

# Childhood Maltreatment, Mental Health, and Interpersonal Conflict in Current Adult Relationships



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## INTRODUCTION

Research has demonstrated associations between childhood maltreatment (CM), mental health symptoms, and interpersonal conflict in adult relationships. Childhood maltreatment has been shown to correlate with mental health symptoms and both victimization and perpetration of aggressive behavior. However, few studies have examined the relationships between all three constructs. **This study examined the relationship between childhood maltreatment, mental health symptoms, and interpersonal conflict in emerging adult relationships in a nonclinical population of college students.**

## METHODS

### Participants

- 94 college students
- 73% female
- Ages 18-30

### Measures

#### CTQ (Childhood Trauma Questionnaire)

A 28-item questionnaire assessing childhood abuse and neglect experiences. It has five subscales: *Emotional Abuse*, *Emotional Neglect*, *Physical Abuse*, *Physical Neglect*, *Sexual Abuse*.

#### TSC-40 (Trauma Symptom Checklist-40)

A 40-item questionnaire that evaluates symptoms associated with traumatic experiences. It has six subscales: *Anxiety*, *Depression*, *Dissociation*, *Sexual Abuse Trauma Index*, *Sexual Problems*, *Sleep Disturbance*.

#### SCL-90-R (Symptom Checklist-90-Revised)

A 90-item questionnaire that evaluates a broad range of mental health symptoms. It has nine categories: *Somatization*, *Obsessive-Compulsive*, *Interpersonal Sensitivity*, *Depression*, *Anxiety*, *Hostility*, *Phobic Anxiety*, *Paranoid Ideation*, *Psychoticism*, *Additional Items*.

#### CTS2 (Revised Conflict Tactics Scales)

A 78-item questionnaire that measures the handling of conflict in adult relationships. It has five categories that assess both the partner and self: *Negotiation*, *Psychological Aggression*, *Physical Aggression*, *Sexual Coercion*, *Injury*.

## RESULTS

CM (CTQ) was **positively correlated** with various **mental health difficulties**.

All **CTQ** subscales were **positively correlated** with all **interpersonal conflict** subscales, with the **strongest correlations** between CTS2 Psychological Aggression by the Partner (PAP) and CTQ Emotional Neglect, Emotional Abuse, and total score.

Various **mental health** symptoms were **positively correlated** with **interpersonal conflict**, with the **strongest correlations** between CTS2 PAP and SCL-90-R Depression, TSC-40 Sexual Abuse Trauma Index, and TSC-40 total score.

The indirect effects analysis demonstrated that TSC-40 total score **completely mediated** the **effect of CTQ total score on CTS2 PAP**. Together TSC-40 total score and CTQ total score **predicted 14% of the variance** in CTS2 PAP.

### Correlations of CTQ and CTS2 subscales

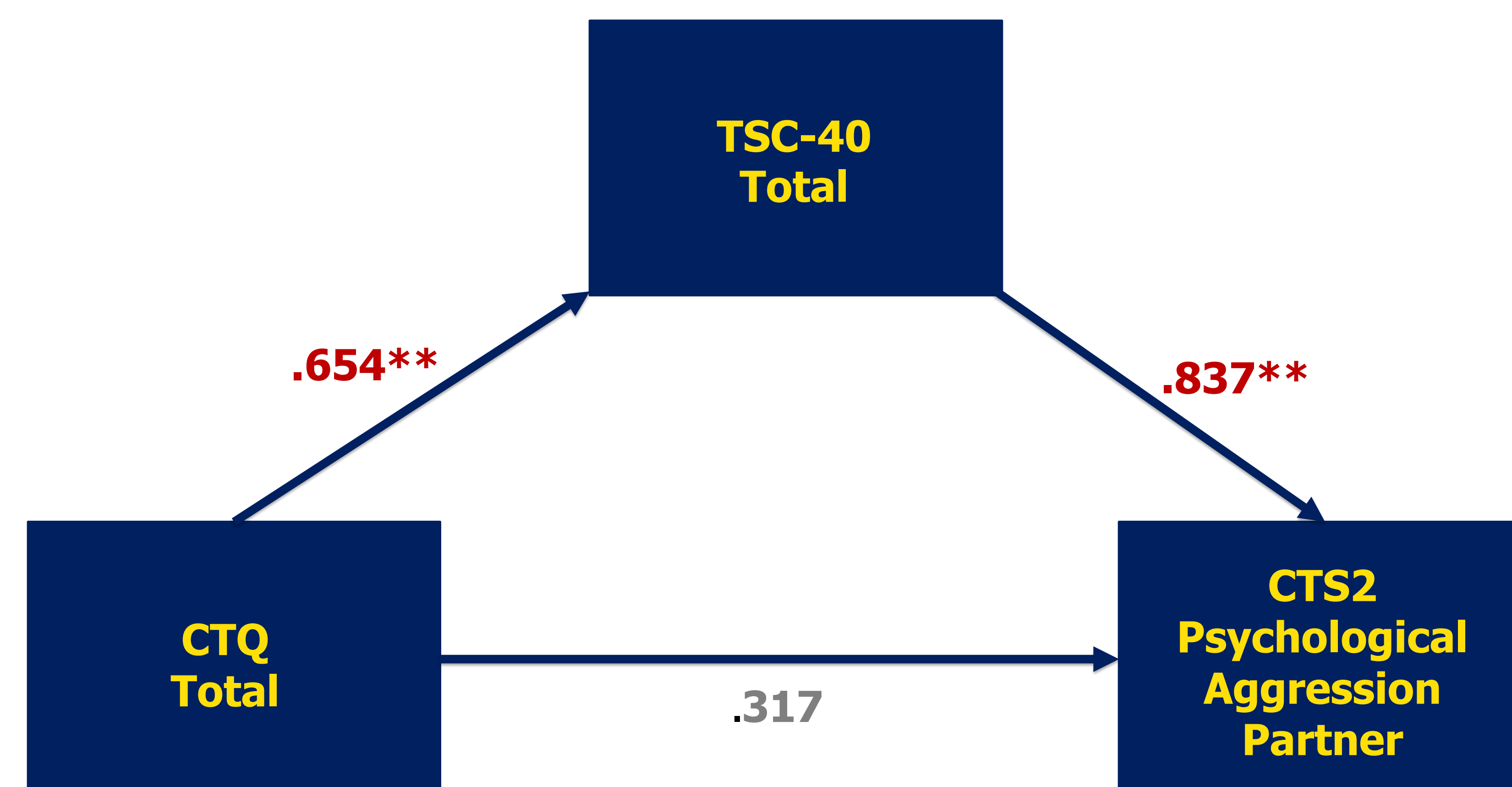
	Total Score	Physical Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Abuse	Emotional Neglect	Sexual Abuse
Psychological Aggression Self	.338**	.376**	.266**	.321**	.335**	.151
Psychological Aggression Partner	.377**	.324**	.231*	.379**	.392**	.236*
Sexual Coercion Partner	.324**	.300**	.224*	.297**	.286**	.228*

### Correlations of TSC-40 total score and CTS2 subscales

	Psychological Aggression Self	Psychological Aggression Partner	Sexual Coercion Partner
Trauma Symptom Checklist Total Score	.422**	.462**	.396**

\*\* Correlation is significant at .01 level (1-tailed)  
\* Correlation is significant at .05 level (1-tailed)

## Mediational Pathway



\*\* Correlation is significant at .01 level (1-tailed)

## DISCUSSION

Mental health symptoms were most strongly positively correlated with psychological aggression from a partner, but results are **inconsistent** in past research. This may be due to some studies involving clinical samples rather than college students.

Although childhood maltreatment was positively associated with interpersonal conflict, emotional neglect and psychological aggression from a partner are most strongly correlated, and previous findings are **mixed**.

These findings suggest that mental health symptoms are a key factor in the relationship between a history of childhood maltreatment and being victimized through psychological aggression by a partner as an emerging adult.