



# Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Strategies Following Adverse Childhood Experiences: The Influence of Parental Acceptance

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## Introduction

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relate to poor health outcomes and psychopathology (Felitti et al., 1998; Bellis et al., 2017), as well as unhealthy coping strategies (Mc Elroy & Hevey, 2014).
- Coping strategies are efforts used to manage a distressing situations (Blomgren, Svahn, Astrom, Ronnlund, 2016). We categorized coping strategies as adaptive which have shown to have desirable outcomes, and maladaptive having undesirable outcomes.
- Parental Acceptance (PA) may act as a buffer for children with ACEs, as having a good home environment has been shown to increase psychological health (Linehan, 1993). Research has not examined if the relationship between ACEs and coping strategies differ by mothers' or fathers' level of PA of their children, which may support adaptive coping strategies despite ACE exposure (Gentzler, Conrteras-Grau, Kerns, & Weimer, 2005).
- The current study predicted higher ACE scores would relate to less adaptive and more maladaptive coping. Also, PA was predicted to moderate the relationship between ACEs and coping strategies, where high ACE scores and high PA would relate to more adaptive and less maladaptive coping.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to examine whether PA and ACEs predicted coping strategies.
- We hypothesized more ACEs would relate to less adaptive coping and more maladaptive coping. We hypothesized more PA would relate to more adaptive and less maladaptive coping.
- We also hypothesized a moderation, where higher PA and high ACEs would relate to more adaptive and less maladaptive coping.

## Methods

- The study included 256 undergraduate students between the ages of 18-21 ( $M = 19.5, SD = 2.28$ ). The sample was over-represented by women (62%). Participants completed the following scales:
  - The Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ; World Health Organization, 2018) to measure childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction.
  - Mother and fathers' PA were separately measured using a subscale of the Rearing Behavior Questionnaire (RBQ; Schaefer, 1965).
  - Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) scales were used to measure adaptive and maladaptive coping.
- Regression 1:
  - IV's: Maternal Acceptance; ACE
  - DV: Adaptive Coping Strategies
- Regression 2:
  - IV's: Paternal Acceptance; ACE
  - DV: Adaptive Coping Strategies
- Regression 3:
  - IV's: Maternal Acceptance; ACE
  - DV: Maladaptive Coping Strategies
- Regression 4:
  - IV's: Paternal Acceptance; ACE
  - DV: Maladaptive Coping Strategies

## Results

Table 1. Parental Acceptance and ACEs Predicting Adaptive Coping

	Model $R^2$	Model $F$	df	$\beta$	$t$	Unique $R^2$
Model 1	.01	0.86	3, 234			
Father Acc.				-.01	-0.17	.01
ACEs				-.10	-1.54	< .01
ACEs X Father Acc.				.01	.17	< .01
Model 2	.01	.84	3, 244			
Mother Acc.				.07	0.90	< .01
ACEs				-.02	-0.29	< .01
ACE X Mother Acc.				.04	0.58	< .01

Note. \* signifies  $p < .05$ .

Table 2: Parental Acceptance and ACEs Predicting Maladaptive Coping

	Model $R^2$	Model $F$	df	$\beta$	$t$	Unique $R^2$
Model 3	.01	0.59	3, 233			
Father Acc.				-.05	-0.73	< .01
ACEs				.06	0.86	< .01
ACEs X Father Acc.				-.01	-0.12	< .01
Model 4	.03	2.37	3, 244			
Mother Acc.				-.16*	-2.16	.02
ACEs				.06	0.96	< .01
ACE X Mother Acc.				.07	0.95	< .01

Note. \* signifies  $p < .05$

## Conclusions

- The proposed hypotheses were partially supported. ACEs did not significantly predict adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies. Additionally, across most analyses, higher PA did not predict coping strategies.
- However, higher maternal acceptance related to more adaptive coping, suggesting it may be an important predictor of psychological adjustment (Holahan, Valentinner, & Moos, 1995). Although this finding should be interpreted in context due to a low effect size (e.g.,  $R^2 = .02$ ).
- Main effects for ACEs and PA across adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies were not qualified by any significant interactions.
- There was no significance between ACEs and PA which may indicate that parental coping strategies are more influential than PA (Kliwer, Fearnow, & Miller, 1996; Gentzler, Contreras-Grau, Kerns, & Weimer, 2005).
- These findings suggest that interventions to prevent ACEs, and to improve maternal acceptance may aide in preventing the development of maladaptive coping strategies among children.
- The current study is limited by using a sample of undergraduate students that was over-represented by women. Additionally, the present study only examined cross-sectional relationships, not allowing for thorough assessment of these relationships across development. Furthermore, this study did not examine other parent factors that may be better predictors of children's coping outcomes.
- Future research should further examine the relationships between different paternal/maternal support and ACE scores to discover if there is a different parental characteristic (i.e. involvement or understanding) that may act as a buffer for children with ACEs to develop more adaptive coping strategies.