

## The Role of Childhood Traumatic Experiences in Predicting Sexual Self-Esteem in Married Women

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### Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of the role of childhood traumatic experiences in predicting sexual self-esteem in married women. The research method was a descriptive correlation. The statistical population included all married women in Guilan province in 2023-2024, and based on the inclusion criteria of the research, a sample size of 200 people was considered, and they were selected by convenience sampling method. Research measurement tools included The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF) and the Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women (SSEI-W-SF). Data were analyzed using linear regression analysis. The results show that childhood traumatic experiences have a significant prediction of sexual self-esteem of married women ( $\beta = -0.644$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ), and explain 0.414 of the variance of sexual self-esteem in married women. Therefore, childhood traumatic experiences can play a role in the sexual self-esteem of married women.

**Keywords:** childhood traumatic experiences, sexual self-esteem, women

## Introduction

Sexual relationship plays an essential role in people's lives, and a satisfying sexual life is related to physical health, happiness, and feeling good in women [1]. Studies in this field show that approximately 58% of women are not completely satisfied with their sexual relationships, and 43% of women struggle with various sexual issues throughout their lives [1]. One of the factors that may affect women's sex relationships is sexual self-esteem. According to Snell et al. [2], sexual self-esteem includes positive regard and trust in one's ability to experience sex satisfactorily. In fact, sexual self-esteem is the value that a person places on himself sexually and includes aspects of himself in relation to others and sexual identity [1].

High sexual self-esteem leads to more sexual satisfaction, and research shows a positive relationship between sexual self-esteem, sexual satisfaction [3]. Also, the results of studies show that sexual self-esteem helps both interpersonal functioning and the development of healthy sexual relationships [4]. It seems that one of the factors that affects sexual self-esteem is childhood traumatic experiences. Childhood traumatic experiences refer to adverse events or situations that occur during a person's childhood years and have a profound negative impact on their physical, emotional, or mental health. These experiences can vary widely in nature and severity but often involve situations that affect a person's ability to cope with different aspects of life [6]. As these children grow into adults people, traumatic experiences can translate into low self-esteem in various aspects of life [7].

In marriage, sexual self-esteem plays an essential role in intimacy and sexual satisfaction [8,9].

Research has shown that unresolved childhood traumatic experiences can manifest as emotional barriers and inhibit a person's ability to participate in and enjoy intimate relationships [10,11].

In other words, the feeling of vulnerability, fear, or shame caused by traumatic childhood experiences can significantly hinder women's ability to express their sexual needs and desires in the context of marriage [12-15]. In general, it can be said that childhood traumatic experiences can significantly affect psychological development and interpersonal functioning and potentially lead to problems in sexual relationships [16-18]. For this reason, research on how traumatic childhood experiences can affect sexual self-esteem in married women is of particular importance, because research shows that traumatic childhood experiences can have extensive effects and consequences on physical and mental health and potentially affect various aspects of adult functioning, including intimate and sexual relationships [12, 18, 20]. According to the issues raised and the few studies that have been conducted in this research area, the researcher seeks to answer the question of whether traumatic childhood experiences have a role in predicting sexual self-esteem in married women or not. For this reason, the present study aims to investigate the role of traumatic childhood experiences in predicting sexual self-esteem in married women.

## Materials and Methods

### Participants

The research method was a descriptive correlation. The statistical population included all married women in Guilan province in 2023-2024, and based on the inclusion criteria of the research, a sample size of 200 people was considered, and they were selected by convenience sampling method. The inclusion criteria included female gender, age range of 18 to 50 years, and at least two years have passed since marriage. The exclusion criteria included refusal to complete the questionnaires, distorted and incomplete questionnaires, suffering from sexual dysfunction and disorders, suffering from acute psychiatric disorders, and substance abuse. Information was collected through self-report questionnaires. After collecting the data, the data were analyzed by SPSS-27 software and by linear regression method.

### Measures

#### The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF)

The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire was compiled by Bernstein et al. [21] in order to measure childhood trauma. This questionnaire is a tool to measure people with experiences of childhood abuse and neglect, which can be used for both adults and adolescents. The questionnaire has 28 items, 25 clinical and three validities, measuring an individuals experiences of child abuse and neglect retrospectively. This questionnaire evaluates five types of abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and emotional and physical neglect. Higher scores in the questionnaire indicate more traumatic experiences. Bernstein et al. [21] reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire on a group of teenagers between 0.86 and 0.89. In the Iranian sample, Ebrahimi et al. [22] reported the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire from 0.81 to 0.98.

#### Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women (SSEI-W-SF)

The Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women - Short Form [23] is a Persian translation and adaptation of the Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women [24]. The SSEI-W-SF is a brief assessment of women's affective reactions to self-appraisals of sexuality in 32 items across five factors: Experience and Skill, Control, Attractiveness, Moral Judgment, and Adaptiveness. The total score of the questionnaire is obtained by summing the scores of 5 factors, and higher

scores indicate higher sexual self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale is 0.92, experience and skill 0.84, attractiveness 0.88, control 0.80, moral Judgment 0.80, and Adaptiveness 0.80 have been reported [24]. In the Iranian sample of Farrokhi and Share [23, 25], the test-retest reliability coefficient for the whole scale was 0.91 and for its five subscales in the range of 0.82 to 0.94. Also, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole questionnaire was 0.88, and the factors of experience and skill, attractiveness, control, moral judgment, and adaptability were 0.73, 0.54, 0.66, 0.72, and 0.62.

## Results

Two hundred people participated in this study, with an average age of 35.51 and a standard deviation of 7.889. The frequency and percentage of the participants' marriage duration shows that 28.5% were married for more than two years, 27% for more than five years, and 44.5% for more than ten years. Table 1 presents the descriptive findings of the research variables. Table 1 presents the descriptive results of the research variables.

**Table 1- Descriptive results of research variables**

Variables	Sub-scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Childhood Trauma</b>	Emotional abuse	10.80	3.360	0.716	-0.506
	Physical abuse	11.06	3.378	0.807	-0.166
	Sexual abuse	11.06	3.299	0.761	0.158
	Emotional neglect	10.98	2.902	0.834	0.010
	Physical neglect	11.13	2.764	0.932	0.495
	Total score of childhood trauma	55.06	14.355	0.992	0.027
<b>Sexual Self-Esteem</b>	Moral judgment	27.65	8.320	-0.071	-1.206
	Adaptability	24.82	5.785	-0.515	-0.753
	Experience and skill	24.48	4.582	-0.922	-0.380
	Control	23.04	4.841	-0.936	-0.185
	Attractiveness	26.02	5.343	-0.715	-0.467
	Total score of sexual self-esteem	123.99	24.232	-0.565	-0.906

Table 1 shows the results of skewness and kurtosis statistics, which are all in the range of -2 to -2. In fact, based on these statistics, the data has a normal distribution. In table 2 the linear relationship between the variables was investigated using the Pearson correlation coefficient test.

**Table 2- Pearson correlation coefficients between research variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>1- Emotional abuse</b>	1	0.858**	0.809**	0.889**	0.776**	0.951**	-	-0.656**	-0.583**	-0.548**	-0.574**	-0.646**
<b>2- Physical abuse</b>	0.858**	1	0.843**	0.777**	0.737**	0.929**	0.416**	-0.595**	-0.531**	-0.505**	-0.510**	-0.573**
<b>3- Sexual abuse</b>	0.809**	0.843**	1	0.722**	0.686**	0.896**	0.341**	-0.548**	-0.478**	-0.499**	-0.481**	-0.543**
<b>4- Emotional neglect</b>	0.889**	0.777**	0.722**	1	0.818**	0.917**	0.339**	-0.602**	-0.546**	-0.500**	-0.526**	-0.590**
<b>5- Physical neglect</b>	0.776**	0.737**	0.686**	0.818**	1	0.871**	0.372**	-0.587**	-0.522**	-0.517**	-0.491**	-0.589**
<b>6- Childhood trauma (total)</b>	0.951**	0.929**	0.896**	0.917**	0.871**	1	0.405**	-0.654**	-0.582**	-0.563**	-0.566**	-0.644**
<b>7- Moral judgment</b>	-0.416**	-0.341**	-0.339**	-0.372**	-0.405**	-0.409**	1	0.592**	0.484**	0.492**	0.557**	0.797**
<b>8- Adaptability</b>	-0.656**	-0.595**	-0.548**	-0.602**	-0.587**	-0.654**	0.592**	1	0.779**	0.753**	0.833**	0.923**
<b>9- Experience and skill</b>	-0.583**	-0.531**	-0.478**	-0.546**	-0.522**	-0.582**	0.484**	0.779**	1	0.676**	0.635**	0.816**
<b>10- Control</b>	-0.548**	-0.505**	-0.499**	-0.500**	-0.517**	-0.563**	0.492**	0.753**	0.676**	1	0.628**	0.815**
<b>11- Attractiveness</b>	-0.574**	-0.510**	-0.481**	-0.526**	-0.491**	-0.566**	0.557**	0.833**	0.635**	0.628**	1	0.856**
<b>12- Sexual self-esteem (total)</b>	-0.646**	-0.573**	-0.543**	-0.590**	-0.589**	-0.644**	0.797**	0.923**	0.816**	0.815**	0.856**	1

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

The results in tables 2 showed that there was a significant correlation between the research variables ( $P < 0.05$ ). In table 3 linear regression was used to investigate the role of traumatic childhood experiences in predicting married women's sexual self-esteem.

**Tables 3- Linear regression to predicting the role of childhood traumatic experiences on married women sexual self-esteem**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	$\beta$	F	T	Sig
1	0.644	0.414	0.414	-0.644	140.092	-11.836	0.001

The results of Table 3 show that childhood traumatic experiences provide a significant prediction of sexual self-esteem of married women ( $\beta = -0.644$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ), and explain 0.414 of the variance of sexual self-esteem in married women.

## Discussion & Conclusions

This research was conducted to predict the role of traumatic childhood experiences on the sexual self-esteem of married women. The results showed that traumatic childhood experiences can predict married women's sexual self-esteem. The results of the present study were implicitly aligned with the studies [1, 3, 5, 7, 10] in terms of the relationship between traumatic childhood experiences and sexual performance in different aspects.

In explaining this finding, traumatic childhood experience can affect sexual self-esteem in different ways. One of the primary factors in this field is the role of negative beliefs. When a person experiences traumatic events, they often develop feelings of guilt, shame, and blame. These thoughts and feelings are not transient but remain in the child's negative self-concept and continue until adulthood [14]. As they grow, these negative beliefs can lead to persistent feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy in various areas of self-esteem, including sexual self-esteem.

Another explanation mentions the use of maladaptive coping strategies [13, 17, 18]. People who experience trauma often develop coping strategies that, while appearing protective in the short term, are maladaptive in the long term. For example, some people who have had childhood traumatic experiences may avoid sexual intimacy altogether to protect themselves from possible future negative events, and this condition can negatively affect sexual self-esteem.

In general, it can be said that childhood traumatic experiences can disrupt an individual's ability to make healthy and reliable relationships. This difficulty and challenges can extend to sexual relationships in different areas, affecting the trust and emotional intimacy that is so important for positive sexual self-esteem.

The present study was also associated with limitations, among which we can mention the convenience sampling and the limitation of the selection of subjects based on gender (female). It is suggested that the situation of men should also be investigated in future research to get a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between research variables.

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