

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup>, 15.40 - 16.00.

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**Negative Childhood  
Experience's Detrimental  
effect upon the Development  
of Differentiation of Self**



Negative childhood experiences (NCE) alter the relationship between the nuclear family emotional system (NFP) and the differentiation of self (DoS) level a person obtains as an adult. Parents naturally establish an NFP as a method of managing the anxiety inherent in a committed relationship. Parents with lower levels of DoS experience a higher level of chronic anxiety, resulting in a reduced ability of the NFP to develop flexibility for managing stress and anxiety. Parents with lower levels of DoS may be more likely to perpetuate an NCE such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse against their children. A child with one or more NCE is more likely to develop negative life outcomes such as heart attacks, suicide, or unemployment. Adults with lower levels of DoS experience negative life outcomes such as eating disorders, depression, and decreased marital satisfaction. There is great similarity between the life outcomes of those who experience NCEs and those with lower levels of DoS.

Based upon the constructs of Bowen theory, this correlational study investigated the moderating effect of NCEs upon the relationship between the NFP and the level of DoS. Using an on-line survey, the 135 participants from the United States were at least 25 years old and were not currently completing their Bachelor's degree. All participants completed three measurements.

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The NFP was measured through the Family of Origin scale. NCEs were measured through a modified Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire. The level of DoS was measured through the BriefDSI-R. Multiple regression and moderation tested the hypotheses. The relationship between the NFP and DoS was significantly positively correlated  $r = 0.204$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The relationship between the NCE and DoS was significantly negatively correlated  $r = -0.451$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The moderating effect of NCE on the relationship between the NFP and the DoS was conditionally significant. There was significance when the NFP was low  $b = .42$ ,  $t(131) = 2.56$ ,  $p < .05$  and when the NFP was average  $b = .32$ ,  $t(131) = 2.39$ ,  $p = < .05$ . There was not a significance when the NFP was high NCE  $b = .21$ ,  $t(131) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .08$ .

This means that the lower the level of the NFP the greater the influence the NCE had upon the development of DoS. Clinically, this information will help therapists recognize the need to focus on the parent's level of DoS when working with families who have experienced NCEs.