

The Role of Doctor Trust in the Relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Non-Adherence to Healthcare Treatment

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ABSTRACT

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include psychological, physical, or sexual abuse; witnessing domestic violence; living with household members with substance abuse, mental illness, suicidality, or past imprisonment (Felitti et al., 1998). Previous research in childhood trauma has found that a history of abuse predicts non-adherence to treatment for a variety of medical conditions (Van Loon et al., 2004). Individuals who have experienced ACEs are also less likely to trust others (Gobin & Freyd, 2013) and may therefore be less likely to trust their doctors. Past research has shown that trust in one's medical provider is necessary in order to ensure adherence to healthcare treatment (Hall et al., 2001). The present study investigated whether level of doctor trust could explain the relationship between ACEs and non-adherence to medical treatments among individuals with chronic health conditions.

ACEs AND NON-ADHERENCE

- It is common for individuals who experienced abuse as a child to not adhere to healthcare treatments as adults (Van Loon et al., 2004).

DOCTOR TRUST AND NON-ADHERENCE

- ACEs are often described as *betrayal traumas* because the child is experiencing abuse or neglect by an adult who is often a family member (Freyd, 1998).
- Individuals who have experienced ACEs and betrayal traumas are less likely to trust others (Gobin & Freyd, 2013) and may therefore be less likely to trust their doctor.
- Studies have shown that trust in one's medical provider is necessary in order to ensure adherence to treatment (Hall et al., 2001).

ACEs, DEPRESSION, AND NON-ADHERENCE

- Childhood trauma has been shown to be a risk factor for developing depression in adulthood (Heim, Newport, Mletzko, Miller, & Nemeroff, 2008).
- Depressed patients are also less likely to adhere to healthcare treatments (Grenard et al., 2011).
- It is therefore important to control for the effects of depression in this study.

METHOD

- 352 participants with chronic health conditions completed an online Qualtrics survey that included:
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) scale (Felitti et al., 1998)
 - Trust in the Medical Profession self-report scale (Hall et al., 2002)
 - Five self-report questions assessing adherence to physicians' advice on medication, care, and appointments
- Hypothesis:** Experiencing a greater number of ACEs will predict significantly greater levels of non-adherence to healthcare treatment and this relationship will be mediated by trust in one's doctor.

RESULTS

- To investigate the role of doctor trust in mediating the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and non-adherence to healthcare treatments, tests of mediation were conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples for bias corrected 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect derived from PROCESS (Hayes, 2013).
- Controlling for the effects of depression, level of doctor trust significantly partially mediated the relationship between number of adverse childhood experiences and non-adherence to healthcare treatments, 95% CI [0.0005, 0.0282].
- This mediation model suggests that level of doctor trust accounts for 12.68% of the variance in non-adherence to healthcare treatments.

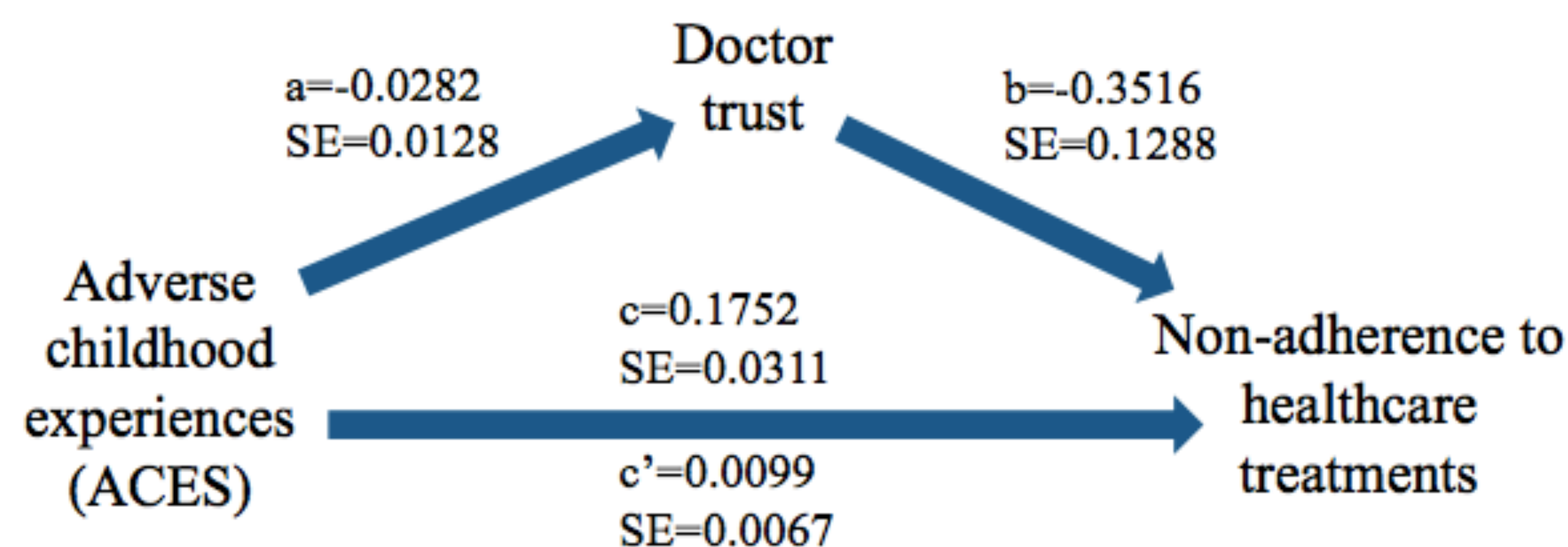


Figure 1. Doctor trust significantly partially mediates the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and non-adherence to healthcare treatments.

DISCUSSION

- The results of the present study suggest that in part, level of doctor trust explains the relationship between ACEs and non-adherence to medical treatments.
- These results provide important information for medical professionals who come in contact with individuals who have experienced trauma. Specifically, this research highlights the importance of these medical professionals developing a trusting relationship with their patients.
- Healthcare providers should refer their patients to psychologists to deal with the effects of trauma that can be exacerbated due to the insidious nature of chronic medical conditions.
- Mental health professionals can work with these patients on their ability to trust authority figures so that they are more able to adhere to medical treatments.

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