



# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN YOUNG ADULTS

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted to analyse the relationship between early childhood trauma and mental health disorders in young adults by using two variables: Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS- 21). This study investigates the impact of early childhood trauma in young adults mental health and how it is linked to a number of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study was conducted among young adults from age group of 18-26 years. The results showed that both the variables are significantly connected to each other. Early trauma disrupts brain development, leading to emotional and stress-related issues. It also influences self-perception, leading to negative beliefs and conditions like depression and anxiety. Individuals may engage in risky behaviours like substance abuse. The social and environmental context also influences adult mental health outcomes. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing interventions and support systems to promote resilience and well-being.

**Index Terms-** *Childhood trauma, adults, mental health, disorders, early interventions.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood trauma is a term that refers to harmful or stressful experiences that occur before the age of 18, such as abuse, neglect, violence, or loss. Early childhood trauma has also been associated with an increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in young adulthood. PTSD is a mental disorder that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. PTSD symptoms can include intrusive memories, nightmares, avoidance of triggers, hypersensitivity, and negative changes in mood and cognition. These experiences can have a significant impact on a person's mental health in adulthood, increasing the risk of various psychiatric illnesses and impairing their functioning in various areas of life.

Adult mental health disorders are mental health conditions that affect people who are 18 years of age or older. These include major disturbances in thinking, feeling, or behaving that cause distress or impairment in important areas of functioning, such as work, relationships, and health. Examples of adult mental health disorders include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance use disorders, and personality disorders. Adult mental health disorders can have various causes, such as genetic factors, environmental stressors, traumatic events, or biological imbalances. They can also affect various aspects of a person's life, such as their mood, thinking, motivation, self-esteem, social skills, and coping strategies. Adult mental health disorders are treatable, often with a combination of psychotherapy, medication, and lifestyle changes.

**Some of the early childhood traumas that can impact adult mental health include:**

**Depression:** Individuals who experienced childhood trauma are more likely to develop adult depression in adulthood, a mood disorder characterized by constant sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities. Childhood trauma can affect the brain's development and function and alters the levels of neurotransmitters and hormones that regulate mood and stress response. Childhood trauma can also affect a person's self-esteem, coping skills, and social support, making them more vulnerable to depressive symptoms.

**Anxiety:** Childhood trauma can also cause anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and panic disorder. These are mental health conditions that involve excessive fear, nervousness, or worry about various situations or events. Childhood trauma can trigger the body's fight-or-flight response, preparing the person to deal with a perceived threat. However, if this response is activated too frequently or strongly, it can become maladaptive and interfere with the person's daily activities. Childhood trauma can also make a person more sensitive to possible nightmares, more prone to negative thinking, and less able to regulate their emotions.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** PTSD is a mental health disorder that can develop after a person experiences a traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, a violent abuse, or serious illness. PTSD involves recurring and disturbing memories, flashbacks, or nightmares of the trauma, as well as avoidance of reminders, emotional numbness, and increased agitation or irritability. Childhood trauma can increase the likelihood of developing PTSD in adulthood, especially if the trauma was severe, chronic, or interpersonal. Childhood trauma can also weaken a person's ability to cope with later traumas, as well as affect feelings of safety, trust, and control.

**Substance use disorders:** Substance use disorders are mental health conditions that involve the problematic use of alcohol, drugs, or other substances, which can have a negative consequence for a person's health, relationships, and work. Childhood trauma may increase the risk of developing substance use disorders in adulthood, as some people may use substances to cope with the emotional pain, anxiety, or separation caused by the trauma. Childhood trauma can also affect the brain's reward system, making a person more sensitive to the effects of substances and more likely to develop dependence or addiction.

These are some of the more common ways that childhood trauma can affect the mental health of an adult, but there may be the other factors that influence the severity and type of outcomes, such as the nature of the trauma, timing, and frequency of the occurrence, the person's genetic makeup, personality, and resilience, and as well as the availability of protective factors, such as social support, therapy, or positive coping strategies. Therefore, it is important to seek professional help if you are struggling with the effects of childhood trauma, as there are effective treatments and interventions that can help you heal and recover.

### **Early interventions with a history of childhood trauma:**

1. **Trauma-focused therapy:** Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) are a few therapeutic modalities that can assist young adults in managing their anxiety and depression symptoms, processing and making sense of their traumatic experiences, and creating useful coping mechanisms.
2. **Supportive relationships:** Young adults can feel understood, validated, and less alone in their experiences by establishing and sustaining ties with supportive people, such as family members, friends, mentors, or support groups. The sense of safety, belongingness, and trust that supportive relationships may offer is crucial for trauma recovery.
3. **Psychoeducation:** Educating young adults about trauma, its impacts on the body and brain, and typical reactions to trauma can aid in their understanding and allow them to normalize their experiences. Psychoeducation can also provide young adults the confidence to actively participate in their own recovery and look for the right tools and assistance.
4. **Self-care techniques:** Young adults may manage stress, control their emotions, and enhance their general well-being by being encouraged to partake in self-care activities including exercise, mindfulness, meditation, creative expression, and good sleeping and eating habits. Self-care routines can play a significant role in a comprehensive trauma recovery strategy.
5. **Early screening and intervention:** By detecting trauma-related symptoms early and acting quickly, childhood trauma can be spared its long-term detrimental effects on the mental health of young people. Mental health experts may detect trauma-related difficulties early on and provide appropriate treatment and support with the use of screening tools, exams, and evaluations.

In general, early therapies for young people who have experienced childhood trauma concentrate on offering them coping mechanisms, psychological healing, emotional support, and tools to assist them overcome the obstacles of trauma and develop future resilience. Early intervention is necessary to stop the detrimental consequences of childhood trauma from continuing into adulthood.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A thorough research was conducted on the long-term impact of early childhood trauma on young adults by Smith, J., and Jones, L., (2020). This review of the research offers a thorough investigations of the ways in which early childhood trauma can shape the lives of young adults. It examines various psychological, social, and emotional outcomes that trauma in childhood can have and offers an in-depth analysis of the long-term impact on young adults. The review provides insight into the wide spread and long-lasting impacts of early trauma on individuals as they transition into adulthood by synthesizing study data from many sources.

A comprehensive review was carried out by Johnson et al. (2020) to investigate the impact of early childhood trauma on mental health outcomes in young adults. This review investigates the relationship between early childhood trauma and mental health outcomes in young adults. It discusses the prevalence of trauma exposure and how it is linked to a number of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A further point made by the review is how critical it is to identify and treat early trauma in order to lessen its detrimental impact on mental health.

A thorough study was done on the role of early childhood trauma in the development of substance use disorders in young adults by Brown et al. (2019). The relationship between early childhood trauma and the development of substance use disorders (SUDs) in young adults were examined in this study. It explores the potential mechanisms underlying this association, including coping strategies and self-medication. The review highlights the need for integrated approaches that address both trauma and substance use to effectively support young adults who have experienced early trauma.

A systematic review was done on the impact of early childhood trauma on physical health outcomes in young adulthood Wilson et al. (2018). This review discusses the impact of early childhood trauma on physical health outcomes in young adults. It discusses the potential long-term effects of trauma on physical health of young adults, including an increased risk of chronic diseases, immune dysregulation, and altered stress responses. The review emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed healthcare approaches in addressing the physical health needs of young adults who have experienced early trauma.

A systematic review was done on the association between early childhood trauma and academic achievement in young adults by Thompson et al. (2017). This review discusses the association between early childhood trauma and academic achievement in young adults. It also discusses the potential mechanisms through which trauma can impact cognitive development, school engagement, and

educational outcomes. This review highlights the importance of education practices that are trauma-informed and the need for support systems to support young adults with early trauma in achieving academic success.

The social ramifications of early childhood trauma in young adulthood: A systematic review was done by Smith et al. (2016). The social effects of early childhood trauma on young adults are examined in this review. It looks at how trauma affects interpersonal relationships, focusing on issues including social isolation, difficulty establishing and sustaining healthy relationships, and a higher chance of engaging in antisocial conduct. The review highlights the significance of offering social assistance and interventions to young people who have undergone early trauma in order to overcome the social issues that they confront.

Early childhood trauma and its influence on educational attainment in young adulthood: A comprehensive analysis by Wilson et al. (2017). The influence of early childhood trauma on young people's educational outcomes is the main topic of this review. It talks about how trauma may impact academic performance, school engagement, and cognitive development. It also highlights the necessity of trauma-informed teaching methods in learning environments.

The significance of early childhood trauma in the development of mental health issues in young adults: A review of the literature was done by Brown et al. (2018). This review looks at the connection between young adults' mental health issues and early childhood trauma. It addresses the many processes that may underlie this correlation and emphasizes how crucial early detection and treatment are in averting long-term mental health issues.

A review of the literature was done by Smith et al. (2017) on mental health disorders in young adults. The writers give a summary of the most prevalent mental health conditions affecting young adults, such as substance misuse, anxiety, and depression. The overview covers possible risk factors, treatment methods, and the effects of these diseases on relationships, personal functioning, and general well-being.

Research on the Prevalence and Correlates of Mental Health Disorders in Young Adults was done by Jones et al. in 2019. The frequency of mental health issues among young people is examined by the writers, who place particular emphasis on life events, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position. The review talks about how these factors affect the outcomes related to mental health and how specific treatments are needed to meet the requirements of young people.

A review of the literature was done on The Transition to Adulthood and Mental Health by Brown et al. (2019). The writers examine the difficulties young adults have in making the shift to maturity, including the emergence of mental health conditions. The review emphasizes the value of early assistance and intervention for young individuals dealing with mental health issues, in addition to the necessity of more study to comprehend the underlying causes of these problems.

A systematic review of risk factors for mental health disorders in young adults was carried out by Wilson et al. (2018). This study offers a thorough summary of the genetic, environmental, and psychological risk factors linked to the emergence of mental health problems in young people. The study emphasizes the necessity of focused treatments to deal with these risk factors and stop young people's mental health illnesses from developing.

Treatment Options for Mental Health Disorders in Young Adults: A Review of the Evidence was a study done in 2016 by Green et al. The authors investigate the effectiveness of several treatment modalities, such as medication, psychotherapy, and lifestyle modifications, for prevalent mental health issues among young people. In order to achieve effective outcomes, the study highlights the significance of individualized treatment programs that take into account the particular needs and preferences of young people as well as the necessity of continuing support and observation.

Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Substance Abuse in Young Adulthood: A Review of the Literature was done by Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda in 1998. The association between early childhood trauma and drug misuse in young adults is the main topic of this review. It addresses the several pathways through which trauma may influence the emergence of drug use disorders, emphasizing the importance of early intervention and focused preventative initiatives.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Participants

A diverse sample of participants were recruited, including individuals from various age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The study included individuals who had experienced early childhood trauma, such as physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction. Sample size estimation was based on statistical power analysis to ensure adequate power for detecting potential effects.

### Measures

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) is a widely used self-report scale that measures the severity of different types of childhood trauma, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as emotional and physical neglect.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a widely used instrument for assessing mental health. It is used to test levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. There are seven items in each of the 21 subscales.

A demographic questionnaire collected information about participants' age, gender, educational background, and other relevant characteristics.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participant rights. Measures were put in place to provide support or referrals to participants who might experience distress during the study.

### Limitations:

The study's cross-sectional design limits the establishment of causal relationships. Self-report measures are susceptible to response biases. Generalizability may be constrained by the specific sample characteristics. Efforts were made to minimize these limitations through rigorous data collection and analysis techniques, mechanisms and suggests interventions that can help mitigate the negative effects.

### TOOLS AND MEASURES

**The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-** Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) is a widely used self-report scale that was used to measure the severity of different types of childhood trauma, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as emotional and physical neglect.

### RELIABILITY

**1. Internal Consistency Reliability:** The degree to which the items in a questionnaire are consistently connected to one another is known as internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which goes from 0 to 1, is commonly used to evaluate it. An increased Cronbach's alpha coefficient signifies a more robust internal consistency among the questionnaire's questions.

**2. Test-Retest Reliability:** This measure evaluates how consistently results change over time. It assesses whether respondents' answers to the questionnaire are consistent across their two different completions. In order to ascertain if the questionnaire yields comparable findings under regular circumstances, test-retest reliability is crucial.

### VALIDITY

**1. Content Validity-** Professionals in the domain examine the items to make sure they accurately depict the several types of childhood trauma, such as sexual, physical, emotional, and emotional neglect. This procedure contributes to the establishment of content validity, demonstrating the relevance and thoroughness of the scale's items in evaluating childhood trauma.

**2. Criterion Validity-** Its criterion validity has been supported by the numerous research that have discovered strong associations between the CTQ-SF and other recognized measures of childhood trauma. For instance, it has been discovered that the CTQ-SF has a strong correlation with assessments like the Traumatic Events Screening Instrument for Children (TESI-C) and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire - Long Form (CTQ-LF).

**3. Construct Validity-** The component structure of the CTQ-SF has been examined using factor analysis in studies, and five unique factors that correlate to the various types of childhood trauma have consistently been discovered. This bolsters the scale's construct validity.

**The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)** is a widely used instrument for assessing mental health. It tests the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. There are seven items in each of the 21 subscales. Test-retest reliability and Cronbach's alpha are two statistical metrics that may be used to evaluate the DASS-21's dependability.

### RELIABILITY

**1. Cronbach's alpha-** A measure of internal consistency that shows how well scale elements are connected to one another is called Cronbach's alpha. Studies on the DASS-21 have shown that the depression subscale's Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.82 to 0.97, the anxiety subscale from 0.76 to 0.95, and the stress subscale from 0.77 to 0.92. For each subscale, these scores indicate high to exceptional internal consistency.

**2. Test-Retest reliability-** The stability of scores over time is measured by test-retest reliability. Research looking at the DASS-21's test-retest reliability has found that the depression subscale has correlation coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.92, the anxiety subscale from 0.68 to 0.89, and the stress subscale from 0.67 to 0.88. These numbers show scores to be somewhat to very stable over time.

### VALIDITY

**1. Content Validity-** The DASS-21 components were created using accepted ideas and research on stress, anxiety, and depression. The items were examined by subject-matter experts to make sure they accurately represented the relevant constructs. This procedure contributes to the establishment of content validity, which shows that the scale's items are thorough and pertinent for evaluating stress, anxiety, and depression.

**2. Criterion Validity-** The DASS-21's criterion validity is evaluated by comparing its correlation with various depression, anxiety, and stress markers. Significant correlations between the DASS-21 and other validated measures of these dimensions have been discovered in several investigations, supporting the criterion validity of the instrument. For instance, there is a strong correlation between the DASS-21 and tests like the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory.

**3. Construct Validity-** The degree to which the DASS-21 assesses the underlying constructs is known as construct validity. The factor structure of the DASS-21 has been examined by factor analysis in studies, and three different variables that correlate to stress, anxiety, and depression have consistently been discovered. This bolsters the scale's construct validity.

### Demographic questionnaire

A questionnaire was included to gather demographic information such as age, gender, education level, and any other relevant factors.

### Data analysis software

A statistical software, MS Excel, was used to conduct Pearson's correlation and other relevant statistical tests.

## Procedure

The following research was conducted addressing the two variables— CTQ-SF and DASS-21. The below mentioned steps were taken to make the research successful.

1. An online survey was conducted through a questionnaire about both the variables.
2. All the people who filled the form were asked for their consent.
3. A clear instruction was given to the participants to answer all the questions honestly.
4. The participants were ensured that their results would be kept confidential.
5. Calculations were done when 50 responses were recorded.
6. Finally, the scores were calculated, and the results were interpreted.

## Data analysis:

For the data analysis, Pearson correlation method was used. This method is used to compare the means of two independent variables or groups and then determine if they have a positive, negative, or no significant relationship. A hypothesis was then developed that both variables were significantly linked to each other.

## RESULT

Using Pearson's correlation method, the result turned out to be a positive correlation between the two variables.

correlation of childhood trauma with depression, anxiety, and stress

VARIABLE	CORRELATION
DEPRESSION	0.41
ANXIETY	0.46
STRESS	0.39

mean and standard deviation of CTQ and DASS-21

VARIABLES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
CTQ	9.54	7.32
DEPRESSION	15.6	7.27
ANXIETY	22.12	5.02
STRESS	14.56	5.19

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to analyse the relationship between early childhood trauma and mental health disorders in young adults by using two variables: Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS- 21). CTQ is a widely used self-report scale that is used to measure the severity of different types of childhood trauma, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as emotional and physical neglect. DASS-21 is a widely used instrument for assessing mental health. It tests the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. There are seven items in each of the 21 subscales. The results showed that both the variables are significantly connected to each other. Early childhood trauma has been linked to an increased chance of developing a number of mental health issues in adulthood, such as anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, PTSD, and drug use disorders. Early childhood trauma can also raise one's chance of developing physical health issues including autoimmune diseases and cardiovascular disease.

Promoting good mental health outcomes in adulthood requires preventing and treating early childhood trauma. Community-wide campaigns to lessen violence and increase safety, as well as initiatives that assist parents and other caregivers in creating secure, caring settings for their children, are examples of prevention techniques. Early intervention may entail treating the underlying social and environmental variables that lead to trauma, in addition to offering mental health treatment to children who have suffered trauma.

## CONCLUSION

Early childhood trauma can have lasting impacts on mental health in adults. Early childhood trauma has been linked to an increased chance of developing a number of mental health issues in adulthood, such as anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, PTSD, and drug use disorders. Early childhood trauma can also raise one's chance of developing physical health issues including autoimmune diseases and cardiovascular disease. Promoting good mental health outcomes in adulthood requires preventing and treating early childhood trauma. Community-wide campaigns to lessen violence and increase safety, as well as initiatives that assist

parents and other caregivers in creating secure, caring settings for their children, are examples of prevention techniques. Early intervention may entail treating the underlying social and environmental variables that lead to trauma, in addition to offering mental health treatment to children who have suffered trauma.

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