Betrayal Trauma and Borderline Personality Characteristics: Gender Differences
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Abstract

Borderline Personality Disorder has been associated with both trauma and insecure attachment styles. Betrayal Trauma Theory proposes survivors of interpersonal trauma may remain unaware of betrayal in order to maintain a necessary attachment. This study attempts to replicate the association between self-reported betrayal trauma experiences and borderline personality characteristics found by Kaehler & Freyd (2009) but using a community sample instead of a college sample. Using multiple regression, all three levels of betrayal and gender were significant predictors of borderline personality characteristics. Separate regression analyses were conducted for each gender to explore the levels of betrayal trauma on these traits. For men, all three levels of betrayal trauma were significant predictors; for women, only high and medium betrayal traumas were significant. These findings suggest trauma may be a key cause of borderline personality disorder, with differential effects for betrayal and gender.

Methods

•N=749 (57% women; 80% married) (M_age = 50.7, SD = 12.6).
•Predominately Caucasian (96.0%).
•Completed the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006) and a modified version of the Borderline Personality Inventory Leichsenring, 1999 online.
•BBTS: a 12-item, self-report measure of major traumatic events.
•Each item is classified as having one of three levels of betrayal: low, medium, and high.
•Non-interpersonal traumas (e.g., natural disasters) are low-betrayal.
•Interpersonal traumas (e.g., being attacked) are medium or high-betrayal.
•BPI : a 53-item self-report measure evaluating characteristics typical of those diagnosed with BPD

Results

•51.4% of sample experienced at least one type of first-hand trauma.
•35.8% experienced at least one high-betrayal trauma.

•A multiple regression modeling including gender and the three levels of betrayal trauma significantly predicted a portion of the variance in borderline traits, F(4, 581) = 21.2, p < .001, adjusted r² = .122.

•Separate regression models were conducted for men and women.

Table 1: Multiple Regression for Betrayal Trauma Predicting BPI (N=749)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High BT</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium BT</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low BT</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
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Note. R² = 126, adjusted r² = .122, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Figure 2: Betrayal Trauma and standardized Male BPI score using standardized β

Conclusion

•Supporting Kaehler &Freyd (2009), betrayal traumas predicts borderline personality traits.
•Contrary to Kaehler & Freyd (2009), gender was a significant predictor.
•For men, all types of trauma predict, with medium BT as the strongest.
•For women, only interpersonal trauma, with high BT as the strongest.

References