

Are self-esteem and adult attachment affected by previous experiences of youth victimisation?

Catarina Teixeira, Catarina Santos, Rafaela Diogo & Telma Catarina Almeida

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Some research show the impact of the traumatic experiences of emotional abuse during childhood in an insecure attachment style [1], leading to a negative attitude towards oneself and towards others [2]. Studies also show that child abuse is a significant predictor of low self-esteem in adulthood [3]. The objectives of the current study are to analyse the relationship between the youth victimisation and self-esteem in adulthood, the adult attachment and the youth victimisation, and the self-esteem in adults and the adult attachment. This study is important to show, in a Portuguese sample, how these variables are linked, providing knowledge about the implications of previous experiences of youth victimisation.

Materials and methods: The sample comprised 109 Portuguese participants, with ages between 18 and 68 years old ($M = 33.96$, $SD = 13.97$), and the majority was female ($n = 82$, 77.4%). Participants responded online to a sociodemographic questionnaire, a Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) [4], a Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) [5], and an Adult Attachment Scale-R (AAS-R) [6]. Portuguese versions of the questionnaires were used.

Results: The total score of the RSES revealed a significant correlation with the CTQ subscales: Emotional Abuse ($r = -0.233$, $p = .016$), Emotional Neglect ($r = -0.201$, $p = .039$), and Physical Neglect ($r = -0.235$, $p = .015$). The total score of the CTQ showed significant statistical and correlations with the total score of the AAS-R and with its subscales: Anxiety ($r = 0.198$, $p = .042$), Close ($r = 0.477$, $p < .001$), and Depend ($r = 0.445$, $p < .001$). The factor Anxiety in the AAS-R showed a significant statistical correlation with the CTQ subscale Emotional Abuse ($r = 0.349$, $p < .001$). The subscale Close in the AAS-R showed significant statistical correlations with the CTQ subscales: Emotional Abuse ($r = -0.266$, $p = .006$), Emotional Neglect ($r = -0.346$, $p < .001$), Physical Neglect ($r = -0.244$, $p = .012$). The subscale Depend on the AAS-R revealed a significant statistical correlation with the CTQ subscales: Emotional Abuse ($r = -0.249$, $p = .010$). The RSES also showed a significant statistical correlation with the AAS-R subscales: Anxiety ($r = -0.590$, $p < .001$), Close ($r = 0.511$, $p < .001$), and Depend ($r = 0.354$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and conclusions: This study highlights the relationship between experiences of youth victimisation and the increase of attachment anxiety in adulthood, decreased self-esteem, comfort with proximity, and confidence in others concerning the attachment in adults. The current study corroborates previous findings [1,2]. This research contributes to the practice of clinical and forensic psychology in the prevention and intervention in childhood trauma, showing, in a Portuguese sample, the impact of the social implications of trauma on attachment style, and self-esteem, during adulthood. However, although this research achieved important results, further studies are recommended, developing a theoretical model with those variables, and with a larger sample.

CONTACT Catarina Teixeira  catateixeira15@gmail.com

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Do difficulties in emotion regulation impact self-esteem and adult attachment? – the role of trauma

Ana V. Antunes^a, Carina Santos^a, Patrícia Oliveira^a and Telma C. Almeida^{a,b}

^aInstituto Universitário Egas Moniz (IUEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^bLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Experiencing trauma in childhood, adolescence or adulthood has severe negative impact on several areas of individuals' lives. Concerning their psychological health, consequences often arise in terms of emotional deficits, self-

esteem and attachment [1]. Strategies of emotional regulation (ER) are extremely important in the individual's development and have implications in their self-concept and self-esteem [2]. The literature suggests that a better ER is directly associated with better self-esteem [3]. Some studies also show an association between attachment and the level of self-esteem [4]. Better attachment in adults is associated with high and stable levels of self-esteem [5]. The objective of this research is to study the impact of ER, self-esteem and attachment in Portuguese adults (above 18 years old) who have experienced trauma. This study contributes to scientific innovation in this field, considering that we found results never obtained in a Portuguese sample.

Materials and Methods: This study comprised 137 Portuguese individuals' (69.3% women and 30.7% men) with ages between 18 and 70 years ($M = 39.49$, $SD = 12.49$), of which 74 (54.0%) experienced trauma in the last three years. This study was carried out by filling out online questionnaires and the link to the study was disclosed by e-mail and in social networks. The participants responded to a sociodemographic questionnaire, a checklist of some types of trauma experienced in the last three years, the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) [6], the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) [7], and the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS-R) [8]. The study was conducted in accordance with all the ethical principles.

Results: The results showed a significant negative correlation between the DERS and the total score of the RSES ($r = -0.509$, $p < .001$) as well as between the DERS Strategies subscale and the RSES ($r = -0.541$, $p < .001$). There was a significant statistical negative correlation between the DERS Awareness and the AAS-R ($r = -0.232$, $p = .006$), and a significant statistical positive correlation between the total score of the DERS ($r = 0.557$, $p < .001$), the DERS Non-Acceptance ($r = 0.500$, $p < .001$) the DERS Strategies ($r = 0.516$, $p < .001$) and the AAS-R Anxiety. The results also showed significant statistical differences between individuals who experienced trauma in the Anxiety dimension of the AAS-R [$F(1,136) = 8.91$, $p = .003$]. Those who experienced trauma showed higher anxiety ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.75$).

Discussion and conclusions: The results showed that if difficulties of emotional regulation and limited access to emotional regulation strategies decreases, self-esteem increases, which corroborates the literature [3]. Concerning the adult attachment, we found that if anxiety increases, difficulties of emotional regulation also increase, as well as lack of acceptance of emotional responses and limited access to emotional regulation strategies. Some studies reveal that attachment styles influence the strategies to express and regulate emotions [9]. All these findings have an impact on clinical and social levels, as they guide therapists to work in these specific areas with individuals who have suffered some form of trauma. Thus, our results help to develop psychological intervention programs to prevent psychopathology. Further studies should focus on the results of preventive and interventional efficacy of therapies implemented in society that focus on emotion regulation, self-esteem, and adult attachment in traumatised individuals.

CONTACT Patrícia Oliveira  patriciasofia_27@hotmail.com

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Polyvictimization among a juvenile Portuguese sample

Telma C. Almeida^a, Catarina Ramos^a and Jorge Cardoso^a

^aLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI-EM), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal