

When Life Becomes a Dream:  
The Relationship between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Childhood Trauma,  
Absorption, Social Anxiety, and Addiction to Daydreaming in a non-clinical student  
sample

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## When Life Becomes a Dream:

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### ABSTRACT

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As opposed to normative daydreaming, daily maladaptive daydreaming lasting for hours is likely to lead to significant harm to the individual's functioning and to a feeling of distress. The goal of this research study was to deepen the scientific knowledge concerning maladaptive daydreaming, a psychological phenomenon that lately has been widely reported in the internet by those who suffer from it.

The research model and its hypotheses were based on the assumption that there are people who have a highly adept at daydreaming. In the case of stress and psychological pain, some of these people are likely to use daydreaming as a way to avoid painful reality and find solace in an alternative, imagined reality. The heightened use of daydreaming to avoid stress and to compensate for it is likely to become maladaptive daydreaming and harm the individual's functioning. The research evaluated two paths for the development of maladaptive daydreaming: childhood trauma and social anxiety. It was hypothesized that absorption and addiction to daydreaming have a mediating role in this relationship. In addition, differences were examined in daydreaming taking into account demographic variables.

315 subjects, students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research, answered a questionnaire which measured demographic variables, traumatic childhood experiences, social

anxiety, absorption, maladaptive daydreaming, and addiction to daydreaming. As proposed in the research hypotheses, a relationship was found between childhood trauma and maladaptive daydreaming, mediated by absorption and the degree of addiction to daydreaming. In addition, a relationship was found between social anxiety and maladaptive daydreaming, mediated by the degree of addiction to daydreaming.

It seems that some of those who were especially adept at daydreaming and had been exposed to childhood trauma prefer to daydream to a greater degree instead of experiencing their painful reality. In the process of rewarding avoidance, it seems that an addiction to daydreaming develops in that an action that was adaptive and normal becomes maladaptive. Also, it was found that some of the people experiencing a high intensity of social anxiety prefer to experience imagined social situations and to daydream instead of experiencing social anxiety within reality. The more that the need for social avoidance grew, the more addiction to daydreaming developed and became a rewarding and compensatory experience. Furthermore, the results of this research point to demographic differences in that young single people who are studying for a B.A. in the humanities have a higher propensity towards maladaptive daydreaming, as compared to older married students studying for graduate degrees in the area of the social sciences or exact sciences.

These research results make a significant contribution to the scarce scientific literature on the subject of maladaptive daydreaming and are likely to advance the recognition of the suffering of many who are struggling. The groundbreaking knowledge presented in this research is likely to aid in the development of effective types of evidence-based therapy that focus on rehabilitation from the addicting habit of maladaptive daydreaming through expanding the repertoire of ways of dealing with past and present distress.