



A Study on Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Resilience with the Role of Alexithymia Among Young Adults

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Abstract: Children are always at the higher risk of experiencing trauma early. The current study is conducted to explore the relationship between childhood trauma and resilience with the role of alexithymia among young adults. Childhood is a crucial and very vulnerable phase for humans, any disruptions or experiencing adverse situations can cause some dysfunctions or traumas. Resilience is a protective factor against childhood trauma, that can be designated as negative or positive based on the environment. A total sample of 91 young adults was taken from Ludhiana, Punjab. The sample was given self-report questionnaires: Childhood trauma questionnaire, Perth alexithymia questionnaire short form, Brief resilience scale. The results showed that there is a positive correlation between denial and resilience, that means individuals who scored higher in resilience also scored higher in denial. There is also a positive correlation between emotional abuse and alexithymia. Individuals who scored higher in emotional abuse had difficulty identifying feelings and had externally oriented feelings. Additionally, externally oriented thinking is also positively correlated with resilience. The study also concluded that children who used resilience as a coping mechanism had undergone adverse childhood experiences. Alexithymia plays an important part in maintain resilience among children who had gone through traumatic events in their life. Increasing awareness about emotions and trauma can help young adults identify their emotions and recognize them, which can contribute to healthy coping styles.

Keywords: *Childhood trauma, Resilience, Alexithymia, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

Trauma in young age has some serious consequences for the victims and for the society. The childhood trauma either builds resilience among children or they learn new techniques of coping. Resilience acts as a coping mechanism for adverse childhood experiences. Alexithymia acts as barrier in expressing emotions that can also indicate childhood trauma. Childhood trauma can be identified into physical, sexual and emotional abuse. These adverse childhood experiences are associated with many disorders like PTSD, depression and anxiety. Resilience acts as a strong protective measure against these experiences. Numerous studies have reported that children with higher levels of childhood trauma have higher resilience, meaning that these individuals can recover from stressful situations more effectively as compared to those who have lower levels of resilience. People with adverse experiences tend to score higher in alexithymia as they use this to protect themselves from anxiety and the fear of being judged.

During young age children does not have enough cognitive understanding and there is difficulty in processing the events, as a result trauma often disrupts their development. Individuals with higher levels of alexithymia cannot recognize or know exact words to present their emotions, these people often tend to suppress their emotions rather than fully processing them. traumatic experiences may influence people's understanding of their emotions that also in cases reduces resilience. Childhood trauma can result in increased alexithymia where as resilience is reduced if alexithymia is high. These experiences can have a negative effect on young adults as it creates challenges in emotional regulation, building relationships, coping skills and delayed developmental milestones. Though resilience is a protective factor, but it also changes with the environment such as with childhood trauma, resilience can be reduced (Labrague, 2021). The study explores a relationship between childhood trauma and resilience with the role of alexithymia among young adults.

A recent study conducted by wang et al. (2025) in which they explored the relationship between childhood trauma and depression in early adulthood with the role of resilience and personality type among 1059 undergraduate students. The authors proposed that there is a positive correlation between childhood trauma and depression. Additionally, resilience plays an important role in this relationship.

A study was conducted by ŞENKAL and İŞIKLI (2015) to understand childhood traumas and attachment styles associated with depression symptoms with the mediating role of alexithymia.

A total sample of 417 students was taken from Haceteppe university undergraduates. The results showed that alexithymia played somewhat important role in the relationship of childhood trauma, childhood emotional abuse and emotional neglect with depressive symptoms. Whereas alexithymia had an important role between childhood physical neglect and depressive symptoms in adulthood. Though alexithymia had a little role in mediating the relationship between anxiety dimension of attachment and depressive symptom levels. Therefore, this study concluded that alexithymia plays significant role in between childhood trauma and attachment patterns with depression symptoms.

1.1 Childhood Trauma

Larkin, Warren and Read (2008) defined childhood trauma as, “the experiences of abuse and neglect that individuals suffered during their childhood period, mainly including various forms of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect and physical neglect.”

Leeb et al. (2008) defines child maltreatment or abuse as “the physical, sexual, emotional mistreatment or neglect of children.” It is defined as “any act or series of acts by a parent or caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child.”

Feyzioğlu et al. (2023) studied the role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between early childhood trauma and alexithymia on 435 participants, aged 18 to 74. The participants were asked to fill self-report questionnaires that are Childhood trauma questionnaire, Toronto alexithymia scale-20 and Young schema questionnaire short form-3. The results showed that individuals who scored higher in traumatic childhood experiences had higher levels of alexithymia as compared to the participants who scored low in childhood trauma. Additional to this, the early maladaptive domains such as disconnection and rejection, inhibition and over vigilance were found to mediate the relationship between alexithymia and childhood trauma. The authors suggested that alexithymia levels might get reduced by schema-based interventions.

A study was conducted by Wang et al. (2018) in which the impact of childhood trauma was explored on psychosocial features in Chinese young adults. A total sample of 555 students was taken by self-report questionnaires that are Childhood trauma questionnaire, dysfunctional attitude questionnaire, Eysenck personality questionnaire and social support questionnaire. The study showed that the individuals with higher levels of childhood trauma report higher levels of depression, anxiety, dysfunctional attitudes, neuroticism and psychoticism while scoring low on social support and extraversion.

Hu et al. (2024) conducted research to explore the mediating and moderating effects of resilience between childhood trauma and psychotic-like experiences among college students. The study consisted of 4302 college students who were given self-report questionnaires. The result showed a negative relationship between psychotic-like experiences and resilience and a positive relationship between psychotic-like experiences and childhood trauma. Additionally, resilience had a little mediating role between childhood trauma and psychotic-like experiences.

1.2 Resilience

Bonanno (2004) defined Resilience as, “the ability to retain or recover normal levels of psychological functioning after facing traumatic experiences.”

Sapientz and Masten (2011) defined resilience “as the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development.”

Resilience is defined as, the ability to adapt to difficult situations and provide flexible responses to daily stress” (Southwick et al., 2014).

Research was conducted by Jun Jie Chang et al. (2021) to understand childhood trauma and depression among college students with the role and effects of psychological resilience. A total sample of 4034 students were given self-report questionnaires. The study found that children with higher levels of childhood abuse are more likely to have depression and the ones with higher levels of resilience had lower levels of depression. Researchers found out that resilience helps college students to deal better with childhood difficulty and abuse.

A study was conducted by Sills, Cohan and Stein (2006) to explore the relationship of resilience to personality, coping and psychiatric symptoms in young adults. A total sample of 132 undergraduates was taken by measures such as Connor-Davidson resilience scale, Neo five factory inventory, coping inventory for stressful situations and Brief symptom inventory. The results showed that the individuals who has higher resilience had lower levels of neuroticism, whereas the relationship of resilience with extraversion, conscientiousness, task oriented is positive. Resilience showed a moderating effect between childhood maltreatment and psychiatric symptoms.

Çıkrıkçı and Yalçın (2023) conducted a research on the relationship between alexithymia and positive beliefs to Rumination and psychological resilience. A total sample of 144 university students was taken and measures were used: The Toronto Alexithymia scale, Psychological

Resilience Scale and Positive Rumination scale. The results showed that alexithymia was positively related to positive beliefs about rumination whereas individuals who scored high in alexithymia had lower resilience. Additionally, a significant role of alexithymia was found between positive belief in rumination and resilience.

1.3 Alexithymia

Sifneos (1972) defined alexithymia as, “it is a construct denoting an incapacity to identify and express emotions and feeling, a limitation in imaginary life and a thought characterized by pragmatic contents with a highly descriptive mode of expression.”

According to Taylor, Bagby, and Parker (1997) alexithymia is defined as, “a deficit in cognitive processing and regulation of affects, which they regard as a potential risk factor for a wide variety of psychiatric and somatic disorders.”

A study was conducted by Romano et al. (2019) to explore alexithymia in young people’s academic career with the role of anxiety and resilience. A total sample of 257 university students was taken by self-report questionnaires that measured alexithymia, academic anxiety and resilience, academic burnout and performance. The results showed that anxiety played a role between alexithymia and academic burnout and performance. Whereas resilience mediated the impact of alexithymia on burnout.

A study was conducted by Aggarwal (2025) to explore the relationship between psychological resilience, alexithymia and parenting styles among young adults. A total sample of 107 young adults was taken aged between 18 to 25 years. The study showed that the individuals who had high authoritarian parenting scored higher in self-efficacy component of resilience, whereas those who had authoritarian and permissive parenting had higher alexithymia, no significant relationship was found between psychological resilience and alexithymia. The research suggested that self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and overall psychological wellbeing is facilitated by emotionally supportive parenting practice.

A study was conducted by Akpınar (2024) to examine the relationship between childhood trauma, alexithymia and difficulty in emotion regulation among university students. A total sample of 351 university students was taken, 293 were females and 63 were males. Online (google form) data collection was carried out and scales used were Childhood Trauma scale, Toronto Alexithymia scale and Emotional Regulation Scale. The results showed that the children who had high levels of childhood trauma also scored high in alexithymia and emotional regulation

difficulties. Further, the results showed, alexithymia was mostly seen in males rather than females. Females were more exposed to sexual abuse than males. The study also found out that in presence of a romantic relationship the rates of alexithymia and emotional difficulty was lower and the age group of 24 to 25 tends to be more emotional dysregulated.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between childhood trauma and resilience with the role of alexithymia among young adults.

1.5 Hypothesis

H₁: The result will show significant positive relationship between childhood trauma and resilience.

H₂: The result will show significant positive relationship between childhood trauma and alexithymia

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

A total sample of n? young adults in the age of 18 to 26 years was collected from Ludhiana.

2.2 Measures

Childhood trauma questionnaire: The childhood trauma questionnaire was developed by David P. Bernstein in 1994 and was used to measure childhood trauma among individuals. The scale included 28 items and has response rate as: 1(*never true*), 2(*rarely true*), 3(*sometimes true*), 4(*often true*), 5(*very often true*). subscales contain: Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual abuse, Emotional Neglect, Physical neglect.

Brief resilience scale: The brief resilience scale was developed by Smith et al. (2008) and is used to measure resilience among individuals. The brief resilience scale includes 6 items and has response rate as: 1(*strongly disagree*), 2(*disagree*), 3(*neutral*), 4(*agree*), 5(*strongly agree*).

Perth alexithymia questionnaire short form: The Perth Alexithymia questionnaire short form is developed by Preece et al. (2023) and was used to measure the level of Alexithymia among young adults. The scale included 6 items and has response rate as: 1(*strongly disagree*), 2, 3, 4 (*neither agree nor disagree*), 5, 6, 7 (*strongly agree*).

2.3 Procedure

Self-report questionnaire was given to young adults aged 18 to 26 and were asked to fill the correct option after reading the question. The questionnaires were distributed by google forms and instructions were given before each questionnaire.

3. Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: Descriptives: N, Mean, Standard deviation

	Childhood trauma	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse	Sexual abuse	Physical neglect	Emotional neglect	denial	resilience	alexithymia	Difficult describing feelings	Difficulty identifying feelings	Externally oriented feelings
N	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91
Mean	67.7	8.10	11.5	6.86	12.9	20.7	9.37	3.49	23.1	8.01	7.86	7.22
Median	9.04	4.18	3.00	3.87	2.01	2.46	3.12	0.546	9.70	3.68	3.54	3.53

Table 2: Correlation between variables

	Childhood Trauma	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse	Sexual abuse	Physical neglect	Emotional neglect	Denial	Resilience	Alexithymia	Difficulty describing feeling	Difficulty identifying emotions	Externally oriented feelings
Childhood trauma	---											
Physical abuse	0.652***	---										
Emotional abuse	0.647***	0.407***	----									
Sexual abuse	0.623***	0.365***	0.404***	----								
Physical neglect	0.364***	0.199	0.161	0.008	----							
Emotional neglect	0.271**	-0.086	-0.197	-0.094	0.097	----						
denial	0.363***	-0.052	0.029	-0.143	-0.015	0.351***	---					
resilience	0.058	-0.0128	0.124	-0.134	-0.094	0.198	0.284**	---				
alexithymia	0.169	0.030	0.259*	0.143	-0.077	-0.008	0.096	0.223*	----			
Difficulty describing feeling	0.051	-0.071	0.176	0.081	-0.093	-0.022	0.033	0.137	0.913***	----		
Difficulty identifying feelings	0.218*	0.083	0.231*	0.138	-0.046	0.042	0.154	0.174	0.921***	0.800***	----	
Externally oriented thinking	0.191	0.073	0.297*	0.170	-0.068	-0.041	0.074	0.295**	0.869***	0.664***	0.693***	----

4. Discussion of Results

The results showed that, there is a significant positive relationship between denial and resilience ($r = 0.284^*$, $p < .05$). A study was conducted by Simeon et al. (2007) to explore factors associated with resilience in healthy adults. A total sample of 25 women and 29 men was taken by self-report questionnaires: Defense style questionnaire, The Relationship questionnaire, The Childhood trauma questionnaire and the Tridimensional Personality questionnaire. The results

showed that there was a negative correlation between childhood interpersonal trauma and with harm avoidance. Resilience was also positively correlated with urinary cortisol, secure attachment, reward dependence and superior performance. The results also showed childhood trauma was the strongest predictor of resilience.

There is also a significant positive relationship between emotional abuse and alexithymia ($r = 0.259^*$, $p < .05$). The results also show that there is a significant positive relationship between resilience and alexithymia ($r = 0.223^*$, $p < .01$). There is also a significant positive correlation between childhood trauma and difficulty identifying emotions ($r = 0.218^*$, $p < .05$). Romero and Perez-Lara (2026) conducted research on the impact of alexithymia as a mediator in the relationship between early traumatic experiences and emotion regulation difficulties in young adults. A total sample of 108 young adults was taken aged between 18 to 25 years, through non-probabilistic sampling. Each participant was given self-report questionnaire: Adverse childhood experiences international questionnaire, The Perth alexithymia questionnaire and the cognitive Emotional regulation questionnaire. The results showed that early trauma is associated with emotional difficulties by alexithymia.

The results also show that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional abuse and difficulty identifying feelings ($r = 0.231^*$, $p < .05$). There is also a significant positive correlation between emotional abuse and externally oriented thinking ($r = 0.297^{**}$, $*p < .01$). There is a significant positive correlation between resilience and externally oriented thinking ($r = 0.295^{**}$, $p < .05$).

5. Conclusion

Childhood trauma is tended to create a lot more trouble in adolescent or young adulthood. This study was conducted to explore the relationship between childhood trauma and resilience with the role of alexithymia in young adults aged 18 to 26 years. In this study, a total sample of 91 young adults was taken from the city Ludhiana, Punjab. Each participant was given a self-report questionnaire with proper instructions. The questionnaires used were Childhood trauma questionnaire, Brief resilience scale and Perth alexithymia short scale. The results in the study concluded that there is a positive correlation between resilience and denial. The results also showed that there is a positive correlation between alexithymia and emotional abuse, resilience and childhood trauma. The study also shows that individuals who scored higher in emotional abuse

have difficulty identifying feelings and have externally oriented thinking. Individuals who scored higher in resilience also tend to have externally oriented thinking.

5.1 Suggestions

These findings revealed several significant positive correlations, including a positive association between emotional abuse and alexithymia. Educational centers such as schools and colleges should pay more attention to students' emotional well-being by helping them recognize, understand, and manage their emotions more effectively. Emotional abuse is often overlooked because its effects may be suppressed or expressed indirectly through anger, which can lead to serious psychological consequences. Trauma-related and emotional awareness workshops should therefore be organized to encourage open discussion about experiences that are often ignored. Individuals with adverse childhood experiences may struggle to identify and recognize emotions, which can affect their future relationships and intensify unresolved trauma. Early identification, along with a supportive environment, can help reduce long-term complications. Overall, these findings contribute to a better understanding of how childhood trauma, resilience, and alexithymia are interrelated.

Future studies can include a larger and more diverse samples as the current study was concluded on only 91 young adults from Ludhiana Punjab. A larger sample and more diverse sample can provide a broader understanding of how childhood trauma, resilience and alexithymia interconnect. The study can also explore gender differences in these variables that can provide a understanding how males and females perceive trauma differently and how they cope with it.

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