



Associations between Childhood Trauma and PTSD Symptoms after Adult Sexual Assault

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Introduction

Childhood trauma exposure can have adverse physical and mental effects on a person throughout the duration of their life, even continuing into adulthood. Childhood trauma exposure, measured using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scale, has been found to uniquely predict a person's Post traumatic Stress (PTSD) symptoms.

- H1: Women survivors with high ACEs (3+) would have more PTSD scores at each time point (initial, one and seven weeks).
- H2: Women survivors with high ACEs scores would demonstrate less reduction in their PTSD symptoms post-assault as compared to those with lower (0-2) ACE scores.

Methods

- 44 women sexual assault survivors receiving emergency care at 1 of 2 sites in the Better Tomorrow Network completed self-report surveys at the emergency care visit and 1-week and 7-weeks post-assault
- Childhood Trauma Exposure was measured using the 10 item ACE scale.
 - Reduced to a dichotomous variable with 0-2 ACEs being defined as “Low”, and 3+ as “High.”
- PTSD symptoms were measured using the PTSD Checklist for the DSM 5 (PCL -5).

Results

Child Exposure and PCL - 5 Mean Score Relationship Across Time

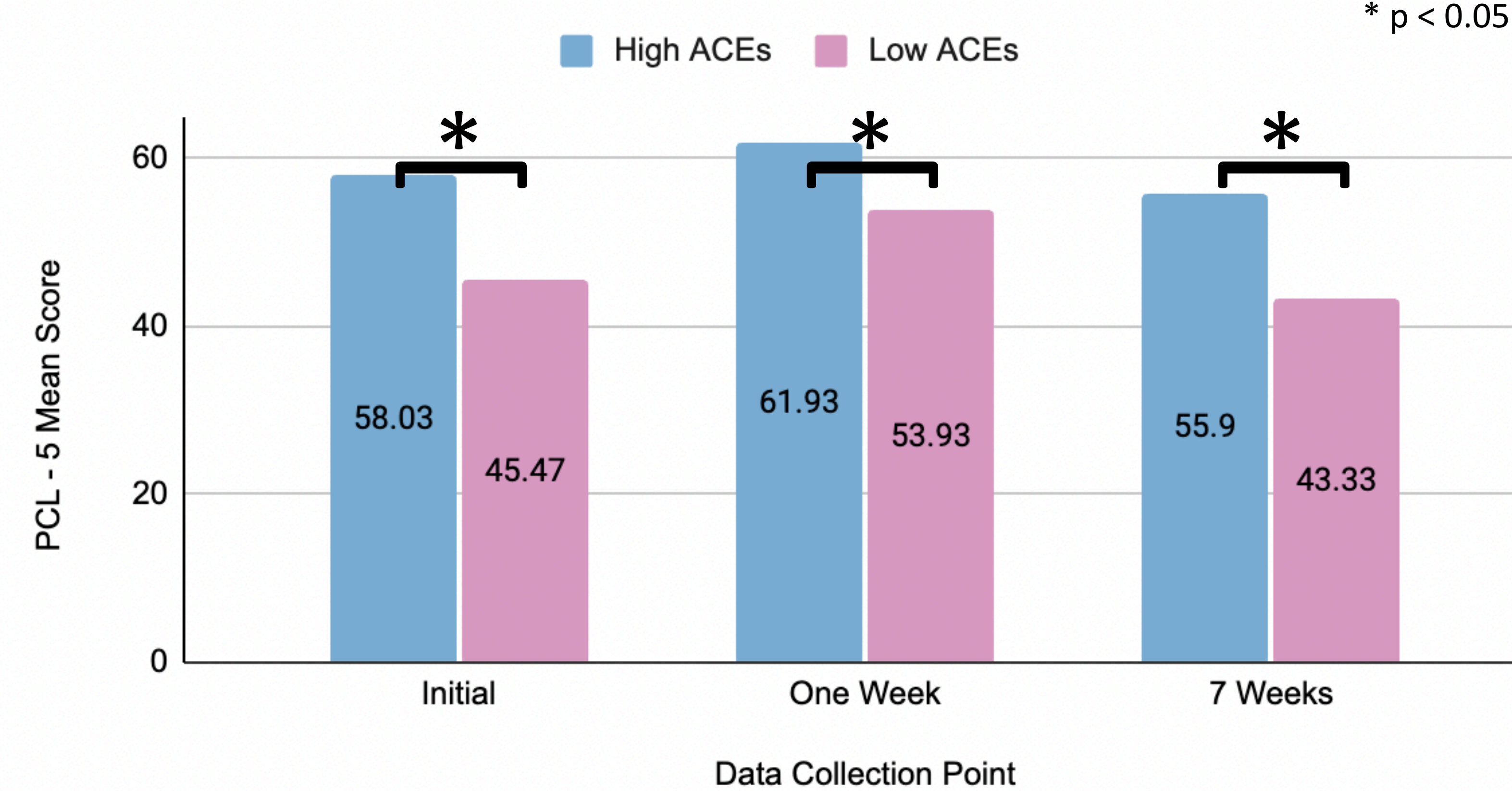


Figure 1

Two ANOVAs were conducted for each hypothesis with the independent variable being the ACE group (0-2 ACEs compared to 3+ ACEs).

For the first hypothesis, PCL score at each time point (initial, one week, and seven weeks) served as dependent variables. The ANOVA demonstrated significant differences in PCL scores by group at the initial time point ($F(1, 42)=11.71, p=.001$), one week ($F(1, 41)=4.79, p=.034$), and seven weeks ($F(1, 42)=5.90, p=.020$) post assault, with the High ACEs group experiencing more PTSD symptoms (group means reported in Figure 1).

To test our second hypothesis, the dependent variable was reductions in PCL score from one week to seven weeks. We found no significant differences in reductions by ACE group ($p= 0.423$).

Discussion

- Findings indicate that greater childhood trauma exposure is correlated with increased PTSD symptoms after sexual assault as an adult.
- Results do not indicate that childhood trauma exposure affects the course of recovery.
- Future research should also be done to analyze what factors influence a persons' reactivity to PTSD treatment.
- Our first finding adds to a large area of research supporting that childhood trauma exposure has implications in the development of PTSD related symptoms.
- Limitations include that the small sample size could have led to an underpowered analysis for our second hypothesis and indicates a need for more extensive research

References

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