

Associations between childhood neglect, interpersonal relationships, and later substance use: A review through the lens of attachment theories

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Background

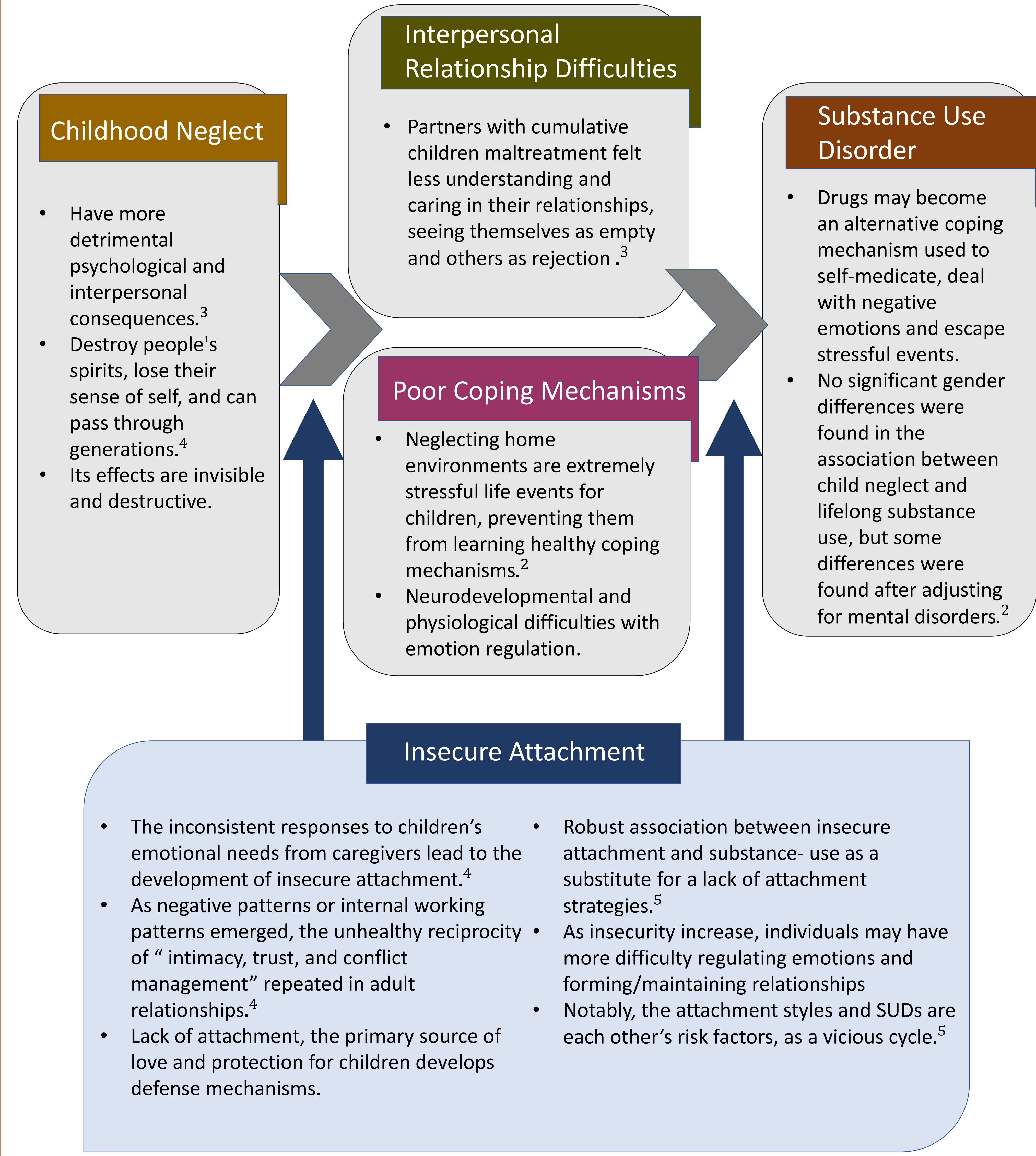
- In the past decades, there has been widespread attention and research on the emotional maltreatment of children and its long-term effects on various developmental areas.¹
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms for emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships developed in child-neglected family environments may lead to the use of drugs as a means of self-healing in the face of difficulties.
- **BUT...**there is still a gap in understanding what connects the dysfunction caused by child neglect with later substance use problems.

Research Topics

Through the lens of attachment, this review will examine how victims of childhood emotional neglect may be more likely to turn to substance use as a coping mechanism through an attachment theory perspective, given difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships during the transition to adulthood.

Findings

Model 1. Synthesize findings of associations between childhood neglect, interpersonal relation and later substance use and apply insecure attachment style to these associations



Conclusion

- Children learn about interpersonal relationships from their parents, and in emotionally neglecting environments, they may be learning poor interpersonal skills because of developing insecure attachments with their caregivers.
- Mixed feelings about neglecting caregivers during the transition from childhood to adulthood may carry over into later intimate relationships and be triggered when they feel loved by their partner.
- In terms of treatment, we should emphasize insecure attachment trauma and provide alternative coping mechanisms to avoid the mutually reinforcing relationship between attachment types and substance use.

Future Directions

- Generalize to multiple populations.
- Reduce sampling error due to recall and reporting bias.
- Distinguish between different attachment patterns, different substances, and comorbidities.
- Move up to a systematic level, integrating family contexts into attachment studies
- More longitudinal studies, covering longer practices.
- Personally, I'm interested in the role of empathy in children experiencing neglect.

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