

Introduction

- Childhood maltreatment, particularly abuse and neglect, has been recognized as a risk factor for later life satisfaction as it impairs the development of secure attachment and hinders meaningful social relationships throughout one's life (Kerley et al., 2023a; 2023b).
- To understand the nature of the relation between early maltreatment and later life satisfaction, various mediating and moderating mechanisms have been examined.
- Sensitivity has been actively investigated as an emotional trait that may explain individual differences in the reaction to childhood maltreatment (Van Reyn et al., 2023).
- Some researchers suggest that it may develop in response to adversity (Karaca Dinç et al., 2021), while others argue it is a dispositional trait that moderates responses to adversity (Di Paola et al., 2022; Belsky et al., 2007).
- Despite an ongoing debate, there remains a lack of research simultaneously examining sensitivity's impact on the interplay between childhood adversity and adulthood life satisfaction.
- Research question: Is sensitivity a mediator or a moderator in the link between childhood maltreatment and adulthood life satisfaction?

Conceptual Models

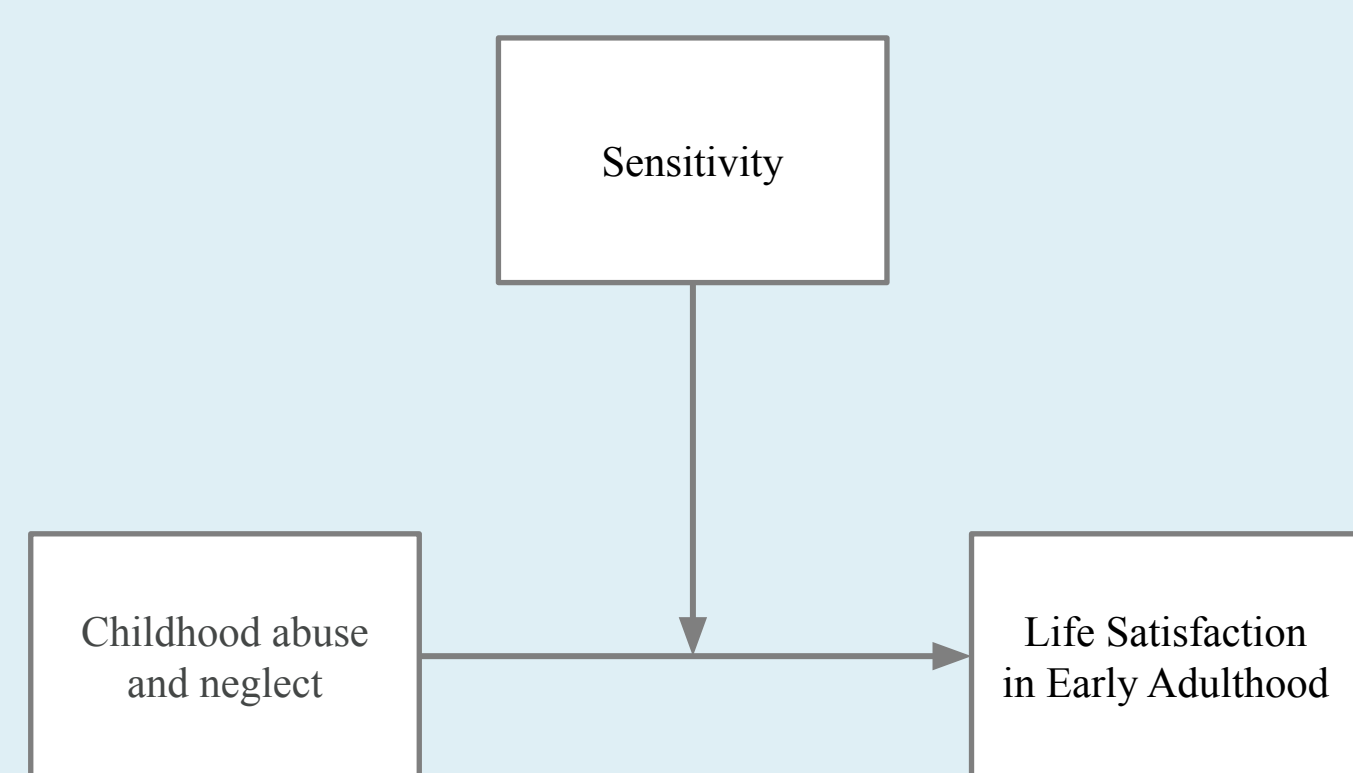


Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of Moderator Effect

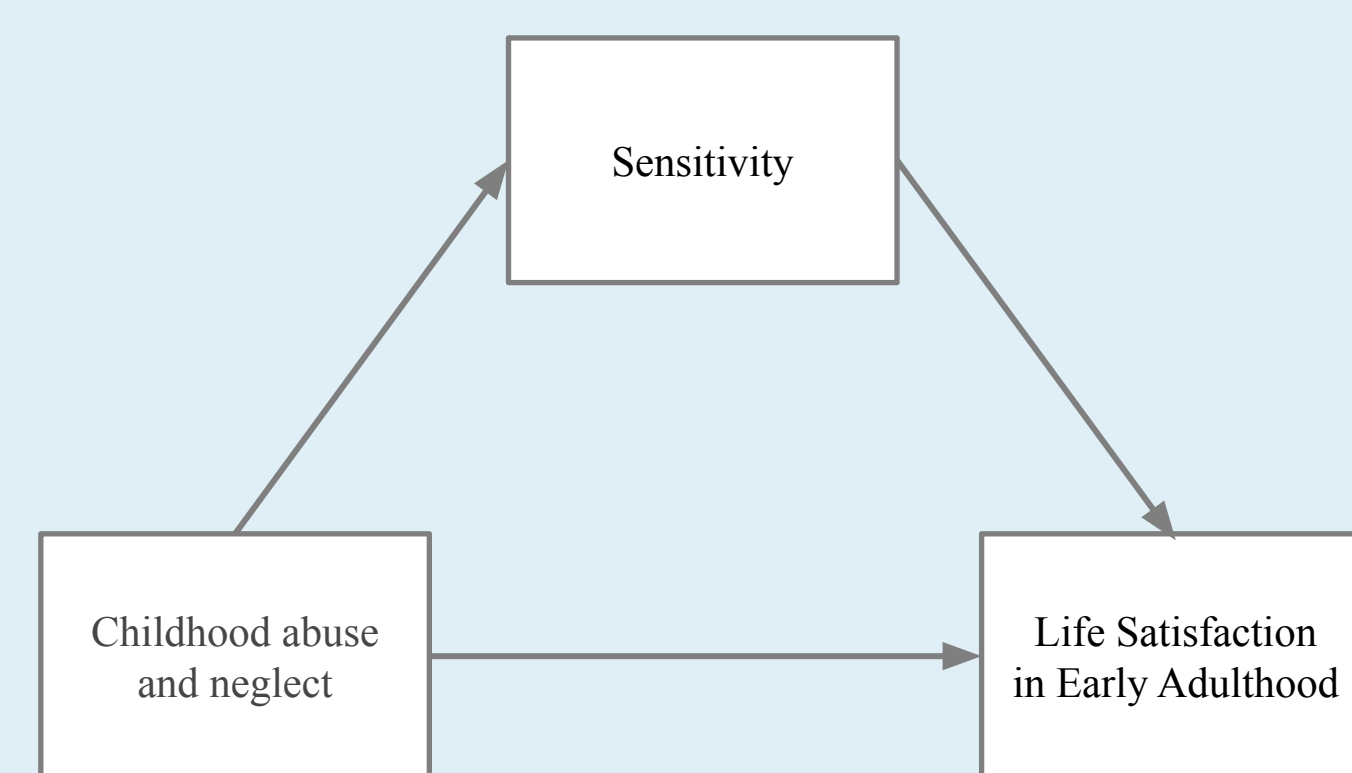


Figure 2. Diagrammatic representation of Mediator Effect

Methods

Participants: 435 university students (50.7% female, $M_{age}=23.78$, $SD=2.21$) in Korea

Measures

- **Childhood abuse/neglect-related traumatic experiences:** Participants retrospectively reported using the Korea-Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (Bernstein & Fink, 1998) scale. 28 items, $\alpha = .939$
- **Life satisfaction:** Participants also self-reported their life satisfaction with Korea-Satisfaction with the Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) scale. 5 items, $\alpha = .915$
- **Sensitivity:** Sensitivity using the Highly Sensitive Person (Pluess et al., 2020) scale. 12 items, $\alpha = .811$

- The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis
- Process Macro 1 and 4 models were used to test moderating and mediating effects of sensitivity, respectively.
- Gender, age, economic level, and social support were included as control variables in the models.

Results

- Moderating effect: The interaction between childhood maltreatment and sensitivity was not statistically significant in predicting early adult life satisfaction, $B = .177$, $SE = 0.106$, 95% CI [-.303, .385] (Table 1).
- Mediating effect: When testing the mediating effect of sensitivity, childhood maltreatment had a direct negative effect ($B = -.42$, 95% CI [-.61, -.22]) as well as an indirect effect on early adulthood life satisfaction, $B = -.04$, 95% CI [-.07, -.00] (Figure 3)

Table 1

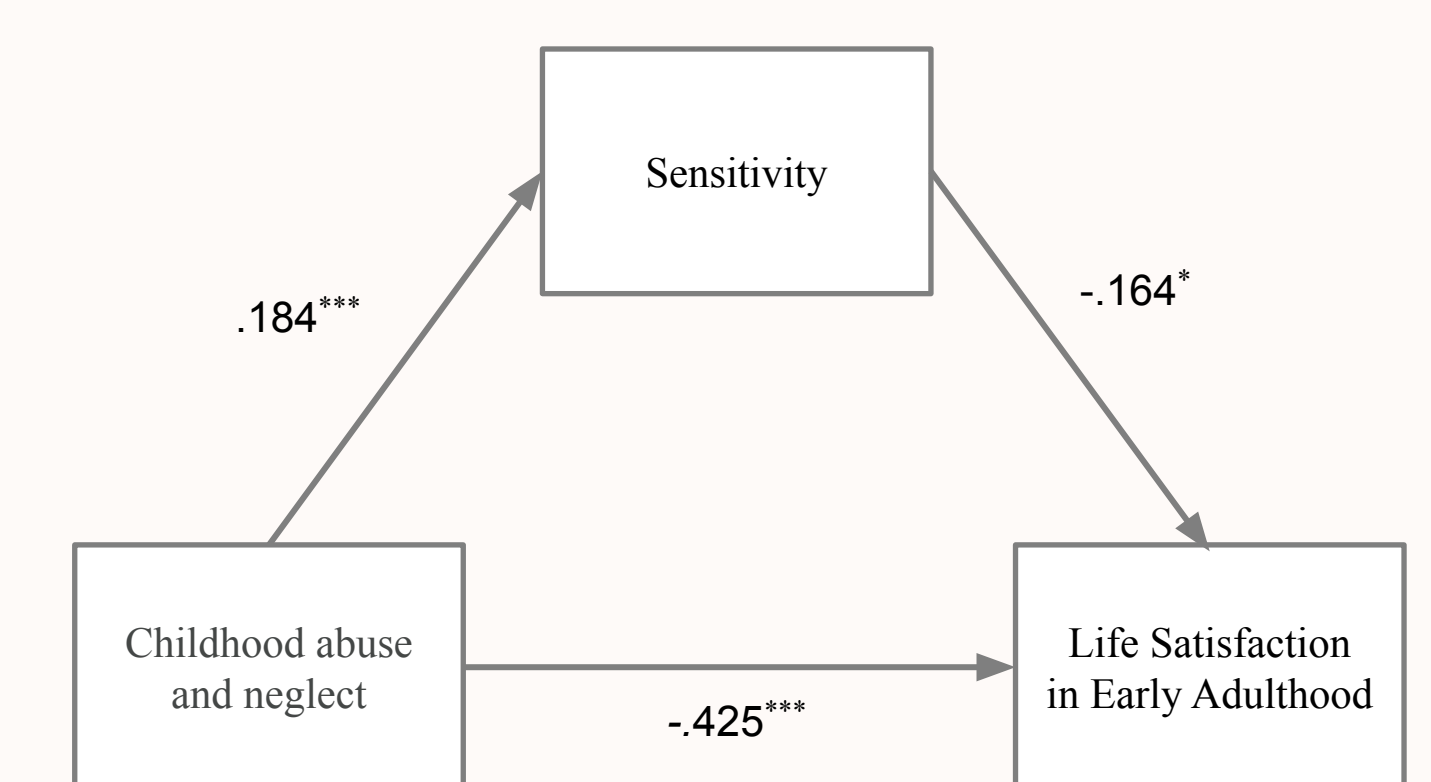
Moderating effect of sensitivity

	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	UCLI
Child Abuse and Neglect	-1.095	.417	-2.628**	.009	-1.913	-.276
Sensitivity	-.319	.166	-2.746	.006	-.547	-.091
Interactive Term	.177	.106	1.679	.094	-.030	.385

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 3

Mediating Effect of Sensitivity



Note. The coefficients in the path are unstandardized coefficients.

Discussion

- The present study examined the moderating and mediating role of sensitivity in the link between childhood maltreatment and life satisfaction in early adulthood.
- The findings supported the mediating hypothesis: childhood maltreatment heightened individuals' sensitivity, which negatively influenced early adulthood life satisfaction.
- These results are in line with studies showing that childhood abuse experiences increase sensitivity by interacting with depression-related genotypes and that the higher the level of abuse experience, the higher the sensitivity (Stein et al., 2007). In other words, childhood abuse experiences are a serious risk factor that negatively affects life satisfaction in adulthood by increasing sensitivity.
- These findings can aid in developing interventions for improving the life satisfaction of highly sensitive individuals while taking into account the antecedents and consequences of high sensitivity as a developmental personal characteristic.

References

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