

**Longitudinal study on the relationship between dissociation and maladjustment
among middle and high school students**

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This study was conducted to examine the longitudinal changes of dissociation among junior and senior high school students and the mechanisms related to school maladjustment and overall maladjustment. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the importance of focusing on dissociation among middle and high school students, contributes to the prevention of maladaptive behaviors, and encourages appropriate responses. In recent years, efforts to improve students' mental health have become increasingly popular. The new Courses of Study for senior high schools in 2019 clearly state that students should have opportunities to learn about mental disorders. However, even with this trend, there has been little focus on dissociation among junior and senior high school students, and this has not been adequately researched. One reason for this is the lack of studies on dissociation among this population in Japan. This is because the significance of studying dissociation among students has not yet been recognized due to the shortage of empirical data in the Japanese context. To bridge this gap, this research conducted four longitudinal studies in schools by surveying students using paper-based questionnaires. Study 1 conducted a latent growth analysis of longitudinal changes in the dissociation scores of students based on data collected over one year. Although the longitudinal dissociation scores tended to decrease, there were individual differences in students' dissociation scores. This finding, which provides data on the longitudinal trajectory of students, could contribute to the early detection of mental health problems. Using cross-lagged effect models based on a two-wave panel survey, Study 2 tested the hypothesis that high dissociation scores predict school maladjustment. The results demonstrated that high dissociation scores significantly predicted loneliness tendencies and low self-assessment of academic performance. In Study 3, the hypothesis that dissociation scores predicted high overall maladjustment was tested using a cross-lagged effect model based on a two-wave panel survey. The results revealed that high dissociation scores predicted high emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer problems, and low prosocial behavior. Further, the results of Studies 2 and 3 suggest that early identification of dissociation in junior and senior high school students can promote an

understanding of the characteristics and challenges of each student and increase the possibility of preventing maladjustment. In Study 4, a covariance structural analysis was conducted on the hypothesized model of partial mediation of school maladjustment from dissociation scores to overall maladjustment, based on two years of survey data. The results indicated that high dissociation scores could directly lead to high total difficulties and indirectly lead to high total difficulties and low prosocial behavior. In other words, the results suggest that increasing school adjustment may alleviate subsequent maladjustment in students with high dissociative tendencies. A focus on the early detection of dissociation in junior and senior high school students can improve students' mental health, prevent students' maladjustment, improve how students are understood by their parents, school staff, and other people, and facilitate more appropriate responses to the difficulties they face. Furthermore, since some students with high dissociation levels may have had severely adverse childhood experiences, research should focus on dissociation among students to ensure that those who require special care are not overlooked. The final part of the paper discusses the aforementioned and other points, the study's contributions to dissociation research and well-being of school students, and its clinical implications.