

# The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem on the Relationship Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Anxiety

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## Background

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events during childhood that have lasting effects into adulthood.<sup>1</sup>
- ACEs are associated with poorer health and psychological well-being.<sup>2,3</sup>
- The present study investigates the relationship between ACEs, self-esteem, and anxiety among people with a history of justice involvement.

## Hypothesis

- We predicted that ACEs would be negatively correlated with self-esteem. In turn, self-esteem would be negatively correlated with anxiety.

## Method

- Data were collected from 216 people with a self-reported history of substance use and justice involvement using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk).
- Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older and fluent in the English language. Eligible participants who consented to participate in the study were asked to complete a 25-minute online survey and were compensated \$1 for their time.

## Results

Tested through three regression models:

- ACEs → Anxiety
- ACEs → Self-Esteem
- ACEs + Self-Esteem → Anxiety

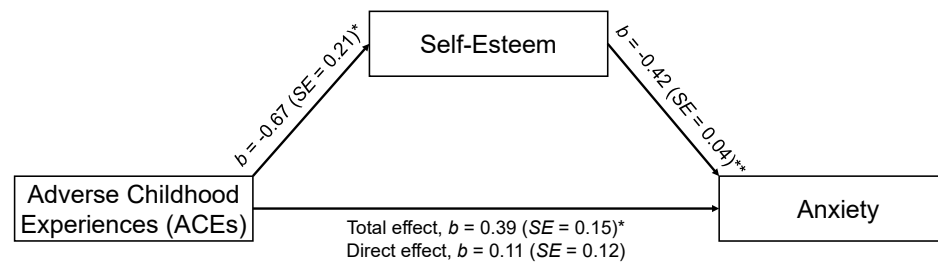


Figure 1. The indirect effect of adverse childhood experiences on anxiety through self-esteem. \* Indicates significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* Indicates significant at  $p < .001$ .

Demographic (N = 216)	Total (n)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	136	63
Male	78	36.1
Transgender man	1	0.5
Gender queer/gender non-conforming	1	0.5
Hispanic		
No	185	85.6
Yes	31	14.4
Race		
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	1.4
Asian	2	0.9
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	0.5
Black	24	11.1
White	169	78.2
More than one race	9	4.2
Other or unknown	8	3.7

Measure	M (SD)
Age (range 20-72)	36.00 (9.52)
ACEs	4.88 (2.90)
Self-Esteem	29.25 (9.18)
Anxiety	10.54 (6.26)

## Discussion

- Analyses revealed that a higher ACEs score was significantly related to both higher anxiety and lower self-esteem.
- Self-esteem was significantly related to anxiety while controlling for ACEs.
- When self-esteem was included in the model, the relationship between ACEs and anxiety was no longer significant.
- Self-esteem statistically mediated the relationship between ACEs and anxiety.

## Conclusion

- The findings from this study may not generalize to a non-justice-involved population.
- Findings indicate that self-esteem may be an important target for treatment among clients with histories of childhood adversity and anxiety.
- Self-esteem may serve as a protective factor against anxiety for clients who report a history of childhood abuse or neglect.

## References

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