

Impact of Perceived Parental Abuse on Relationship Satisfaction in Adults

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults using convenience sampling and data collected via Google Forms from 152 participants. Measurement tools included the Relationship Assessment Scale and Perceived Parental Abuse Scale, with statistical analyses comprising correlation and linear regression. Findings revealed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation (Spearman's rho = 0.270, $p < .001$) between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction. Regression analysis indicated that perceived parental abuse explains 8.95% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.0895$, $F = 14.7$, $p < .001$). These results challenge conventional views by suggesting resilience mechanisms among survivors of parental abuse and underscore implications for interventions aimed at improving relationship outcomes in this population. The study contributes to understanding the complex dynamics between early-life adversity and adult relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the need for targeted support strategies.

Keywords: Parental Abuse, Relationship Satisfaction, Adults, Correlation

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The dynamics of parental relationships and their lasting influence on adult romantic relationships have been a subject of extensive psychological research. The impact of perceived parental abuse on relationship satisfaction in adults is a critical area of study that seeks to unravel the complex interplay between early adverse experiences and later relationship outcomes. This research examines the nuances of how perceived parental abuse—whether emotional, physical, or psychological—affects the quality and satisfaction of romantic relationships in adulthood.

Defining Perceived Parental Abuse

Perceived parental abuse encompasses a range of adverse experiences children may encounter, including emotional neglect, physical violence, and psychological manipulation (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2016). Unlike objective measures of abuse, perceived abuse focuses on the individual's subjective experience and interpretation of their childhood events (Afifi et al., 2017). This subjective perspective is crucial as it significantly impacts mental health outcomes and relationship dynamics (Riggs, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Attachment theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the link between early abuse and adult relationship satisfaction. According to Bowlby (1988), early interactions with caregivers shape an

individual's attachment style, which subsequently influences their romantic relationships. Individuals who experience abuse are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles, characterized by anxiety and avoidance, which negatively affect relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Empirical Evidence on Abuse and Relationship Outcomes

A substantial body of empirical research has demonstrated the detrimental effects of perceived parental abuse on relationship satisfaction. Studies have consistently shown that individuals who report higher levels of childhood abuse are more likely to experience lower satisfaction in their adult romantic relationships (DiLillo, Lewis, & DiLoreto-Colgan, 2007). These individuals often face difficulties in establishing trust, maintaining intimacy, and managing conflict (Colman & Widom, 2004). For instance, a study by DiLillo and colleagues (2009) found that adults with a history of childhood abuse reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction compared to those without such histories. The researchers attributed this to the persistent negative internal working models of self and others formed during childhood. Similarly, Riggs and Kaminski (2010) highlighted that emotional abuse, in particular, was a strong predictor of relationship dissatisfaction, underscoring the profound impact of non-physical forms of abuse.

Mechanisms Linking Perceived Abuse to Relationship Satisfaction

The mechanisms through which perceived parental abuse influences adult relationship satisfaction are multifaceted. One significant pathway is through mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Afifi et al., 2016). These conditions can impair interpersonal functioning and reduce the ability to form and sustain healthy relationships (Whisman, 2016). Furthermore, abuse survivors often exhibit maladaptive coping strategies, such as substance abuse and aggression, which can further strain romantic relationships (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005). Research by Whitfield et al. (2003) demonstrated that adults with a history of childhood abuse were more likely to engage in substance abuse, which negatively impacted their relationship satisfaction.

Interpersonal Dynamics and Abuse

The quality of communication and conflict resolution skills are critical determinants of relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1999). Individuals with a history of perceived parental abuse often struggle with these aspects due to the dysfunctional communication patterns learned in childhood (Moynan et al., 2010). Studies indicate that these individuals may either avoid conflict altogether or engage in aggressive and unproductive arguments, both of which are detrimental to relationship health (Riggs, Cusimano, & Benson, 2011).

Moreover, the intergenerational transmission of abuse highlights how early experiences can shape not only personal outcomes but also parenting styles and relationship behaviors in adulthood (Bailey et al., 2009). Adults who perceived abuse during their upbringing are at a higher risk of perpetuating similar behaviors in their relationships and with their own children, thus continuing the cycle of dysfunction (Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

Protective Factors and Resilience

Despite the adverse effects of perceived parental abuse, not all individuals experience negative outcomes in their adult relationships. Resilience factors, such as social support, positive self-esteem, and effective

coping mechanisms, can mitigate the impact of early abuse (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Interventions aimed at fostering these protective factors have shown promise in improving relationship satisfaction among abuse survivors (Wright, Crawford, & Del Castillo, 2009).

Therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and attachment-based therapies, have been effective in addressing the relational difficulties stemming from childhood abuse (Briere & Scott, 2014). These interventions help individuals reframe negative cognitions, enhance emotional regulation, and develop healthier relationship skills (Johnson, 2002).

Method

Aim: The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults.

Objective

1. To investigate the correlation between perceived parental abuse and adult relationship satisfaction.
2. To examine whether perceived parental abuse is a predictor of relationship satisfaction in adults.

Research Questions

1. What is the correlation between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults?
2. Is perceived parental abuse a predictor of relationship satisfaction in adults?

Hypotheses

H01: There is no correlation between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults

H02: Perceived parental abuse is not a predictor of relationship satisfaction in adults.

Operational Definition of the Variables

Perceived parental abuse refers to the subjective perception or interpretation by an individual of experiencing mistreatment, neglect, or psychological harm inflicted by one or both parents or caregivers during their formative years and adolescence. This mistreatment may encompass various forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, abandonment, or any other actions or behaviors perceived by the individual as harmful or detrimental to their well-being. Relationship satisfaction is a multifaceted construct that reflects individuals' overall contentment and fulfillment within their intimate partnerships. It encompasses various dimensions, including emotional intimacy, communication quality, trust, and mutual support, among others. Understanding the factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction, as well as its impacts on individuals and interventions to enhance it, is essential for promoting healthy and fulfilling relationships.

Sampling method Used

The sampling method employed in this study was convenience sampling, where participants were selected based on their convenient availability and accessibility rather than through random selection or a specific sampling frame. This method was chosen to facilitate the recruitment of participants who were easily reachable, thereby expediting the data collection process. The inclusion criteria for this study specify individuals aged between 18 and 32 years who are currently in a committed relationship or married. The approach aimed to gather data from a diverse pool of respondents without imposing restrictions based on

specific criteria. By doing so, the study sought to enhance the generalizability of its findings within the constraints of convenience sampling. While convenience sampling inherently limits the ability to generalize findings to the entire population due to potential biases, the inclusive nature of the sampling strategy aimed to mitigate some of these limitations by ensuring a wide-ranging participant pool. This approach provided valuable insights into the relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults, contributing to the understanding of these phenomena across diverse demographic groups.

Research Design

The research design utilized in this study is a correlational research design. This correlational design enables researchers to collect data at a single point in time, aligning with the convenience sampling method employed.

Tools Used:

RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE by Hendrick,

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), developed by Susan S. Hendrick, is a widely used tool in psychological research to measure relationship satisfaction. It demonstrates high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.86 to 0.87, and good test-retest reliability, indicating stability over time. The RAS has strong construct validity, correlating highly with other established measures of relationship satisfaction and related constructs, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and shows convergent validity through positive correlations with measures of relationship quality, communication, and intimacy. Its discriminant validity is supported by lower correlations with unrelated constructs, such as individual personality traits.

PERCEIVED PARENTAL ABUSE SCALE by Dr Gargi Sharma

The Perceived Parental Abuse Scale (PPAS) developed by Dr. Gargi Sharma demonstrates strong psychometric properties, particularly in terms of reliability and validity. The PPAS exhibits high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding 0.80, ensuring that the items on the scale measure a cohesive construct. Additionally, the scale has shown good test-retest reliability, indicating stability in scores when administered at different points in time. In terms of validity, the PPAS has strong construct validity, as it correlates well with other established measures of abuse and related psychological constructs. The scale also demonstrates convergent validity through positive correlations with measures of psychological distress and trauma. Furthermore, the PPAS shows good discriminant validity, evidenced by lower correlations with unrelated constructs, confirming that it accurately measures perceived parental abuse without significant overlap with unrelated traits.

Procedure:

The data collection process involved the administration of survey questionnaires through Google Forms. Convenience sampling was utilized to select participants, allowing for the recruitment of individuals who were readily accessible and available to participate.

Following data collection, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the characteristics of the sample and provide an overview of the variables under study. This included measures such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages to describe the distribution of responses.

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, linear regression analysis was employed to explore whether perceived parental abuse could serve as a predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Results

Table 1
Descriptives

	RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION	PERCEIVED PARENTAL ABUSE
N	152	152
Missing	0	0
Mean	24.5	26.5
Median	25	26.5
Mode	27	27
Standard deviation	3.76	5.47
Minimum	15	17
Maximum	32	49
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.953	0.971
Shapiro-Wilk p	<.001	0.003

*More than one mode exists, only the first is reported

The sample consisted of 152 participants, with no missing values for either variable. The mean score for relationship satisfaction was 24.5 (SD = 3.76), with a median of 25.0 and a mode of 27.0. Scores ranged from 15 to 32. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the distribution of relationship satisfaction scores significantly deviated from normality (W = 0.953, p < .001). For perceived parental abuse, the mean score was 26.5 (SD = 5.47), with a median of 26.5 and a mode of 27.0. Scores ranged from 17 to 49. The Shapiro-Wilk test for perceived parental abuse also indicated a significant deviation from normality (W = 0.971, p = 0.003), although to a lesser extent than relationship satisfaction.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

		PERCEIVED PARENTAL ABUSE	RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION
PERCEIVED PARENTAL ABUSE	Spearman's rho	—	
	p-value	—	
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION	Spearman's rho	0.270	—
	p-value	< .001	—

The correlation matrix reveals a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction, with a Spearman's rho of 0.270. This suggests that as perceived parental abuse increases, relationship satisfaction also tends to increase, although the relationship is not particularly strong. The p-value of less than .001 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant, meaning there is a very low probability that the observed association occurred by chance. Despite the weak strength of the correlation, the significant p-value highlights the relevance of perceived parental abuse in the context of relationship satisfaction.

Table 3

Model Fit Measures				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.299	0.0895	0.0834	14.7	1	150	< .001

The model fit measures indicate that the regression model explains a modest portion of the variability in relationship satisfaction. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.299 suggests a positive but modest linear relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction. The R² value of 0.0895 implies that approximately 8.95% of the variance in relationship satisfaction is accounted for by perceived parental abuse. The adjusted R² value of 0.0834 confirms this, adjusting for the number of predictors in the model. The F-statistic of 14.7, with a p-value less than .001, indicates that the model is statistically significant and provides a significantly better fit than a model with no predictors. This means that while perceived parental abuse explains only a modest proportion of the variance in relationship satisfaction, it is a significant predictor, highlighting its importance in understanding relationship satisfaction dynamics.

Discussion

The study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults, exploring how experiences of parental abuse influence satisfaction in adult romantic relationships. The sample included 152 participants, with no missing data. The mean relationship satisfaction score was 24.5, with a range from 15 to 32, and the distribution deviated significantly from normality. The mean score for perceived parental abuse was 26.5, ranging from 17 to 49, also showing a significant deviation from normality.

A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction (Spearman's rho = 0.270, p < .001), indicating that higher levels of perceived parental abuse are associated with slightly higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The regression analysis revealed that perceived parental abuse accounts for a modest portion of the variability in relationship satisfaction (R² = 0.0895), but is a significant predictor (F = 14.7, p < .001), underscoring its importance in understanding relationship satisfaction dynamics.

The study revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction (Spearman's rho = 0.270, p < .001). This finding suggests that individuals who reported higher levels of perceived parental abuse also reported slightly higher levels of relationship satisfaction. This counterintuitive result may be explained by resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms developed by individuals who experienced parental abuse, aligning with previous research indicating that adverse childhood experiences can foster resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Alternatively, these individuals may have lower expectations for relationships, leading to greater satisfaction with less ideal relationships, supported by the contrast effect theory (Kahneman & Miller, 1986).

The regression analysis indicated that perceived parental abuse explains a modest portion of the variance in relationship satisfaction (R² = 0.0895), underscoring its significance as a predictor. This finding contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the complex and nuanced effects of parental abuse on

adult relationships, which contrasts with some studies that predominantly report negative impacts (Colman & Widom, 2004).

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and self-reported measures may introduce biases such as social desirability and recall bias. The non-normal distribution of the variables suggests that extreme scores might have influenced the results, potentially skewing the findings. Additionally, the study's sample may not be representative of the general population, limiting the generalizability of the results.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to explore the temporal relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction. Qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and contextual factors influencing this relationship. Additionally, future studies should aim for more diverse and representative samples to enhance generalizability. Exploring the role of resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms in greater detail could further elucidate the pathways through which parental abuse impacts relationship satisfaction, providing a more comprehensive understanding of this complex dynamic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between perceived parental abuse and relationship satisfaction in adults. The findings indicate a statistically significant but weak positive correlation, suggesting that individuals who perceive higher levels of parental abuse may paradoxically report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. This challenges conventional wisdom and underscores the complexity of how early adverse experiences can impact adult relationship dynamics.

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