METHODS

Participants
• 295 undergraduates at the University of Oregon
• 70% female; Mean age = 19 years; 96% heterosexual
• 82% White, 7% Asian, 3.5% Hispanic, 7.5% other/decline to respond

Measures
• Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) 28-item measure, possible range 0-100, higher scores indicate more dissociative experiences
• Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale (DAS) 40-item measure, possible range 40-280, higher scores indicate more cognitive distortions
• Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS) 14-items, each assessed for 3 age categories, scores indicate number of types of events experienced

Method
• Participants completed surveys anonymously in an on-line research study administration program

RESULTS

Dissociation and cognitive distortions were significantly positively correlated, \( r = .26, p < .01 \). Trauma and dissociation were significantly correlated across types of trauma and across ages at time of trauma. Trauma and cognitive distortions were correlated for both types of trauma at all ages except 0-6 years old (see Table 1).

A series of t-test did not indicate a high trauma were significantly more dissociative that people who had not, but that these groups did not differ in number of cognitive distortions. People who had experienced at least one low –betrayal trauma had significantly higher scores on both dissociation and cognitive distortions than people who had not (see Table 2).

Table 1. Correlations Between Trauma and Dissociation and Cognitive Distortions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DES</th>
<th>DAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Betrayal Trauma</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 0-6</td>
<td>.145*</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 6-11</td>
<td>.211**</td>
<td>.153**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 12+</td>
<td>.267**</td>
<td>.186**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Betrayal Trauma</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 0-6</td>
<td>.248**</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 6-11</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>.127*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 12+</td>
<td>.361**</td>
<td>.124**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Results of this study suggest that both dissociation and cognitive distortions are more likely to occur among people who have experienced trauma than people who have not. Inconsistent with previous research, dissociation was less strongly associated with traumas high in betrayal and traumas occurring at young ages than with low betrayal traumas and those at older ages. Thus results of this study should be interpreted with caution, as this sample may not be a representative sample. However, it appears that trauma before the age of 6 is less likely to result in cognitive distortions than in dissociation. This makes sense given the limits of cognitive development at that age.

Data from this study have implications for the utility of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) as a treatment for people who have experienced trauma, in particular early childhood trauma. Although CBT techniques are among the most highly recommended for treating trauma responses (Smucker & Dancu, 1999), at present there is is scant research on how dissociation impacts the efficacy of CBT.

In this study, betrayal trauma, particularly that experienced before age 6, did not indicate the presence of more cognitive distortions than were present among people who did not report a history of trauma. This indicates that targeting cognitive distortions may be less appropriate for some people who report trauma histories than others.

Future research should further examine the relationships between dissociation and cognitive distortions among trauma survivors, to determine whether these results hold with more representative samples, and examine how these two coping strategies are impacted by therapeutic interventions.

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