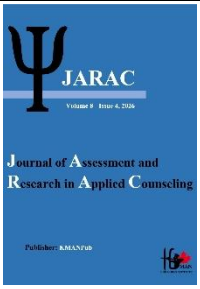
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Childhood Emotional Neglect and Depressive Symptoms in Young Adults: The Mediating Roles of Rejection Sensitivity and Emotion Regulation Difficulties

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The theoretical account of rejection sensitivity requires greater mechanistic precision. The paragraph beginning “One particularly important interpersonal mechanism…” argues that emotionally neglected children may develop expectations that others will be unavailable or rejecting, but the manuscript does not clearly identify the developmental framework underlying this proposition. The authors should articulate whether this pathway is being understood primarily through attachment-related internal working models, social-information-processing biases, learned interpersonal expectancies, or schema development. This matters because rejection sensitivity is not simply interpersonal distress; it involves a specific cognitive-affective disposition characterized by anxious expectations, heightened detection, and disproportionate reactions to rejection cues. A more precise account would substantially strengthen the rationale for positioning rejection sensitivity as a mediator rather than merely a correlate of depressive symptoms.

The rationale for modeling rejection sensitivity and emotion regulation difficulties as parallel mediators rather than sequential mediators should be developed more carefully. The Introduction states that these processes are “theoretically related

but conceptually distinguishable," which is reasonable, but the empirical correlation between them was subsequently substantial (r = .48). It is also plausible that childhood emotional neglect contributes to emotion dysregulation, which increases affective reactivity to perceived rejection, or conversely that chronic rejection sensitivity generates emotional states that become difficult to regulate. The authors should acknowledge these alternative temporal structures and explain why a parallel mediation model was selected as the primary analytic representation. This issue should also be revisited in the Discussion to avoid implying that the present cross-sectional model establishes the ordering of these mechanisms.

The measurement of rejection sensitivity requires substantially greater methodological detail. The manuscript describes the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire conceptually but does not state the exact number of scenarios used, the response ranges for rejection concern and acceptance expectancy, or the precise scoring formula. Because rejection sensitivity measures typically combine concern about rejection with expected likelihood of rejection rather than simply summing items, the authors should provide the exact computational procedure used to derive the overall score. The observed range in Table 1, from 2.10 to 24.60, should also be reconciled with the scoring procedure so that readers can verify that the values are plausible for the version administered.

The manuscript reports Cronbach's alpha values for all instruments, including $\alpha = .86$ for rejection sensitivity, $\alpha = .88$ for emotional neglect, $\alpha = .93$ for emotion regulation difficulties, and $\alpha = .89$ for depressive symptoms. The authors should consider reporting McDonald's omega in addition to or instead of alpha because alpha assumes tau-equivalence and may provide an incomplete estimate of reliability for multidimensional measures such as the DERS. More importantly, because the total DERS score aggregates six theoretically distinct dimensions, the authors should justify use of the total score and indicate whether its factor structure is supported in young-adult samples comparable to the present Canadian sample.

Authors revised and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Methods section under "Study Design and Participants," the manuscript states that "a total of 412 participants were recruited from several Canadian provinces… using convenience and online recruitment methods." This description is insufficiently reproducible. The authors should specify the recruitment period, exact recruitment platforms, whether university participant pools were used, whether advertisements were paid or unpaid, whether participants received financial or course-credit compensation, how duplicate submissions were prevented, how many individuals initially accessed the survey, how many consented, how many were excluded, and the specific reasons for exclusion. A participant-flow description is particularly important because online convenience recruitment can introduce substantial self-selection and data-quality biases.

The justification for the sample size requires formal statistical support. The Methods state that "the final sample of 412 eligible respondents was considered adequate for the planned correlational and mediation analyses and provided sufficient statistical power," but no power analysis is reported. The authors should provide an a priori or sensitivity power analysis specifying the assumed effect size, alpha level, desired statistical power, number of predictors, and method used to determine the minimum sample. For mediation, it would be preferable to justify the sample in relation to the anticipated indirect effects rather than only conventional multiple-regression requirements. Without such information, the statement that the study was sufficiently powered remains unsupported.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria described in the Methods require further operational detail. The manuscript states that participants were excluded if they "submitted substantially incomplete questionnaires or failed embedded attention-check items," yet neither "substantially incomplete" nor the attention-check criterion is defined. The authors should specify the missing-data threshold used for exclusion, the number and nature of attention checks, the required number of correct responses, whether implausibly rapid completion was screened, and whether straight-lining or invariant responding was examined. These decisions can materially affect results in online psychological research and should therefore be reported transparently.

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The ethical procedures require more complete reporting. The Methods describe informed consent, confidentiality, and provision of Canadian mental-health resources, but no institutional research ethics board, approval number, or formal ethical approval statement is reported. The authors should provide the full name of the approving institution or research ethics board, the protocol or approval number, and the approval date where required by the target journal. Because the PHQ-9 includes an item concerning death or self-harm, the manuscript should also clarify whether responses to this item triggered any risk-management procedure and whether the anonymous nature of the study limited direct follow-up with participants endorsing severe suicidal ideation.

The description of the CTQ-SF Emotional Neglect subscale should specify exactly how scoring was performed in this sample. The manuscript notes that "after reverse scoring the positively worded items where required, item scores were summed," but the authors should identify whether all five emotional-neglect items were scored according to the original CTQ-SF scoring protocol, whether minimization/denial items were used in any manner, and whether established severity cutoffs were examined. Because the study treats emotional neglect as a continuous predictor, the authors should explicitly justify this approach and clarify whether the score distribution demonstrated floor effects, which are common in maltreatment measures in community samples.

Authors revised and uploaded the document.

2. Revised

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