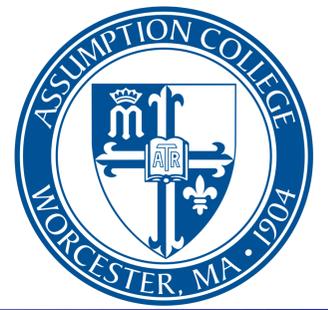




Childhood Adversity and College Mental Health Moderated by Coping Style



Adam M. Volungis, Ph.D, Maria Kalpidou, Ph.D., Colleen E. Popores, B.S.,
Almaas Raziuddin, B.A., Mark Joyce, B.A., & Paul Avolese, B.A.

Psychology Department
Assumption College, Worcester, MA

Introduction

- The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), current mental health functioning, and coping styles of college students.
- ACEs have been linked with mental health problems including depression and alcoholism (Anda et al., 2002; Lejonclou et al., 2014).
- ACEs also appear to negatively affect adaptive coping in children (Best & Miller, 2010).
 - More specifically, previous research has shown that ACEs are linked to both physical and mental health concurrently in children and retrospectively in middle to late adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998, Whitfield, 1998).
- There is a lack of research investigating these links during the transition to young adulthood.
- Attending college coincides with being independent and being on your own for the first time for many young adults.
 - Therefore, how young adults adapt during this developmental milestone is important for mental health consideration.

Hypotheses

- **(1) Students with multiple ACEs (i.e., two or more) would be more prone to have higher levels emotional and social distress than those with zero or a single ACE.**
- **(2) Multiple ACEs would predict “clinical” levels of mental health and substance use.**
- **(3) We expected the relationships from H₂ (i.e., ACEs and mental health/substance use) to be moderated by coping style.**

Contact Information

Email: am.volungis@assumption.edu
Website: www.dradamvolungis.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/adamvolungis

Method

Participants & Procedure

- 110 college students (M = 19.39 years) in a Catholic liberal arts college in the northeast
- 85% female, 88% Caucasian, and 72% came from intact families
- Participants completed a series of questionnaires on PsychData

Measures

- *Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire*
 - 17 Yes-No items
 - 7 categories: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, substance abuse, mental illness, mother treated violently, and criminal behavior in the household
- *Outcome Questionnaire-45 (OQ-45)*
 - 45 Five-point Likert scale items
 - Total score and 3 subscales: symptom distress, interpersonal relations, and social role
- *Short Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (SMAST)*
 - 13 Yes-No items
- *Drug Abuse Screening Test-10 (DAST-10)*
 - 10 Yes-No items
- *Brief COPE*
 - 28 Four-point Likert scale items
 - 14 variables: active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humor, religion, using emotional support, using instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioral disengagement, and self-blame

Results & Discussion

- As expected, those with multiple ACEs reported significantly higher scores on the OQ-45 (domains: total score, symptom distress, and interpersonal relations) and the DAST-10.
- There were also significant positive correlations between the OQ-45 (domains: total score, symptom distress, interpersonal relations, and social role), the DAST-10, and SMAST.
- Logistic regression analyses showed that students with multiple ACEs were predictive of those who scored in the “clinical” range for the OQ-45 (domains: total score, symptom distress, and interpersonal relations) and the DAST-10 (i.e., moderate level or higher).
- Moderator analyses showed that certain coping styles (e.g., denial, acceptance, self-blame) either enhanced or diminished the relationships between ACEs and the OQ-45.
 - More specifically, adaptive coping styles acted as a buffer to clinical mental health outcomes, whereas maladaptive coping styles magnified clinical mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

- The results provide support that ACEs influence college age students’ mental health functioning.
- Although there may be other variables that contribute to young adults’ well-being (e.g., biological and protective factors), ACEs appears to have a significant role in this relationship.
- This relationship may be magnified for young adults when they enter college because of the potential for increased distress.
- These findings have clinical implications as it appears that certain cognitive-coping styles can moderate this relationship, especially during a critical time of transition to adulthood.

