

# Trauma and Aggressive Fantasies as Predictors of Criminal Involvement in an Internet Sample



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## Background

In this study, childhood trauma is used to explain the contradictory results of past literature regarding the relationship between crime and aggression.

- McCreery and Krach (2018) concluded that aggressive fantasies predict aggression by engraving and normalizing aggression tendencies.
- Maniglio (2010) suggest aggressive fantasies decrease aggression and are utilized as a cathartic coping mechanism.

Our study's purpose is to explain this discrepancy in the current literature by accounting for childhood trauma as a mediator.

## Sample

Individuals were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Out of the 357 subjects, 145 reported as male, 211 reported as female, and none reported as any other gender.

The race of the participants was as follows:

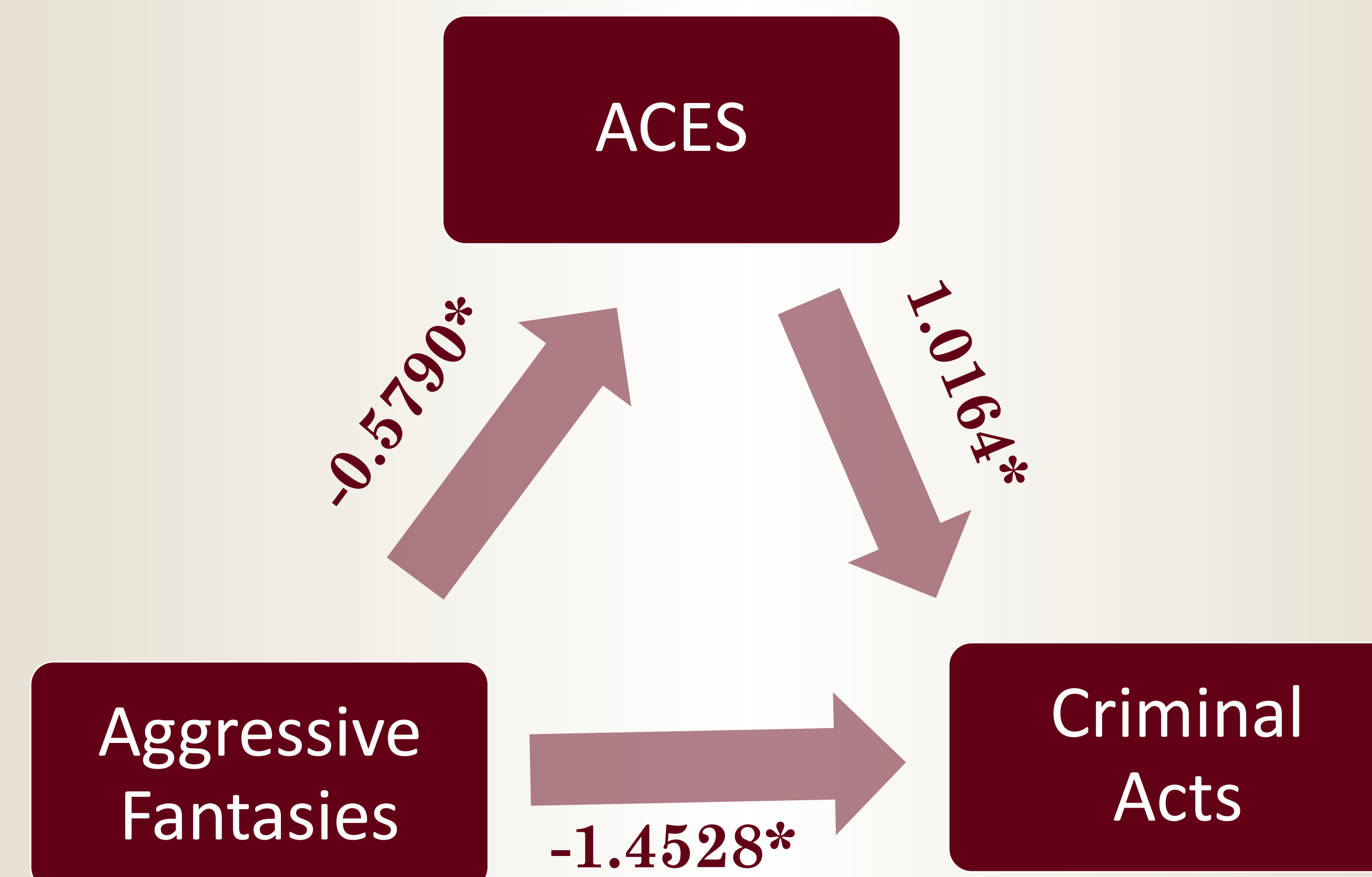
- 245 (68.6%) white
- 98 (27.5%) black
- 2 (0.6%) Native American
- 12 (3.4%) other or not reported
- 72 (20.2%) Hispanic/Latino/Spanish
- 382 (79.0%) reported as not falling into this category
- 3 (0.8%) not answering

The mean age of participants was 33.92 years ( $SD = 11.21$ )

## Methods

Three instruments were used as part of the data collection process.

- The *Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale* (ACES; Felitti et al., 1998) provides a score based on a seventeen-question survey which measures the different traumatic or negative events that occurred for an individual during childhood.
- The Criminal Involvement Scale (Elliott & Ageton, 1980; Thornberry & Farnworth, 1982) provides 47 questions survey related to past criminal involvement.
- The *Scale of Aggressive Fantasies* (SAF; Dahlberg, Toal, Swahn, & Behrens, 2005) provides a score related to aggressive thoughts and wishful actions.



*Note: \* = Significant at 0.5 (Wilcox, 2003)*

Total Score	N	M	SD
Total types of Criminal Involvement	307	62.98	9.68
Total ACES	321	23.55	4.18
Total Aggressive Fantasies	332	11.2	4.01

## Results

Based on these findings, 68.1% of the variance between aggressive fantasies and criminal acts was accounted for by ACES indirectly in comparison to only 31.9% that was accounted for by aggressive fantasies directly.

## Summary

We found that a person who had aggressive fantasies and ACES is more likely to act on their aggressive tendencies and engage in types of criminal behavior than a person with only aggressive fantasies or only ACES. 61% of our variance had aggressive fantasies, aces, and criminal acts, while 31.9% only had only aggressive fantasies and criminal acts or aggressive fantasies and ACES. In conclusion, our results showed that a person with aggressive fantasies alone is less likely to engage in criminal acts than a person with aggressive fantasies and ACES.

## Discussion

Our study bridges the gap in literature surround aggressive fantasies. From a criminological standpoint, it is important to understand which groups are at risk for offending. This information can be used to lobby for government funding of crime prevention programs or could motivate schools to create early detection programs of ACE and aggressive fantasies in adolescents. Those afflicted by ACE and aggressive fantasies would get the help they need sooner thus decreasing chances of criminal engagement. Future studies in this topic could include cognitive behavior therapy as a mediator between aggressive fantasies and crime.

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