The Mediator Role of Borderline Personality Features and Separation Anxiety in the Relationship between Childhood Traumas and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

Çocukluk Çağı Travmaları ile Romantik İlişkide İstismara Maruziyet Arasındaki İlişkide Borderline Kişilik Özellikleri ve Ayrılık Anksiyetesinin Aracı Rolü

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the mediating role of borderline personality pattern and separation anxiety in adults in the relationship between childhood traumas and exposure to abuse in romantic relationships, to emphasize some factors that may cause violence in relationships, and to support initiatives to prevent exposure to partner violence. For the research, 400 participants aged 18-55 residing in Istanbul were determined by a simple random sampling method. After that, a Socio-demographic Information Form, Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (CTQ-33), Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory (RRAI), Borderline Personality Questionnaire (BPQ), and Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASAQ) were given to them. The data obtained from the study were evaluated with the SPSS-25 statistical analysis program. Relationships between scales were evaluated with Pearson Correlation analysis, and mediating roles were evaluated with PROCESS 3.5 Macro. All analyses were based on a 95% confidence interval. When the research findings were examined, A positive correlation was found between the Childhood Traumas Questionnaire and all its subscales, the Borderline Personality Questionnaire and all its subscales, and the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and the Romantic Relationship Assessment Scale. Research results show that childhood traumas predict exposure to abuse in romantic relationships and that borderline personality traits and adult separation anxiety play a partial mediating role in this relationship. It has also been determined that adult separation anxiety predicts borderline personality traits. As a result of the study, it is shown that in the case of abuse and neglect experiences in childhood, whether individuals are exposed to abuse in romantic relationships or not is related to borderline personality traits and low tolerance for separation. Study results reveal that separation anxiety significantly predicts borderline personality traits (34%), indicating that separation anxiety can be targeted as a key point in the repetitive abuse pattern. Another result of the study is that the increase in separation anxiety in borderline personality traits is associated with low economic levels. The current result reveals the importance of economic independence in exploitation patterns.

Keywords: Childhood Trauma, Violence, Abuse, Borderline Personality Disorder, Separation Anxiety.

Öz

Araştırmada çocukluk çağı travmalarıyla romantik ilişkilerde istismara maruziyet arasındaki ilişkide borderline kişilik örüntüsünün ve yetişkinlerde ayrılık anksiyetesinin aracı rolünün incelenmesiyle, ilişkilerde şiddet yaşantılarına sebep olabilecek bazı etmenlerin vurgulanması ve partner şiddetine maruziyeti engelleyici girişimlere destek olunması amaçlanmaktadır. Araştırmada, basit seçkisiz örnekleme metoduyla belirlenen ve İstanbul'da yaşayan 18-55 yaş arası 400 katılımcıya Sosyo-demografik Bilgi Formu, Çocukluk Çağı Travmaları (CTQ-33), Romantik İlişkiyi Değerlendirme Ölçeği, Borderline Kişilik Ölçeği-Türkçe BPQ, Yetişkin Ayrılma Anksiyetesi Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Veriler, SPSS-25 istatistik analiz programıyla, ölçekler arası ilişkiler Pearson Korelasyon analiziyle, aracı roller PROCESS 3.5 Makrosuyla değerlendirilmiştir. Analizlerde %95 güven aralığı esas alınmıştır. Bulgular incelendiğinde Çocukluk Çağı Travma Ölçeği ve tüm alt ölçekleri ile Borderline Kişilik Ölçeği ve tüm alt ölçekleri; Yetişkin Ayrılık Anksiyetesi Ölçeği ve Romantik İlişkiyi Değerlendirme Ölçeği arasında pozitif yönlü bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Araştırma sonuçları çocukluk çağı travmalarının, romantik ilişkide istismara maruz kalmayı yordadığı ve borderline kişilik özelliklerinin ve yetişkin ayrılma anksiyetesinin bu ilişkide kısmi aracılık rolü olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca yetişkin ayrılık anksiyetesinin borderline kişilik özelliklerini yordadığı belirlenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda çocukluktaki istismar ve ihmal yaşantılarının söz konusu olduğu durumda bireylerin romantik ilişkilerde istismara maruz kalıp kalmamasının sergiledikleri borderline kişilik özellikleri, ayrılığa düşük tolerans ile ilişkili olduğu göstermektedir. Çalışma sonuçları ayrılık anksiyetesinin borderline kişilik özelliklerini önemli ölçüde (%34) yordadığını ortaya koyarak ayrılık anksiyetesinin tekrarlayan istismar örüntüsünde bir kilit nokta olarak hedeflenebileceğini göstermektedir. Çalışmanın bir diğer sonucu borderline kişilik özellikleri ayrılık anksiyetesindeki artışın düşük ekonomik düzeyle ilişkili olduğunun belirlenmesidir. Mevcut sonuç istismar örüntülerinde ekonomik bağımsızlığın önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocukluk Çağı Travması, Şiddet, İstismar, Borderline Kişilik Bozukluğu, Ayrılık Anksiyetesi .

The Mediator Role of Borderline Personality Features and Separation Anxiety in the Relationship between Childhood Traumas and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

Childhood traumas contain non-accidental and preventable behaviors towards the child that adversely affect the psychosocial and physical development of the child, ill-treatment and traumatic events such as loss of parents, divorce, witnessing violence, accidents, migration, natural disasters, and war (Helvacı Çelik & Hocaoğlu, 2018; Öztürk, 2021). Behaviors that may physically harm the child increase the risk of injury and deterioration of the physical integrity of the child; sexual abuse, on the other hand, reveals a picture that can continue in adulthood, disrupts vital functioning at a high rate and creates a higher level of stress than an average negative experience (Igarashi et al., 2010). Children who are abused and whose psychological and emotional needs are not met because of neglect, who are mocked, humiliated, threatened, and belittled are highly affected by these repetitive traumatic experiences (Cantürk et a., 2021; Şar et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2013). Childhood traumas negatively affect the personality of the child who does not have the power to protect himself/herself and disrupt the child's development (Taillieu et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2021). It is stated that traumas experienced in childhood cause a life-long pattern of psychological fragility in the individual, being a factor in both personality organization and the formation of psychopathology, and mental disorders in childhood are more severe (Nemeroff, 2016).

Borderline personality disorder is at the top of the most common mental disorder associated with childhood traumas (Tekin, 2021; Kutlu, 2018; Taillieu, et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2021). Borderline personality disorder causes a persistent sense of emptiness and repetitive self-harming behaviors. It also manifests itself with relationship difficulties and inconsistencies caused by fluctuations in self and affect (Faraji, 2021). Childhood traumas and borderline personality traits have a strong association with adulthood separation anxiety (Bassi et al., 2021; Karaytuğ et al., 2023, Namlı et al., 2022). When the child cannot establish a secure bond in his first relationships, he expects to be abandoned in his future relationships, and this expectation reveals the emotional and cognitive processes underlying the formation of anxiety (Astuti et al., 2020). While separation anxiety in childhood is mainly on the axis of the fear of being away from the caregiver and home, especially from the mother, this anxiety usually turns into the anxiety of losing a partner in a romantic relationship (Bögels et al., 2013; Faraji & Özen, 2022).

Traumatic life events experienced in childhood increase the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively (Downey & Crummy, 2022). Individuals whose first relationships' are caring and nourishing earn the ability to establish similarly caring relationships again in the future. However, on the other side, children who have been abused or neglected in the early stages of their lives tend to be re-exposed to similar early negative experiences in their romantic relationships in adulthood (Butler et al., 2020. The child's first relationships and early life experiences are not only the prototype of adult relationships but also the precursors of one's emotions and self-expression, ability to cope with distress, one's internalized map of unwritten rules, personality organization, and predisposition to psychopathology (Levy et al., 2018).

In romantic relationships where an individual sees himself as worthless when alone and feels vulnerable against being alone, the individual may show hypersensitivity to being abandoned and alone in romantic relationships and obsessively dependent on his/her partner, just as in borderline personality disorder. In this case, the separation anxiety creates a tendency to be mistreated for the sake of not losing the relationship, and the individual may become more open to abuse (Kayha & Taşkale, 2019; Bassi et al., 2021). Based on this information, this study is planned to investigate the prediction that the effect of traumatic childhood experiences in the early period, facilitating the formation of borderline personality

patterns and separation anxiety, may cause these people to become more vulnerable to abuse in romantic relationships.

Globally, an estimated one-third of women are thought to have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2018). By the way, it is not just for women; numbers show that there a plenty of people who have been psychologically or physically attacked or threatened by their spouses or lovers at some point in their lives (Pichon, et al., 2020; Sansone et al., 2007). Also it is stated that having low income increases adult separation anxiety, borderline personality traits and partner violence (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020; Silove et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2008; Frias & Angel, 2005). The study aims to examine the effect of childhood traumas on the increase in exposure to abuse in romantic relationships and also examine the increasing effect and mediating role of the presence of borderline personality pattern and separation anxiety on this exposure in these individuals. It is hypothesized that an increase in childhood traumas increases borderline personality patterns, separation anxiety, and exposure to abuse in romantic relationships. Moreover, borderline personality patterns and separation anxiety play a mediating role between childhood traumas and exposure to romantic relationship abuse. The secondary hypothesis of the study is having low income worsens whole scenario including having more separation anxiety and higher degrees of borderline personalitt traits and also experiencing abuse more frequently in romantic relationships. The increase in negative behaviors, such as the use of opposing force, coercive attitudes, threats, harassment, and physical or sexual violence, especially in romantic relationships, has led to the need to examine the causes of these behavior patterns as well as their consequences. This study aims to shed light on this problem and raise awareness about the foundations of this problem by trying to evaluate some of the antecedents in the formation of this unhealthy structure in romantic relationships. In this direction, it is aimed to support preventive initiatives specific to recurrent violence victimization in adulthood.

Method

Model of the Research

A relational screening and cross sectional model was used in this study. While examining the effect of being exposed to traumatic events in childhood on being more vulnerable to abuse in romantic relationships in adulthood, the mediating effect of the presence of borderline personality traits and intolerance and high anxiety about separation in this relationship is tested.

Population and Sample

The population of this study in the field of psychology was determined as adults residing in Istanbul. Paris (2001) indicates about 90% of borderline personality traits decreases by the age of 50. With time, especially when patient gets close to his/her sixties, impulsivity declines and patients learn to avoid the situations that cause them the most problems (such as passionate romantic relationships), finding solid niches that provide them the structure they require (Faraji ve Tezcan, 2022). In light of this information, the sample of this study consists participants, 326 women (81.5%) and 74 men (18.5%), between the ages of 18-55, residing in Istanbul using the simple random sample technique. 1% of the participants are primary school graduates 13.3% are high school graduates, 53.5% are university students, and 32.3% are university graduates or higher. While the rate of single participants is 64.8%, married participants make up 31.5% of the sample, and divorced participants make up 3.8%. The rate of people with low income is 14.5%, the rate of people with middle income is 72.5%, and the rate of people with high income is 13%. While 31.3% of the participants had received psychiatric support before, 68.8% did not.

Data Collection Tools

The Socio-Demographic Information Form

The Socio-demographic Information Form created by the researcher includes questions about the romantic relationships of the participants, as well as personal information such as gender, age, education levels, income levels, marital status. In this form, participants' experiences of receiving psychiatric support at any point in their lives are also questioned.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-33)

The Turkish adaptation of the Childhood Traumas Questionnaire developed by Bernstein (1994) was made by Şar (1996, cited in Şar 2012) under the name CTQ-28. The scale was re-arranged in 2001 by Şar et al. (2012), and its new revision was published under the name CTQ-33. There are 33 items on the scale, and it is based on a 5-point Likert scale. Items numbered 1,2,4,5,7,10,13,19,26,28,31 on the scale are reverse items. The scale has subscales named emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and overprotection-overcontrol. Cronbach's alpha value was determined as .87 (Şar, et al., 2021). For this study the Cronbach Alpha value, which is the internal consistency coefficient, was found to be .91 for the total score, .83 for the emotional abuse subscale, .85 for the physical abuse subscale, .76 for the physical neglect subscale, .86 for the emotional neglect subscale, and sexual harassment, .92 for the subscale and .85 for the overprotection/control subscale.

Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory (RRAI)

Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory (RRAI), developed by Kılınçer and Tuzgöl Dost (2013), was consist of 70 items and a 5-point Likert scale was used in the scale. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale without an reverse item is 70, and the highest score is 350. An increase in the score means that the exposure to abuse in the relationship increases. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was determined as .97 (Kılınçer & Tuzgöl Dost, 2013). For this study, the Cronbach Alpha value, which is the internal consistency coefficient, was found to be .97 for the total score.

Borderline Personality Questionnaire (BPQ)

Poreh et al. (2006) to evaluate Borderline Personality traits according to DSM-IV, Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Ceylan (2017). The scale consists of 65 items and has subscales of Impulsivity, Affective Instability, Abandonment, Relationships, Self-Image, Suicidal Self-Injury Behavior, Feeling of Void, Intense Anger, and Psychotic-Like Situations. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale was determined as .89 (Ceylan, 2017). For this study, the Cronbach Alpha value, which is the internal consistency coefficient, was found to be .94 for the total score, .61 for the impulsivity subscale, .75 for the indecisiveness in affect subscale, .72 for the abandonment subscale, .72 for the relationships subscale, and self. .81 for the self-image subscale, .79 for the suicidal self-injury subscale, .77 for the sense of emptiness subscale, .81 for the intense anger subscale, and .70 for the psychosis-like states subscale.

Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASAQ-27)

The Turkish validity and reliability studies of the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (Manicavasagar et al., 2003), were conducted by Diriöz (2012). The scale was consist of 27 items based on self-report, and a 4-point Likert scale was used in the scale. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was determined as .93 (Diriöz, 2012). For this study, the Cronbach Alpha value, which is the internal consistency coefficient, was found to be .93 for the total score.

Process

This study conducted with the permission of Istanbul Aydın University Ethics Committee (no: 2022/9 date: 27/05/2022) Socio-demographic Information Form, Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (CTQ-33), Romantic Relationship Assessment Scale, Borderline Personality Questionnaire, Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaires were given on a voluntary basis to people aged 18-55 living in Istanbul. An informed consent form was given to participants on the front page of the study. The identity information of the participants was not taken in order to comply with the principle of confidentiality. Participants were reached through online surveys. In the electronic environment, the questionnaires created with the Google Form application were delivered to the research participants via e-mail and social media channels. There is no need to get permission from any institution for the research. The average completion time of the scales was determined as 25 minutes.

Analysis of Data

Within the scope of this study, all statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 25 software. whether the scales exhibited a normal distribution was examined in detail. During this evaluation, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients of the scales were observed to meet the reference values in the range of -2 to +2 suggested by HahsVaughn and Lomax (2020).

The level and direction of correlation between abuse in romantic relationship, childhood traumas, borderline personality traits and adult separation anxiety variables were investigated using Pearson Correlation analysis. In addition, ANOVA tests were preferred to examine the differences in the scores of abuse in romantic relationships, childhood traumas, borderline personality traits and adult separation anxiety according to income status. Process Macro 3.5 programme was used to examine the mediating role of adult separation anxiety and borderline personality traits in the prediction of childhood traumas and exposure to abuse in romantic relationships. Since the validity of the Baron & Kenny (1986) causal steps technique, which is widely used in the analysis of the mediation model, is controversial today, it is preferred to use the new approach based on the bootstrap technique applied for psychology research. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), path a, path b, path c should be statistically significant. Unlike the Baron and Kenny method, according to the new approach, although these paths are not statistically significant, there may be mediation models whose mediation effect is statistically significant (Gürbüz & Bayık 2019).All these statistical analyses were performed with 95% confidence intervals and p value .05 level of significance.

Findings

The mean of the Childhood Traumas Queastionnaire was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 41.12, with a standard deviation (SD) of 12.39. The mean of Emotinal Abuse was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 8.39, with a standard deviation (SD) of 3.85. The mean of Physical Abuse was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 6.85, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.50. The mean of Physical Neglect was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 8.08, with a standard deviation (SD) of 3.06. The mean of Emotinal Neglect was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 11.46, with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.49. The mean of Sexual Abuse was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 6.34, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.28. The mean of Overprotection-Overcontrol was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 10.81, with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.48. The mean of the Borderline Personality Queastionnaire was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 23.31, with a standard deviation (SD) of 14.81. The mean of the Impulsivity was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 1.75, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.67. The mean of the Affective Instability was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 4.26, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.53. The mean of the Abandonment was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 2.54, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.23. The mean of the Affective Instability was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 4.26, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.53. The mean of the Relationship was determined as $\bar{X}$ = 2.91, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.24. The mean of the Self-Image was determined as $\bar{X}$ =

1.93, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.38. The mean of the Suicidal Self-Injury Behavior was determined as $\bar{X} = 1.06$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.63. The mean of the Feeling of Void was determined as $\bar{X} = 3.25$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.60. The mean of the Intense Anger was determined as $\bar{X} = 3.37$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.82. The mean of the Psychosis-like states was determined as $\bar{X} = 2.24$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.89. The mean of the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire was determined as $\bar{X} = 28.91$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 15.20. The mean of the Suicidal Self-Injury Behavior was determined as $\bar{X} = 94.54$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 31.60.

Table 1

The Relationship Between Childhood Traumas, Adult Separation Anxiety, and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

	Adult Separation Anxiety	Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships
Childhood Traumas	.252**	.292**
Emotional Abuse	.232**	.247**
Physical Abuse	.186**	.250**
Physical Neglect	.165**	.216**
Emotional Neglect	.178**	.234**
Sexual Abuse	.201**	.142**
Overprotection-overcontrol	.236**	.292**

Note. **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ Name of the test applied: Pearson Correlation Test

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (r=.252, p<0.01). It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory and Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (r=.292, p<0.01).

Although the variables showed low correlation with each other, mediator analysis was performed because it was thought that they could predict abuse in an adult romantic relationship in case of co-existence of childhood traumas and separation anxiety.

Table 2

The Relationship Between Borderline Personality Traits and Childhood Traumas

	Childhood Traumas	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Overprotection-Overcontrol
Borderline Personality Traits	.464**	.390**	.315**	.306**	.401**	.317**	.346**
Impulsivity	.261**	.202**	.240**	.172**	.213**	.164**	.145**
Emotional Instability	.306**	.231**	.187**	.207**	.299**	.199**	.210**
Abandonment	.384**	.326**	.283**	.247**	.308**	.289**	.322**
Relationships	.323**	.246**	.183**	.267**	.294**	.199**	.244**
Self Image	.439**	.373**	.271**	.318**	.380**	.282**	.353**
Suicide/ Self Harm	.427**	.422**	.326**	.240**	.298**	.346**	.250**
Sense of Emptiness	.444**	.381**	.277**	.285**	.391**	.316**	.336**
Intense Anger	.270**	.269**	.183**	.128*	.259**	.128*	.219**
Quasi Psychotic States	.222**	.131**	.179**	.165**	.180**	.211**	.178**

Note. **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ Name of the test applied: Pearson Correlation Test

It was examined that, there is a moderate positive relationship between Borderline Personality Traits and the following variables: Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (r=.464, p<0.01) Emotional Abuse (r=.390, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.315, p<0.01) 0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.306, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.401, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.317, p <0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=.346, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Impulsivity and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.261, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.202, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.240, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.172, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.213, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.164, p<0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r= .145, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a moderate positive relationship between Emotional Instability and Childhood Traumas (r=.306, p<0.01), Also, there is a weak positive relationship between Emotional Instability and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.306, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.231, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.187, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.207, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.299, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.199, p<0.01), Overprotection Control (r=.210, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Abandonment and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r = 0.384, p < 0.01), Emotional Abuse (r = 0.326, p < 0.01), Physical Abuse (r = 0.283, p < 0.01), Physical Neglect (r = 0.247, p < 0.01), Emotional Neglect (r = 0.308, p < 0.01), Sexual Abuse (r = 0.289, p < 0.01), and Overprotection-Overcontrol (r = 0.322, p < 0.01).

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Relationships and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.323, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.246, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.183, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.267, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.294, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.199, p<0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=. .244, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a moderate positive relationship between Self-Image and the following variables: Childhood Traumas Questionnaire (r=.439, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.373, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.318, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.380, p<0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=.353, p<0.01). Also there is a weak positive relationship between Self-Image and the following variables: Physical Abuse (r=.271, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.282, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a moderate positive relationship between Sucidice/ Self Harm Behavior and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.427, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.422, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.326) , p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.346, p<0.01). Also, there is a weak and positive relationship between Sucidice/ Self Harm Behavior and the following variables: Physical Neglect (r=.240, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.298, p<0.01), Overprotectio-Overcontrol (r=.250, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a moderate positive relationship between Emptiness and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.444, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.381, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.391, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.316, p<0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=.336, p<0.01). Also, there is a weak positive relationship between Emptiness and the following variables: Physical Abuse (r=.277, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.285, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Anger and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.270, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.269, p<0.01), Physical Abuse (r=.183, p<0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.128, p<0.05), Emotional Neglect (r=.259, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.128, p<0.05), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=.219, p<0.01).

It was examined that, there is a weak positive relationship between Quasi Psychotic States and the following variables: Childhood Traumas (r=.222, p<0.01), Emotional Abuse (r=.131, p<0.01), Quasi Physical Abuse (r=.179, p<0.01) 0.01), Physical Neglect (r=.165, p<0.01), Emotional Neglect (r=.180, p<0.01), Sexual Abuse (r=.211, p <0.01), Overprotection-Overcontrol (r=.178, p<0.01).

Table 3

The Relationship Between Borderline Personality, Adult Separation Anxiety, and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

	Adult Separation Anxiety	Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships
Borderline Personality Traits	.584**	.307**
Impulsivity	.254**	.262**
Emotional Instability	.497**	.177**
Abandonment	.569**	.252**
Relationships	.463**	.227**
Self Image	.436**	.297**
Suicide/ Self Harm	.376**	.200**
Emptiness	.474**	.271**
Intense Anger	.445**	.187**
Quasi Psychotic States	.277**	.169**

Note. **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ Name of the test applied: Pearson Correlation Test

The correlation between Adult Separation Anxiety and Borderline Personality Traits (r=.584, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety and Impulsivity (r=.254, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and Emotional Instability (r=.497, p <0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and Abandonment (r=.569, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and Relationships (r=.463, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety and Self-Image (r=. 436, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety and Sucidice/ Self Harm Behavior (r=.376, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety and Emptiness (r=.474, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire and of Intense Anger (r=.445, p<0.01), Adult Separation Anxiety and Quasi Psychotic States (r=.277, p<0.01) variables are weak and moderate positive.

The correlation between Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory and Borderline Personality Questionnaire (r=.307, p<0.01).

Table 4

Findings on the Prediction of Borderline Personality Traits by Adult Separation Anxiety

						%95 CI	
Independent Variable	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
Constant	6,85	1,29		5,29	<.001***	4,31	9,39
Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire	0,57	0,04	0,58	14,37	<.001***	0,49	0,65

R=.59   R²=.34   F₍₁.₃₉₈₎=206.43   p<.001***

$R=.59 \quad R^2=.34 \quad F_{(1.398)}=206.43 \quad p<.001***$

Note.***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05; The test use: Simple Linear Regression, CI: Confidence Interval

Table 4 shows adult separation anxiety predicts borderline personality traits. The R^2 value was .34 and the predictor explained 34% of the variance in the outcome variable (F(1,398)=206.43, p<.001). As a result of the findings, adult separation anxiety positively predicts borderline personality traits (β=.58 p<.001).

Table 5

The Mediator Role of the Borderline Personality Traits in the Prediction of the Childhood Traumas and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

		B	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*p*	%95 CI		*F*	*R²*
							LL	*UL*		
1	**Intercept**	63.97	5.25		12.18	<001***	53.65	74.30	38.59***	.08
	Childhood Traumas	0.74	0.12	0.29	6.08	<001***	0.50	0.98		
2	**Intercept**	63.73	5.15		12.38	<001***	53.61	73.85	28.26***	.12
	Childhood Traumas	0.48	0.14	0.19	3.58	<001***	0.22	0.75		
	Borderline Personality Traits	0.47	0.11	0.22	4.12	<001***	0.24	0.69		
	Undirect Total Effect (Mediator)	0.18	0.06				0.06	0.31		

*Note.* ***p<.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05 Test used: Process Macro 3.5

When the mediator role analysis utilized, it is seen that childhood traumas predicted the level of abuse in romantic relationship. The R^2 value was .08 and the predictors explained 8% of the variance in the outcome variable (F(1,398)=38.59, p<.01). According to the findings, childhood traumas positively predicted the level of abuse in romantic relationship (β=.29, t=6.08, p<.001) (Figure 1, path c).

The regression model after the mediator variable borderline personality traits was included in the model was statistically significant (F(2,397)=28.26, p<.001). After the mediator variable was included in the model, the predictive effect of the independent variable childhood traumas (β=.19, t=3.58, p<.001) on the level of abuse in romantic relationships continued (Figure 1, path c'). The R^2 value is .12 and it is seen that the predictors explain 12% of the variance in the outcome variable.

After the mediator variable was included in the model, the difference in variance explained between the models was found to be .04. The β coefficient of childhood trauma decreased from 0.29 to 0.19 and it was found to have this partial mediating role because it lost its statistical significance (Figure 1). The total partial mediation effect of these two variables was obtained as (β=.10, p<.05).

Figure 1

Beta Coefficients Regarding the Mediator Role of the Borderline Personality Questionnaire in the Prediction of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire and the Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory
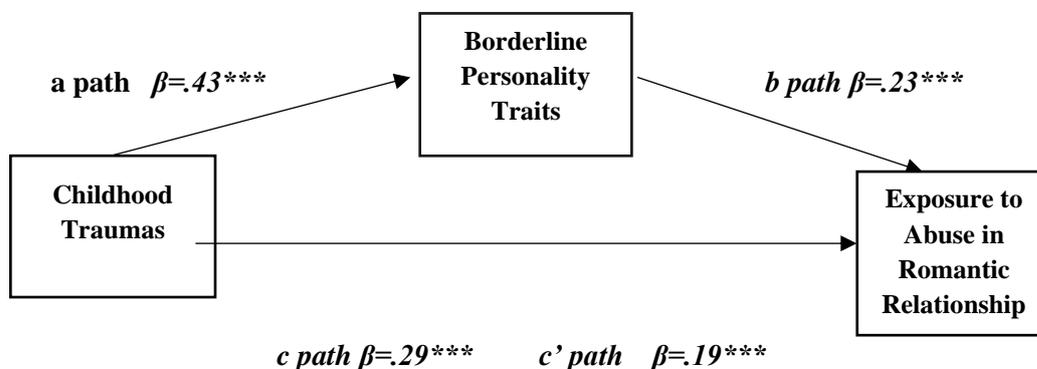
Note. ***p<.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 6

The Mediator Role of the Adult Separation Anxiety in the Prediction of the Childhood Traumas and the Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships

Model		B	SE	β	t	p	%95 CI LL	%95 CI UL	F	R^2
1	**Intercept**	63.97	5.25		12.18	<001***	53.65	74.30	38.59***	.08
	Childhood Traumas	0.74	0.12	0.29	6.08	<001***	0.50	0.98		
2	**Intercept**	55.95	5.36		10.45	<001***	45.42	66.47	32.27***	.13
	Childhood Traumas	0.59	0.12	0.23	4.81	<001***	0.35	0.83		
	Adult Separation Anxiety	0.49	0.10	0.24	4.94	<001***	0.30	0.69		
	Undirect Total Effect (Mediator)	0.10	0.04				0.04	0.18		

*Note.* ***p<.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05 Test used: Process Macro 3.5

The regression model after the mediator variable, adult separation anxiety, was included in the model was statistically significant (F(2,397)=32.27, p<.001). After the mediator variable was included in the model, the predictive effect of the independent variable childhood traumas (β=.23, t=4.81, p<.001)) on the level of abuse in romantic relationship continues (Figure 2, path c'). The R^2 value is .13 and it is seen that the predictors explain 13% of the variance in the outcome variable.

After the mediator variable was included in the model, the difference in variance explained between the models was found to be .04. The β coefficient of childhood traumas decreased from 0.29 to 0.23 and since it lost statistical significance, it was found to have this partial mediating role (Figure 2). The total partial mediation effect of these two variables was obtained as (β=.06, p<.05).

Figure 2

Beta Coefficients Related to the Mediator Role of the Adult Separation Anxiety in the Prediction of the Childhood Traumas and Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships
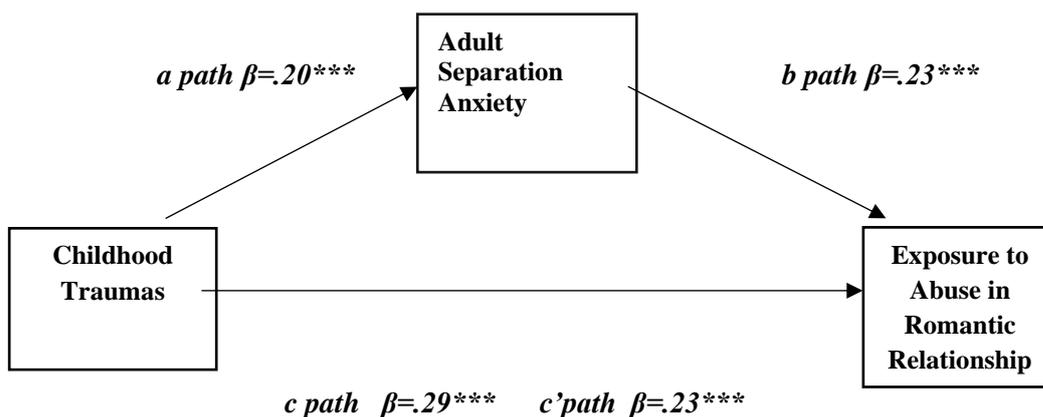
Note. ***p<.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 7

Comparison of Borderline Personality Traits, Adult Separation Anxiety, Exposure to Abuse in Romantic Relationships by Income Status

Dependent Variables	Low Income (n=58)		Medium Income (n=290)		High Income (n=52)		F(2.397)	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Borderline Personality Traits	30.17	15.42	23.28	14.51	15.83	12.07	13.69	<.001***
Impulsivity	2.09	1.60	1.67	1.68	1.81	1.66	1.55	0.214
Affective Instability	5.14	2.20	4.33	2.55	2.90	2.32	11.62	<.001***
Abandonment	3.48	2.56	2.57	2.14	1.37	1.79	13.17	<.001***
Relationships	3.67	2.26	2.95	2.24	1.85	1.81	9.65	<.001***
Self-Image	2.78	2.91	1.92	2.32	1.04	1.68	7.55	0.001**
Suicide/ Self Harm	1.52	1.88	1.05	1.60	0.62	1.32	4.30	0.014*
Emptiness	4.59	2.70	3.23	2.53	1.90	2.22	15.66	<.001***
Intense Anger	4.22	3.00	3.34	2.77	2.56	2.68	4.93	0.008**
Quasi Psychotic States	2.69	2.13	2.22	1.88	1.79	1.63	3.15	0.044*
Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire	34.60	17.35	28.54	14.42	24.56	15.37	6.46	0.002**
Romantic Relationship Assessment Inventory	100.09	41.68	94.32	32.50	92.69	23.70	0.88	0.418

Note. ***p<.001. **p<.01. *p<.05 Test Used One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

When the scores obtained from the Impulsivity and Romantic Relationship Evaluation Scale were analysed according to income status, no difference was observed between the groups (p>.05) (Table 7).

There is a significant difference in borderline personality scores among participants based on their income levels (F(2.397)=13.69, p<.001). As a result of Games-Howell findings, it was observed that those with low income (30.17±15.42) scored significantly higher than those with medium income (23.28±14.51) and high income (15.83±12.07), and those with medium income (23.28±14.51) scored significantly higher than those with high income (15.83±12.07) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Affective Instability subscale (F(2.397)=11.62, p<.001) were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. As a result of Games-Howell findings, it was observed that those with low income (5.14±2.20) and medium income (4.33±2.55) scored significantly higher than those with high income (2.90±2.32) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Abandonment subscale (F(2.397)=13.17, p<.001) were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. As a result of Games-Howell findings, it was observed that those with low income (3.48±2.56) scored significantly higher than those with medium income (2.56±2.14) and high income (1.37±1.79), and those with medium income (2.56±2.14) scored significantly higher than those with high income (1.37±1.79) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the relationships subscale (F(2.397)=9.65, p<.001) were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Tukey findings, it was observed that those with low income (3.67±2.26) and medium income (2.95±2.24) had significantly higher scores than those with high income (1.85±1.81) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Self-Image subscale (F(2.397)=7.55, p<.01) were analysed

according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. As a result of Games-Howell findings, it was observed that those with low income (2.78±2.91) and medium income (1.92±2.32) scored significantly higher than those with high income (1.04±1.68) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Suicide/ Self Harm subscale $(F_{(2.397)}=4.30, p<.05)$ were examined according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Games-Howell findings, it was observed that those with low income (1.52±1.88) scored significantly higher than those with high income (0.62±1.32) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Emptiness subscale $(F_{(2.397)}=15.66, p<.001)$ were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Tukey findings, it was observed that those with low income (4.59±2.70) scored significantly higher than those with medium income (3.23±2.53) and high income (1.90±2.22), and those with medium income (3.23±2.53) scored significantly higher than those with high income (1.90±2.22) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Intense Anger subscale $(F_{(2.397)}=4.93, p<.01)$ were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Tukey findings, it was observed that those with low income (4.22±3.00) scored significantly higher than those with high income (2.56±2.68) (Table 7).

When the scores obtained from the Quasi Psychotic States subscale $(F_{(2.397)}=3.15, p<.05)$ were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Tukey findings, it was observed that those with low income (2.69±2.13) scored significantly higher than those with high income (1.79±1.63) (Table 7).

When the scores of the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire $(F_{(2.397)}=6.46, p<.01)$ were analysed according to income status, a difference was observed between the groups. According to Tukey findings, it was observed that those with low income (34.60±17.35) scored significantly higher than those with medium income (28.54±14.42) and high income (24.56±15.37) (Table 7).

Discussion

People who have had traumatic experiences in childhood have lower psychological resilience and a higher predisposition to psychopathology than those who have not been abused and neglected in childhood (Chang, et al., 2021; Carr, et al., 2013). Individuals with childhood traumatic experiences are at high risk for forming unhealthy personality organizations (Xie, et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2018). All these features cause people to have insufficient ability to resist, stop, and move away from repetitive attacks in adulthood (Lelaurain et al., 2021). Experiences of abuse and neglect in childhood can cause people to normalize their experiences of violence in adulthood and easily integrate into violence to resolve conflicts (Cyr et al., 2006). Individuals may tend to repeat their childhood experiences in adulthood by reintroducing the aggressive objects they have known from their past lives. The belief that attachment to the offensive object is better than having no object to attach to and being alone, as a result of their extreme fear of object loss and abandonment, is also among the reasons that make people more vulnerable to repetitive victimization (Bögels, et al., 2013). Therefore they tend to engage abusive romantic relationships (McClure & Parmenter, 2020).

The main finding of the current study is that childhood traumas predict exposure to abuse in a romantic relationship and that borderline personality traits and adult separation anxiety partially mediate this relationship. Adults and children can develop strong emotional bonds with people who abuse, beat, and threaten them, and the persistence of these bonds can lead to the confusion of pain and love. This prevents making the right relationship decision and causes the longing for attachment to overcome realistic fears (van der Kolk, 1989). People exposed to abuse and deprivation early in their lives may

become vulnerable to violent relationships with their peers as adults (Gabbard, 2011).

Childhood neglect and abuse lead to the lack of integrative processes in identity, preventing the formation of a healthy structure in the child and may lead to a personality organization with borderline personality traits (Cirasola et al., 2017). Studies have revealed the role of childhood traumas in developing borderline personality (Ibrahim, et al., 2018; Kutlu, 2018; Tekin, 2021; Xie et al., 2021).Sansone et al., (2005) study, which is on hospitalized patients, reported that patients with borderline personality disorder mostly reported childhood trauma. Taillieu et al. (2016), pointed out that child maltreatment, especially emotional abuse and emotional neglect, increases the tendency of borderline personality disorder. Cirasola et al. (2017) showed that not just childhood maltreatments but also childhood distress has a significant association with the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Consistent with the other studies mentioned below, a positive relationship was found between borderline personality traits and each of the childhood traumas in the present study. According to these results, it is seen that as the childhood trauma experiences increase, the borderline personality traits increase, too.

When someone's childhood environment consists of aggressive, humiliating and abusive individuals (especially caregivers), the person can put the other individuals in the same role in future relationships, match with partners suitable for these roles, and hide the experienced victimization in relationships again like before (Gabbard, 2011). In borderline personality organization, people establish unbalanced and masochistic relationships and are repeatedly traumatized in their relationships (Battle, et al., 2004; Persano, 2022; Salome et al., 2023). As the bad experiences in the first relationships increase, this personality pattern of the people is positioned at the more extreme, and the romantic relationship problems experienced in the adult life also increase. Igarashi et al. (2010) drew attention to the effect of neglect and abuse in the first relationships on borderline personality organization and emphasized that the sexual nature of maltreatment is a higher disruptive factor.

Sansone et al. (2007) found that o considerable percentage (64%) of women diagnosed with borderline personality disorder were exposed to partner violence. Likewise, Newhill et al. (2009) reported, an even a more considerable percentage that 73% of individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder were exposed to interpersonal violence within one year after discharge from the hospital. Loas et al. (2011) found that 50% of women diagnosed with dependent personality disorder who were exposed to violence by their spouses showed borderline personality disorder comorbidity. Stepp et al. (2012) says that having borderline personality traits is a significant risk factor for relationship victimization. In another study, Newhill et al., (2012) showed that emotion regulation disorder is an essential longitudinal mediator of violent behavior among individuals with borderline personality disorder and may serve as the primary mechanism that increases the risk of violence in borderline population. Westphal et al. (2013) found that the relationship between interpersonal traumatic experiences in adulthood and borderline personality disorder is as strong as the relationship between interpersonal traumatic experiences in childhood and borderline personality disorder. Similarly, this study found a positive relationship between exposure to abuse in a romantic relationship and borderline personality traits. The fear of abandonment, in the subset of borderline personality disorder, increases the risk of being a victim of violence again (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The current study's results show that separation anxiety predicts borderline personality traits in a significant level. Matthies et al. (2018) also indicate that the development, management, and therapy of BPD may all involve separation anxiety as a key trait. Data from epidemiological, environmental, psychological, and neurobiological studies linking BPD to separation experiences, feelings of loneliness, insecure attachment patterns, dimensional separation anxiety, and separation anxiety disoder as a whole point to a partially common etiological pathway hypothesis underpinning both disorders

(Matthies et al., 2018).

Separation anxiety disorder can be comorbid with many other psychopathologies and cause significant problems in people's lives, especially in the relationship dimension (Manicavasagar et al., 2010; Silove et al., 2010). This disorder is particularly common among women in low-income countries (Silove et al., 2016; Bögels, et al., 2013). This situation is related to the dependency-increasing nature of financial inadequacies. It is thought that the psychological difficulties and problems that arise from childhood traumas increase dependency and, thus, separation anxiety with the perception of being inadequate alone. Separation anxiety in adulthood increases the possibility of being exposed to higher relational stress and victimization in the relationship (Silove, et al., 2016). Kayha and Taşkale (2019) examined women as both perpetrators and victims of violence. They found a positive relationship between separation anxiety and violence experiences in adults and emphasized the increasing effect of separation anxiety on violence. Silove et al. (2016) reported in a study on pregnant women that a group showing only the basic features of separation anxiety reported higher levels of physical violence than women with low-level symptoms. Likewise, this study found a positive correlation between the adult separation anxiety levels and the level of abuse exposure in a romantic relationship. Our results indicate that low economic level has a association with both borderline personality traits and separation anxiety the two psychological condition which have strong relations with victimization in romantic relationship.

Childhood traumas may contribute to a particular vulnerability to different types of psychopathology in childhood and adulthood (Carr, et al., 2013; Chang, et al., 2021; Lochner, et al., 2010). Traumatic stress experiences cause high levels of anxiety in children, and studies reveal the relationship between childhood traumas and different types of anxiety disorders (Nemeroff, 2016). Separation anxiety seen in adults is among the anxiety types highly correlated with childhood traumas (Karaytuğ et al., 2023). A similar relationship was also reported by Çakmak (2016). Similarly, this study found a positive correlation between adult separation anxiety levels and all types of childhood trauma.

The need for acceptance, belonging, and being assured of a commitment to others is one of the most important elements of human existence. Since a large part of human behavior, feelings, and thoughts stem from this primary interpersonal drive, lack of belonging creates a serious deprivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Every individual needs to connect with the other (Bowlby, 1960). However, since individuals with borderline personality traits have extremely anxious expectations about losing this belonging one, being rejected and abandoned, they may display more sensitive and reactive attitudes towards the rejection signals and loss of the bonds they have established (Hepp, et al., 2018; Hepp, et al., 2017; Staebler, et al., 2011). They may also easily encounter the experience of abandonment as a self-fulfilling prophecy because of their maladaptive behaviors such as aggression or withdrawal, emotional dysregulation and sensitivity, marked impulsive behavior, and difficulties in anger control (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Houben et al., 2018; Quattrini, et al., 2019.

It has been reported that separation anxiety can be highly co-diagnosed with personality disorders, including borderline personality disorder (Manicavasagar & Silove, 2016). Fear of abandonment plays an important role to engage in abusive romantic relationships in the precense of childhood abuse (Zerubavel et al., 2018). Borderline personality disorder symptoms of "fear of abandonment or efforts toward not being abandoned" and separation anxiety symptoms have soma different points. These anxieties are typically brought on by emotionally charged and unstable relationships in borderline personality disorder. However, adult separation anxiety disorder patient views separations brought on by "accident, injury, death or other unforeseen event" as more terrifying than abandonment when they occur in stable and healthy partnerships (Namlı et al., 2022). But in the case of excistance of both of them it can a cause a significant tandecy to do not leave the romantic relationship any way even in the case of abuse. Because with a comorbid diagnosis of personality disorder, separation anxiety was found

to be much more severe and impair functionality more significantly (Osone & Takahashi, 2006). It is undeniable that both intolerance to separation and being alone make people more vulnerable to being abused in their romantic relationships (Battle, et al., 2004). In this direction, while many studies associate borderline personality disorder with exposure to violence generally (Alexander, 2009; Coolidge and Anderson, 2002), there are also studies stating that borderline personality disorder and exposure to violence, especially in romantic relationships, are associated (Reuter et al., 2015; Vanwoerden et al., 2019; Brownridge & Tyler, 2022). The conflicting and irregular nature of romantic relationships is seen as one of the main characteristics of relationship violence, and the presence of instability in interpersonal relationships in borderline personality disorder is associated with increased exposure to abuse (Capaldi et al., 2012; Carotta et al., 2018; Sinai et al., 2018; Wojciechowski, 2019). Adults who neglect the child by not providing adequate support in the first relationships, abuse the child emotionally and physically, or actually or imaginatively abandon the child make child tend to develop borderline features in adult life and become more sensitive to separation, more sensitive to abandonment, more intolerant of loneliness and more abusable (Widom et al., 2009; Westphal et al., 2013; Berber Çelik & Odacı, 2019; Wojciechowski, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been found that traumatic experiences in childhood are associated with borderline personality organization and separation anxiety in adults, and this personality structure and intense separation anxiety play a mediating role in the romantic relationships that people form in adulthood, as well as being open to violence. The experiences of abuse and neglect in childhood predispose these people to the same experiences of abuse and neglect in adulthood, positioning them in a similar violent experience. The mediating roles of borderline personality organization and separation anxiety in adults, which are emphasized in the study, serve to reveal the association of the violence cycle in childhood and adulthood.

Violence experienced by individuals in childhood can lead to their inability to form a healthy personality. On the other hand, these personality traits can imprison people in the same cycle of violence with a behavior pattern that invites violence again. Similarly, the ongoing separation anxiety of these people, who were abandoned physically or imaginatively in childhood, whose emotional needs were not met, or who were abused physically or sexually, being separated from those first objects with which they could never reunite, can make tend to be in a dependent relationship with people who abuse them in the same way in adulthood. At this point, the current study's results show the importance of separation anxiety and borderline personality organization on victimization in romantic relationships. Also, results show that separation anxiety predicts borderline personality organization. Therefore, it indicates that focusing on separation anxiety in the psychological processes of individuals who have childhood trauma, especially those with borderline personality features might be usefull.

The fact that the research is limited to only 400 people residing within the provincial borders of Istanbul is among the limitations of the research. Another limitation of this study is that when determining the age range, focusing on borderline personality traits and not taking into account that the experiences gained with age can lead individuals to healthier romantic relationships. Therefore, it is recommended to evaluate the 18-30 age range in future studies. In addition, the fact that this study was conducted in a cross-sectional design causes a limitation in presenting the background of recurrent abuse experiences. In this regard, longitudinal follow-up and evaluation of children with childhood trauma is recommended in future studies.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Author Contributions
H.F. led the conceptualization of the study and was also responsible for the design phase and providing supervision throughout the study. Data collection and processing, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data, were carried out by D.S.C., who also conducted the literature search. The writing of the manuscript was a collaborative effort between H.F. and D.S.C. The critical review of the manuscript was specifically performed by H.F..

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