Cognitive Emotional Coping Strategies in Women abused in Their Childhood

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Abstract

In this article we investigated the presence of child abuse in women; the comparative evaluation of coping strategies, cognitive-emotional in two groups of women: abused and non-abused (N = 175). For this purpose, we used the Child Abuse and Trauma Scale (Sanders, Becher-Lausen, 1995), as well as the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ, Garnefski, Kraaij, Spinhoven, 2001). The results show that generally there are differences in which coping strategies are used by non-abused and abused women when it comes to slow adaptable strategies. Such strategies as Self-blaming, Blaming others and Catastrophizing are more frequently utilized in case of women who experienced child-abuse. Non-abused women adopt high adaptable strategists in stress management, especially Refocusing on Planning and Positive Reevaluation, where they got high scores. Regarding correlations of cognitive-emotional inter-strategies for women who were abused in childhood, we remark that there are associations between slow adatable strategies, Self-blaming, Catastrophizing and Acceptance; moderated correlations between Acceptance and Rumination.

Key words: cognitive emotion strategies, abuse, women.

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous avons enquêté sur la présence d'enfants victimes de maltraitance; l'évaluation comparative des stratégies d'adaptation cognitivo-émotionnelle dans deux groupes de femmes: maltraitées et non maltraitées (N = 175). À cette fin, nous avons utilisé l'échelle des abus envers les enfants et des traumatismes (Sanders, Becher-Lausen, 1995), ainsi que le questionnaire sur la régulation des émotions cognitives (CERQ, Garnefski, Kraaij et Spinhoven, 2001). Les résultats montrent qu'il existe généralement des différences entre les stratégies d'adaptation utilisées par les femmes non maltraitées et maltraitées lorsqu'il s'agit de stratégies lentes adaptables. Des stratégies telles que l'auto-blâme, blâmer les

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autres et catastrophiser sont plus fréquemment utilisées chez les femmes victimes de maltraitance. Les femmes non violentées adoptent des stratégies hautement adaptables en matière de gestion du stress, en particulier en se recentrant sur la planification et la réévaluation positive, où elles ont obtenu des scores élevés. En ce qui concerne les corrélations entre les stratégies cognitives et émotionnelles chez les femmes maltraitées dans leur enfance, nous remarquons qu'il existe des associations entre les stratégies lentes, l'auto-blâme, la catastrophisation et l'acceptation; corrélations modérées entre acceptation et rumination.

Mots-clés: stratégies émotionnelles cognitives, abus, femmes.

Rezumat
În articolul de faţă am investigat prezenţa abuzului în copilărie la femei, evaluarea comparată a strategiilor de coping cognitiv-emoţional în cazul a două grupuri de femei: abuzate şi neabuzate (N = 175). Pentru aceasta a fost aplicată scala de depistare a abuzului şi traumei (Sanders, Becher-Lausen, 1995) şi chestionarul de coping cognitiv emoţional (CERQ, Garnefski, Kraaij şi Spinhoven, 2001). Rezultatele arată că, în general, există diferenţe privind utilizarea strategiilor de coping între grupul de femei neabuzate şi abuzate în copilărie la strategiile slab adaptative. Strategii precum: autoculpabilizarea, culpabilizarea altora şi catastrofarea sunt mai frecvent utilizate în cazul femeilor care au trăit experienţa abuzului în copilărie. Grupul de femei neabuzate adoptă strategii înalt adaptative în managementul stresului, în special refocalizarea pe planificarea şi reevaluarea pozitivă, unde au obţinut medii mai mari. La corelaţiile inter strategii cognitiv emoţionale, pentru femeile abuzate în copilărie remarcăm că există asocieri între strategiile slab adaptative: autoculpabilizare şi ruminaţie, catastrofare şi acceptare; corelaţii moderate între acceptare şi ruminaţie.

Cuvinte cheie: strategii de coping cognitiv emoţional, abuz, femei.

Introduction

Every human being starts his or her existential journey with the period of maximum plasticity, with childhood, that is why the echoes of good things and, unfortunately, the bad ones that happen to us, mark us both emotionally and socially throughout life. Therefore, child abuse repercussions leave their mark on a person's development and maturity, both in adolescence and especially in adulthood, and especially on women. Stress management coping skills to be used by women abused in childhood are less-known.

In psychology literature, coping is described as a dynamic process in which intentional physical or mental actions are involved, based on a stressor, oriented towards internal or environmental conditions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "cognitive and behavioral change efforts to cope with external or internal demands that lead to of exceeding individual's personal resources".

Efforts to cope with stress are directed towards the cognitive and behavioral effort of the individual to reduce, control and tolerance internal or external

demands that exceed personal resources, involving three stages: anticipation (warning); confrontation (impact); post-confrontation.

In the view of Folkman and Lazarus, the person crosses two evaluation stages. The first time is the analysis of the resources in an attempt to answer the question "Why do I have it to overcome this situation?", then an assessment of the intuitive possibilities and actions involved in the environmental feed-back reactions, looking for the answer to "What can I do? How will the environment react to my actions? What are my strategies to fight?" The focus on certain coping strategies chosen will be based on the answers to these questions, which play an essential role in the complex process of self-regulation.

Method

The *objectives* for achieving the major goal of the research were established:
• identifying the presence of childhood abuse in women;
• comparative assessment of coping strategies used by women abused and non-abused in childhood;
• determining associations of inter-strategies for cognitive emotional coping for women abused in childhood.

Subjects:

The survey sample consisted of 175 women aged 20 and 35, with the average age of the group being 27.4 years. The sample was divided into two groups:
- Lot I Women uninfluenced in childhood;
- Lot II Women abused in childhood.

Women abused during childhood were assigned according to the type of abuse:
a) physically abused women;
b) emotionally abused women;
c) sexually abused women;
d) women abused by negligence.

The selection of individuals in Lot II of the sample was based on information from the anamnesis of beneficiaries of various state and non-governmental organizations, placement centers and day-service centers offering victims of violence, as well as recipients of social welfare services for families and careers children's rights.

Instruments:

1. Scandal for the detection of abuse and trauma developed by B. Sanders. E. Becher-Lausen 1995 defines the types of physical, sexual, neglect and emotional abuse. The purpose of the scale is to determine what was the general atmosphere at home and how they were treated by parents during childhood. The scale includes 35 items that are listed as follows: 0 = never, 1 = rare, 2 = sometimes, 3 = very often, 4 = always. Respondents must choose one of the answers that suits them

personally. Scaling is done by adding points to each subscale: physical abuse - 5 items, sexual abuse - 4 items, neglect abuse - 12 items and emotional abuse - 12 items.

2. CERQ - Cognitive Emotional Coping Questionnaire developed by Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven is a multidimensional questionnaire built to identify exclusively the cognitive coping strategies that someone uses after experiencing certain events or negative situations. In contrast to other coping questionnaires that do not make an explicit distinction between a person's thoughts and his actual work, the present questionnaire refers exclusively to a person's thoughts after experiencing a negative experience. CERQ is a self-evaluation questionnaire consisting of 36 items rated on a scale of 5 anchors 1 - Almost never and 5 - Almost always. The questionnaire measures nine coping strategies: 1. Autocupability – thoughts due to which that the responsibility for the lived situation belongs to one's own person; 2. Acceptance – resignation to what happened; 3. Rumination – Concern about feelings and thoughts that are associated with a negative event; 4. Positive refocusing – directing thoughts to positive events; 5. Refocusing on planning – guiding the thoughts towards the steps to be taken to cross the negative event; 6. Positive reassessment – the positive mental association of a negative event; 7. Catastrophe – accentuating thoughts in a recurring way how terrible the event was; 8. Prospective – refers to those thoughts that reduce the severity of the event by comparison with other events and emphasize that there are even more serious things in the world; 9. Culpability others – blaming others for their own experiments.

For all CERQ scales, the following is true: the higher the score on a given subscale, the more the person uses the cognitive coping strategy. In standards it can be checked whether a certain level is low or high compared to the group on which the standard was built. The gross score obtained will be compared to the average of the scores of people in the comparable population, the so-called group / standard. Five standard groups are available.

Research results

Table 1 gives primary results with reference to abuse and types of abuse.

The sample included 175 women, of whom 78 women (44.57%) did not experience child abuse experiences and 97 (55.43%) women who had undergone various forms of childhood abuse. Of the abused women the highest frequency is held by physically abused women (32 persons, 18.29% of the general sample), 28 women (16%) were emotionally abused, 21 of them were in neglect (12%) and the lowest share of sexual abuse: 16 women, 9.14%.

Table 1. Distribution of women depending on presence or absence of abuse and type of abuse

Type of abuse	Nr. of people	Per cents
Non abuse	78	44,57%
Physical	32	18,29%
Emotional	28	16%
Negligence	21	12%
Sexual	16	9,14%
Total	175	100%

Ackerman (2016) in his book, *Adult Daughters of Alcoholics*, said: "The words are stronger than anyone can imagine, and once they have been imprinted in a child's mind, they cannot easily be wiped off. Respectively, most of the childhood abused women through maturity crossed changes in their behavior based on rooted childhood habits when experiencing continued abuse of parents or other adults responsible for them''.

In the study, we proposed to compare the coping strategies used by abused and non-abused women in CERQ through the Cognitive Cognitive Control Questionnaire. Respectively, we will see the differences between cognitive emotional coping strategies in childhood abused women compared to those who did not experience such experiences.

Thus, we identify significant statistical differences between abused women and non-abused women in childhood in poorly adaptive strategies: Autoculpability (t = 2.33 and p = 0.021), Culpability of others (t = 2.232 and p = 0.022) and Catastrophe (t = 2,552 and p =, 012) with higher scores for the group of abused women.

Women abused in childhood take responsibility for the situations lived, attributing their blame. Unlike women who have not traumatized traumatic situations in childhood, there are concerns and thoughts about the mistakes they have made, and they are also deeply concerned about their own sense of guilt.

Table 2. Average statistics and significance of differences in coping strategies in abused and non-abused women

	Variables	P/A of abuse	M	A.S.	t	P
1	Autoculpability	absence	11,4933	3,22730	**2,33**	**0,021**
		presence	12,8305	3,38431		
2	Acceptance	absence	12,3600	3,49378		
		presence	12,8136	3,52564		
3	Rumination	absence	13,2800	3,85746		
		presence	13,6780	3,77579		
4	Positive refocusing	absence	13,0533	4,11291		
		presence	12,0000	4,43730		

	Variables	P/A of abuse	M	A.S.	t	P
5	Refocusing on planning	absence	15,6933	3,01336		
		presence	14,8983	3,86717		
6	Positive reassessment	absence	15,4533	3,27684		
		presence	14,9153	3,90971		
7	Prospective	absence	13,2667	3,49646		
		presence	14,8644	9,08477		
8	Catastrophe	absence	9,6133	4,24867	**2,552**	**0,012**
		presence	11,4237	3,84709		
9	Culpability of others	absence	8,0133	2,96599	**2,232**	**0,022**
		presence	9,9655	6,46438		

Often, they tend to blame others, especially their parents, for their present behaviors (showing that they have been taught or transferring responsibility to others), allowing them not to take responsibility for changing the current situation.

Women mistreated in childhood increasingly use Catastrophe as a strategy of cognitive emotional coping. So, they tend to think how terrible the childhood experience was, and what a terrible impact it had.

Table 3 shows the direction and significance of the correlation relationships between coping strategies.

If we refer to the correlations of the emotional cognitive inter-strategy, we note that there are associations between poorly adaptive strategies. In this way, we identified a positive correlation between Autoculpabilty and Rumination ($r = 0.536$, $p <0.0001$), Catastrophe ($r = 0.499$, $p <0.0001$) and Acceptance ($r = 0.498$).

Table3. Correlations of the inter-strategy of cognitive emotional coping for women abused in childhood

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Auto culpability	1	,498**	,536**	,157	,220**	,140	,101	,499**	,147
2	Acceptance		1	,446**	,282**	,231**	,186*	,223**	,353**	,063
3	Acceptance			1	,222**	,304**	,255**	,074	,461**	,195*
4	Positive refocusing				1	,426**	,589**	,114	,042	-,063
5	Refocusing on planning					1	,624**	,141	-,014	-,063
6	Positive reassessment						1	,175*	-,006	-,027
7	Prospective							1	,049	,104
8	Catastrophe								1	,435**
9	Culpability of others									

* Correlation significant $p < 0,05$
** Correlation significant $p < 0,0001$

Similarly, we find moderate correlations between Acceptance and Rumination (r = 0.446; p <0.0001). These results allow us to assert that abused women are dominated by the feeling that they have committed a mistake, that they cannot change the situation in their lives at maturity.

We note that highly adaptive strategies, Positive Refocusing, Refocusing on Plan, Positive Reassessment, Prospective, are in positive correlation with each other.

Conclusion

The analysis of a group of women in terms of childhood abuse and cognitive-emotional regulatory capacity shows that there are differences in the use of coping strategies between the group of women abused and underestimated in childhood towards poorly adaptive strategies. Thus, Autoculpability, Culpability of others and Catastrophe are more commonly used in women who have experienced childhood abuse. The group of non-abusedwomen adopts highly adaptive strategies in stress management, especially Refocusing on Planning and Positive Reassessment, where they have achieved higher scores. At the correlations of the emotional cognitive inter-strategy, for women abused in childhood, we note that there are associations between poorly adaptive strategies: Autoculpability and Rumination, Catastrophe and Acceptance; moderate correlations between Acceptance and Rumination.

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