



The Impact Of Childhood Neglect in development of Borderline personality Disorder Traits in young Adults

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Abstract: Childhood neglect is a frequently overlooked form of early adversity that significantly contributes to long-term psychological disorders, particularly Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). This study investigates the association between emotional and physical neglect in childhood and the development of BPD traits in adulthood. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from 120 adults through a self-structured questionnaire assessing neglect and BPD symptoms. Quantitative analyses revealed strong correlations between childhood emotional neglect and BPD traits such as emotional dysregulation, unstable relationships, and impulsivity. Regression analysis confirmed emotional neglect as a stronger predictor than physical neglect. Thematic analysis of qualitative responses revealed themes of emotional unavailability, chronic insecurity, and emotional suppression. The findings highlight the critical need for trauma-informed care, comprehensive screening practices, and early intervention strategies in mental health settings to address the consequences of childhood neglect.

Keywords: *Childhood Neglect, Borderline Personality Disorder, Emotional Dysregulation, Attachment, Trauma, Emotional Invalidation*

1. Introduction

Childhood experiences play a central role in shaping emotional and personality development. Neglect, often less visible than abuse, can cause deep psychological wounds that persist into adulthood. Emotional and physical neglect deprive children of basic emotional support and safety, respectively. Emotional neglect involves the absence of affection, validation, and responsiveness, whereas physical neglect includes deprivation of food, shelter, and health care. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a severe psychiatric condition marked by emotional instability, impulsivity, and identity disturbance, has been consistently linked to early adverse experiences, especially neglect.

Understanding the relationship between neglect and BPD is essential for prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment planning. While emotional neglect disrupts self-regulation and attachment, physical neglect compromises basic safety and development. This study explores how such neglect manifests in adult psychopathology, highlighting both the psychological mechanisms and long-term emotional consequences involved.

2. Method

Participants: The study involved 120 adult participants (aged 18 and above) from varied demographic backgrounds. Convenience sampling was used to reach a wide range of individuals through online platforms and academic networks.

Instruments: A 28-item self-structured online questionnaire was used, comprising:

- Demographic details (age, gender, education)
- BPD traits (emotional instability, impulsivity, identity disturbance)
- Childhood neglect history (emotional and physical)
- Open-ended qualitative questions on childhood experiences and emotional well-being

Procedure: Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional ethics board. Participants provided informed consent electronically before proceeding. The survey was disseminated via Google Forms, with participation being voluntary and responses anonymized. Data were cleaned and screened prior to analysis.

Data Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics to summarize sample characteristics and symptom prevalence
- Pearson's correlations to examine relationships between neglect and BPD traits
- Multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive value of neglect types
- Thematic analysis to identify recurrent emotional narratives in qualitative responses

3. Results

Descriptive Findings: Participants reported high levels of childhood neglect. Emotional neglect had a mean score of 5.30 on a 7-point Likert scale, while physical neglect averaged 4.97. Key BPD symptoms, such as emotional instability ($M=5.10$), feelings of emptiness ($M=4.88$), and unstable relationships ($M=4.72$), were also prominent. This suggests a substantial overlap between neglect experiences and adult BPD symptoms.

Correlations: Emotional neglect showed significant positive correlations with mood swings ($r=0.59$), relationship instability ($r=0.63$), and impulsivity ($r=0.48$). Physical neglect correlated moderately with the same traits, suggesting that while both neglect types are harmful, emotional neglect may have more pervasive psychological consequences.

Regression Analysis: A multiple regression analysis confirmed that emotional neglect was a significant predictor of BPD symptoms ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), followed by physical neglect ($\beta = 0.26$, $p = 0.005$). These findings support the hypothesis that early emotional deprivation plays a central role in adult emotional dysregulation.

Thematic Analysis:

- *Emotional Unavailability:* Many participants recalled growing up feeling invisible, unloved, or emotionally unsupported, describing a lack of warmth and validation from caregivers.
- *Chronic Insecurity:* Recurring themes included fears of abandonment, mistrust in relationships, and difficulties in forming secure emotional bonds.
- *Suppressed Emotions:* Participants often internalized distress, leading to repressed anger, anxiety, and emotional shutdowns that later emerged as impulsivity or mood swings.

4. Discussion

The findings affirm that childhood neglect, especially emotional neglect, is a potent predictor of BPD traits in adulthood. Emotional deprivation disrupts identity formation, attachment security, and emotion regulation—key areas impaired in individuals with BPD. These results support theoretical models of developmental psychopathology, particularly attachment theory, which posits that early caregiver unresponsiveness leads to emotional instability.

Correlational and regression data reinforce that neglect, even without overt abuse, has lasting effects on personality and emotional functioning. The thematic analysis adds qualitative

depth, showing how participants interpreted their experiences as emotionally invalidating or relationally traumatic.

Clinically, these findings advocate for:

- Trauma-informed therapy (e.g., Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Mentalization-Based Therapy)
- Screening children for signs of neglect and emotional deprivation
- Educating caregivers and teachers about the impact of emotional neglect

Neglect often goes unrecognized in both clinical and legal settings. This study contributes to a growing body of evidence that calls for recognizing neglect as a serious developmental trauma.

Limitations include the study's cross-sectional nature, potential recall bias, and the use of convenience sampling. Future longitudinal studies are recommended to track the developmental trajectory of individuals exposed to neglect and assess the role of moderating factors such as resilience, social support, and genetic vulnerability.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that childhood emotional and physical neglect significantly elevate the risk of developing BPD symptoms in adulthood. Emotional neglect, in particular, emerged as a robust predictor of emotional instability, interpersonal difficulties, and impulsivity. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings provides compelling evidence that childhood neglect must be addressed proactively within mental health care systems.

Early detection, increased awareness, and targeted interventions can prevent the long-term psychological consequences of neglect. Trauma-informed care approaches, such as DBT and MBT, hold promise for healing emotional wounds and enhancing relational stability in individuals with BPD. Recognizing neglect as a serious risk factor can shift public and clinical understanding, encouraging preventative strategies and compassionate responses for affected individuals.

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