or maladaptive daydreaming anticipated relatively low levels of trait mindfulness and higher levels of both true self-alienation and acceptance of external influence.

According to results, emotional processing is non-significantly negatively correlated with trait mindfulness ($r = -.12, p > 0.05$). According to Watford (2014), the initial experience of increased mindfulness may be difficult for people, particularly when experiencing negative emotion, because having experienced a negative affective initiation after practicing mindfulness also contributed in attendees feeling more overwhelmed and unable to improve their emotional state. Watford predicted that mindfulness training increased openness to experience, making negative mood induction more acute, leading in the subjective experience of feeling more dysregulated.

According to the study's hypothesis, trait mindfulness moderates the relationship between childhood emotional maltreatment and maladaptive daydreaming in teenagers. The findings of a recent study show that the interaction impact of trait mindfulness and childhood emotional maltreatment has a substantial influence on maladaptive daydreaming (see Table). Marchetti et al., (2014) discovered a moderate negative correlation between maladaptive daydreaming and trait mindfulness, whereas Wisener et al., (2018) discovered that participants with trait mindfulness quickly identify emotions and that trait mindfulness increases attentional process and executive functioning in emotionally maltreated females.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current study, like most previous investigations, has some

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limitations:

1. The first and most important factor is the small sample size. The study's population was only comprised of Swabi teenagers; however, in order to generalise the findings, data from adolescents from many other cities throughout Pakistan should have been obtained by random assessment.

2. Interviews should also be utilised to collect detailed information about participants and to increase validity.

3. Future study should look at participants under the age of 13 and those above the age of 18, as well as the content of their Daydreaming.

Implications

In recent years, there has been rising excitement about mindfulness, which has led to the notion that mindfulness is a cure-all that lowers negative thoughts, actions, and consequences (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). However, according to this study, the favourable effects of mindfulness in childhood emotional abuse may be limited. Mindfulness is found very low in individuals who suffered therefore, in order to enhance their mindfulness therapies that include mindfulness training and different skills which enhance their trait mindfulness might be adapted for children who are currently inside an abusive or neglectful setting, as well as adults who have a history of childhood emotional abuse.

Conclusion

To summarise, there is a positive association between childhood emotional maltreatment and maladaptive daydreaming while. Trait Mindfulness, according to moderation analysis, acts as a mediator between Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Maladaptive Daydreaming. There is no statistically significant difference between male and female adolescents, school and college students, and joint and nuclear family systems in terms of childhood emotional maltreatment, maladaptive daydreaming and Trait Mindfulness.



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