



Research paper

## The Mediation Role of Early Maladaptive Schemas in the Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Borderline Personality Traits

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### Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between childhood trauma and borderline personality traits. Using a correlation-type descriptive research method. A sample of 300 participants, selected from the students of Islamic Azad University of Shahrood through convenience sampling. The tools were used in this research included borderline personality scale, childhood trauma questionnaire and primary maladaptive schemas questionnaire. Pearson correlation test and structural equation method were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that early maladaptive schemas played a mediating role in the connection between childhood trauma and borderline personality traits. Therefore, paying attention to these variables was of particular importance in improving the characteristics of borderline personality. Therefore, it is suggested that the results of the present study should be taken into consideration in interventions related to students' mental health.

**Keywords:** Borderline personality traits, childhood trauma, early maladaptive schemas

### Introduction

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is characterized by a pervasive pattern of emotion dysregulation, hyper-intensity affects, unstable interpersonal relationships, and impulsive behaviour, which is a common and serious psychiatric disorder in the general population (peng, et al., 2021). BPD is also regularly comorbid with axis I and other axis II disorders, especially mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and disorders related to substance abuse (Botter, et al., 2021). Childhood trauma is one of the factors that can be involved in creating borderline personality syndrome. There are many studies that have shown the relationship between experiencing childhood trauma and suffering from borderline personality syndrome in adulthood (Tate, et al., 2022). Therefore, examining these damages may lead to providing solutions to reduce people's problems so that these people can take the right step to solve their problems. Therefore, discussing the origin of borderline personality disorder, especially during childhood, makes it important to pay attention to another variable called childhood trauma in people with this disorder. Although the relationship between childhood trauma and borderline personality syndrome has been investigated; However, little attention has been paid to the mediating factors of this relationship. One of the mediating mechanisms of this relationship is the primary maladaptive schemas which are defined as pervasive patterns of dysfunction that relate to a person's relationship with self or others (Kaya & Aydin, 2021). In general, people

with borderline personality disorders have characteristics that cause tension and conflict in their relationships. In order to help these people to have a better life, it is necessary to examine these disorders from the general aspects and to know well the underlying and accompanying factors of these disorders. Considering the importance of examining psychological and functional variables and components in people with borderline personality disorder, the present study aimed to present a model of the mediating role on the childhood trauma, known as early maladaptive schemas, on this disorder. So, the main hypothesis of the research was that early maladaptive schemas had a mediating effect on the relationship between childhood trauma and borderline personality traits.

## Method

This study employed a descriptive-correlational approach with a structural equation modeling type. The statistical population encompassed the students of Islamic Azad University of Shahrood (Iran) in 2021-2022, and a sample of 300 participants was selected through convenience sampling. The research was conducted online, with questionnaires posted on virtual networks such as Telegram. Inclusion criteria encompassed an age range of 20 to 40 years, while non-response to the questionnaire served as exclusion criteria. To explore the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between childhood trauma and borderline personality traits, path analysis via AMOS22 software was employed.

## Tools

**Borderline personality Scale (BPS):** The BPS has 22 items, with scores ranging from 0 to 22; a higher score indicates the presence of Borderline personality symptoms. Mohammadzadeh, et al. (2005) standardized this questionnaire, reporting Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 for the overall scale. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 was achieved.

**Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ):** This questionnaire has 28 items and 5 subscales. The questionnaire's reliability was reported as 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha by Bernstein, et al. (2003). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was determined to be 0.89.

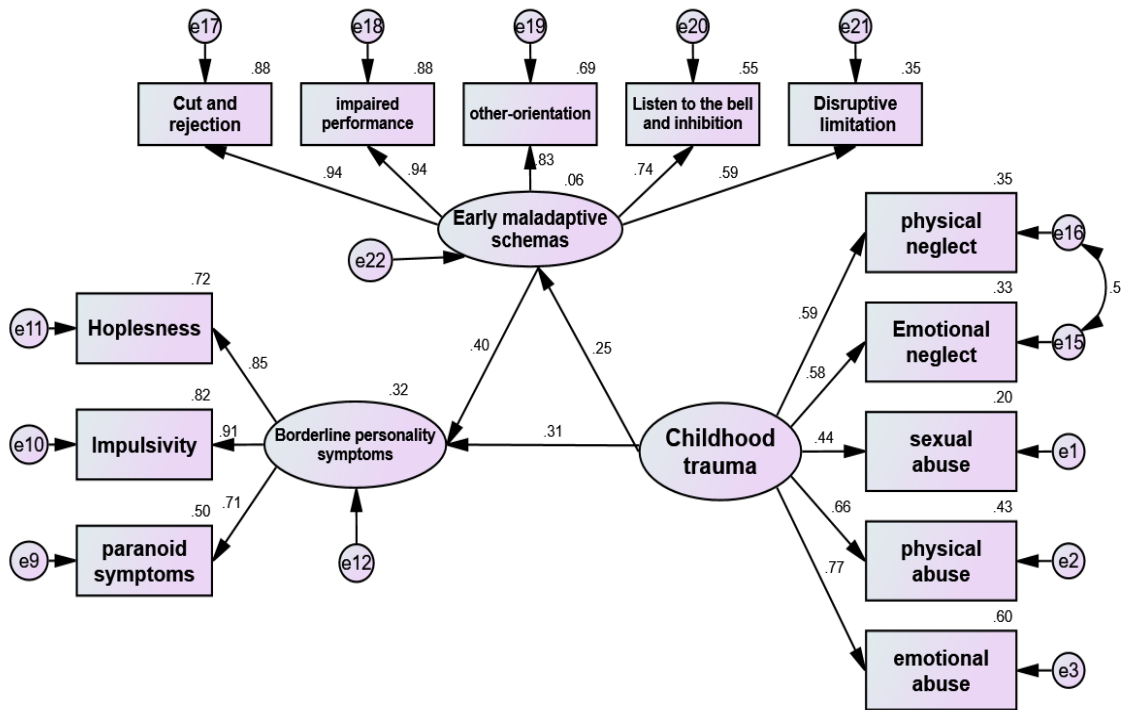
**Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF):** This questionnaire, consisting of 75 items, reflects a higher score indicating greater maladaptive schemas. Ameri (2023) reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 to 0.90. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 to 0.92.

## Results

Prior to conducting path analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed normality assumptions. Given that structural equation analysis relies on Pearson correlation coefficients derived from the sample correlation matrix, it is noteworthy that all correlations reached statistical significance ( $P < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, results pertaining to fit indices indicated the model's satisfactory alignment with the data in this study. As Table 1, the Bootstrap test results reveal a significant mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between childhood trauma and borderline personality traits ( $P < 0.05$ ).and Figure 1

**Table 1: The results of Bootstrap test**

Routes	Indirect Effects	Standard errors	Upper Bounds	Lower Bounds	sig
Childhood trauma → Maladaptive Schemas → BPD	0.10	0.02	0.16	0.05	0.002



**Figure 1. Final model**

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that childhood trauma was linked to borderline personality traits, not only through a direct association but also indirectly through the early maladaptive schemas. This suggests that childhood trauma alone do not constitute a significant aspect of vulnerability to the occurrence of borderline personality; rather, the presence of early maladaptive schemas is crucial. Specifically, childhood trauma exhibits a positive relationship with borderline personality when the levels of early maladaptive schemas are high. Trauma can be the result of stressful events that destroy a person's sense of security and make a person feel insecure in a dangerous world. In this case, it is more likely that people will experience symptoms of borderline personality following exposure to traumatic events. Also, early traumatic experiences, create an environment that invalidates the child's feelings and emotions, which may lead to schemas in adulthood become inconsistent; Therefore, maladaptive feelings caused by childhood trauma activate primary maladaptive schemas in the later stages of life. In fact, experiencing traumatic events in childhood leads to the formation of maladaptive schemas that a person is constantly involved with in adulthood. The activation of these schemas can affect a

person's cognition and behaviour and increase the possibility of suffering from psychological disorders such as borderline personality disorder. It is suggested to conduct this study in the clinical community and other age groups in future researches and to use the clinical interview and other variables measurement scales. Also, the severity of borderline personality symptoms or the type of trauma in the participants was not controlled. It is suggested that specialists in the treatment of patients with borderline personality disorder pay attention to the history of childhood experiences of these patients.

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## Conflict of Interests

Authors found no conflict of interests.



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