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Precursor to Substance Abuse in Young Adulthood: Childhood Abuse?

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Abstract:

Substance Abuse as defined by Abraham Wikler (c.f 1971) is a habitual nonmedical substance-seeking and substance-taking behavior resistant to extinction or suppression by its adverse social and pharmacological consequences. Young adults may be predisposed to Substance Abuse if subjected to Abuse in Childhood. The objectives of this study were to determine the difference; relationship and association between Substance Abuse and Childhood Abuse and its Dimensions. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 60 participants of age group 18-24 years (30 males and 30 females) from four metropolitan cities of India. The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (Adult Retrospective Version), developed by Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod and Turner (2005) was administered to measure the level of Childhood Abuse. The participants were screened using Drug Abuse Screening Test 10 (Skinner, 1982) and Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (Saunders, Aasland, Babor, De La Fuente & Grant, 1993). Results indicated that there was no significant difference and association between Substance Abuse and Childhood Abuse and its Dimensions. There was a significant relationship between Drug Abuse in men and Sexual Victimization and Alcohol Abuse in Men and Conventional Crime and Witnessing and Indirect Victimization. Since the present study is not in accordance with earlier studies it recommends conducting studies on a wider platform to study this change in outlook.

Keywords: Substance abuse, childhood abuse

1. Introduction

Substance Abuse is defined by Abraham Wikler (c.f 1971) in Alterman's book "Substance Abuse and Psychopathology" as, a habitual nonmedical substance-seeking and substance-taking behavior resistant to extinction or suppression by its adverse social and pharmacological consequences. *Substance Abuse* and Dependence are amongst the only disorders which develop due to a wide range of environmental stimuli.

Previous reports indicate that individuals between 18 to 24 years, report maximum alcohol consumption (Chen, Dufour, Yi, 2001-2002) and abuse one or more illicit drugs (White, Hingson, Pan, Yi, 2011). This cohort is referred to as "Young Adulthood" or "Emerging Adulthood" and is described by Arnett in Musney's Study (2006) as the time from the end of adolescence to the young-adult responsibilities of a stable-job, marriage and parenthood

A thorough literature review on *Substance Abuse* points out to a number of precursors leading towards it. Individuals having a family history of *Substance Abuse* (Gupta, 2008), raised in Extreme Poverty (Droliia, 2013), victims of Cyber Bullying (ANI, 2013), coming from Unhealthy Family Environment (Agarwal, 2013), suffering from Low Self Esteem, under the Influence of Peers and Locus of Control (Dielman, Campanelli, Shorp & Butchart, 1987) are at a greater risk of abusing Psychoactive Substances. Among other precursors to *Substance Abuse*, majority of literature points out that, adolescents who had been physically abused, sexually assaulted, witnessed violence and whose family members suffered from alcohol and drug problems were at a higher risk of *Substance Abuse* and Dependence (Kilpatrick, Acierno, Saunders, Resnick, Best & Schnurr, 2000). These acts may be referred to as *Childhood Abuse*.

Childhood Abuse may be defined as an "act or failure to act on the path of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk or serious harm" (U.S. Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 2010). Another study published in The American Journal for Preventive Medicine concluded that participants who exhibited greater exposure to *Childhood Abuse* reported increased health risk for alcoholism and drug abuse. The study reported a significant relationship between the number of categories of *childhood abuses* faced and risk behaviors exhibited (Felitti et al., 1998).

However, a majority of literature indicating a strong relationship between *Substance Abuse* and *Childhood Abuse* is foreign in nature. Due to paucity of literature in studying the two variables (*Substance Abuse* and *Childhood Abuse*) and due to difference in defining and understanding culturally informed concepts of *Substance Abuse* and *Childhood Abuse* the study aims to investigate the question: Is *Childhood Abuse* the most significant precursor to *Substance Abuse* in Young Adulthood?

1.1. Objectives

- i. To determine if there is significant difference in experiencing Childhood Abuse between Men and Women Substance Abusers.
- ii. To determine if there is a significant correlation between Substance Abuse and levels of Childhood Abuse.
- iii. To determine if there is a significant association between Substance Abuse and levels of Childhood Abuse.

1.2. Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant difference between Men and Women Drug Abusers on
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H2: There is a significant difference between Men and Women Alcohol Abusers on
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H3: There is a significant correlation between *Substance Abuse* and *Childhood Abuse*.
- H4: There is a significant correlation between *Drug Abuse* and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H5: There is a significant correlation between *Alcohol Abuse* and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H6: There is a significant correlation between *Drug Abuse* in Men and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H7: There is a significant correlation between *Drug Abuse* in Women and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H8: There is a significant correlation between *Alcohol Abuse* in Men and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H9: There is a significant correlation between *Alcohol Abuse* in Women and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H10: There is a significant association between *Substance Abuse* and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H11: There is a significant association between *Drug Abuse* and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.
- H12: There is a significant association between *Alcohol Abuse* and
 - Childhood Abuse; in the levels of (B) Conventional Crime; (C) Child Maltreatment; (D) Peer and Sibling Victimization; (E) Sexual Victimization; (F) Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The present study used a quantitative method. The study adopted a within-group design to assess the differences (if any) in the levels of *Childhood Abuse* between Men and Women Substance Abusers. The study has also used a co-relational design to determine the relationship between *Substance Abuse* and levels of *Childhood Abuse*. The study also aimed to identify the association (if any) between *Substance Abuse* and levels of *Childhood Abuse*.

2.2. Participants

The study collected data from 60 participants divided into two within groups [30 Alcohol Abusers (15 Male and 15 Female) and 30 Drug Abusers (15 Male and 15 Female)]. Participants from four Metropolitan Cities of India were included in the sample. Participants were selected on the basis of prior knowledge using purposive sampling method.

2.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

- Participants within the age group of 18-24 years were included in the sample.
- Only Substance Abusers were included in the sample.
- Participants having a minimum educational qualification of 10th Standard and belonging to the upper middle and middle class were included in the sample.

2.2.2. Exclusion Criteria

- Social Users and Addicts were excluded from the sample.
- Nicotine and Caffeine Users/Abusers/Addicts were excluded from the sample.

2.3. Instruments

The Drug Abuse Screening Test 10 (DAST 10) developed by Skinner (1982) is a 10 item screener scored on a Yes/ No scale. A score of 3-5 indicates Drug Abuse. The DAST-10 correlates very highly with the longer version DAST-20 (0.98). It has high internal consistency reliability (0.74).

The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) developed by Saunders, Aasland, Babor, Fuente, Grant (World Health Organization; 1993) is a 10 item scored on a five point scale from 0 to 4. Its Cronbach Alpha is established at 0.85. A score of 8-15 indicates Alcohol Abuse.

The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (Adult Retrospective Version) developed by Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner (2005) is used to measure the presence of *Childhood Abuse* among the adult population. It is a self-report questionnaire and consists of 34 items. The Questionnaire is divided into five modules. Each module is rated on a 6 point scale, which emphasizes on the number of times a Young Adult has experienced Childhood Abuse. On the scale, "1- time" is given a score of 1, "2-times" a score of 2, "3-times" a score of 3, "4-times" a score of 4, "5 times or more" a score of 5 and "no" has been evaluated as 0. The score for each module is interpreted as follows:

- Module A measures Conventional Crime where, 0-10 = low levels; 11-30 = moderate levels; and 31-40 = high levels of witnessing conventional crime.
- Module B measures Child Maltreatment where, 0-5 = low levels; 6-15 = moderate levels; and 16-20 = high levels of witnessing child maltreatment.
- Module C measures Peer and Sibling Victimization where, 0-5 = low levels; 6-25 = moderate levels; and 26-30 = high levels of witnessing peer and sibling victimization.
- Module D measures Sexual Victimization where, 0-7 = low levels; 8-27 = moderate levels; and 28-35= high levels of witnessing sexual victimization.
- Module E measures Witnessing and Indirect Victimization where 0-10 = low levels; 11-35 = moderate levels; and 36-45 = high levels of witnessing and indirect victimization.

The Cronbach Alpha of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (Adult Retrospective Version) is established at 0.80.

2.4. Procedure

The participants were made comfortable, explained the purpose of the study and their informed consent was taken. Written and verbal instructions were given and they were encouraged to seek clarifications. Screeners (DAST-10 and AUDIT) were given to the participants according to his/her substance of choice. After the scoring and interpretation of the screener, the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire was administered to the participants.

2.5. Statistics Used

The statistics used to analyze the collected data include Mean, Standard Deviation, t-test, Correlation and Chi-Square.

3. Results

	Substance Abuse (DAST-10 and AUDIT)	Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization)
Mean (M)	7.16	31.47
Standard Deviation(SD)	4.11	22.9

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Substance Abuse (DAST-10 and AUDIT) and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) (n=60)

Note. DAST-10: Drug Abuse Screening Test – 10
AUDIT: Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test

	DAST-10	Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization)
	<i>M1 (SD1)</i>	<i>M2 (SD2)</i>
Male	3.67 (0.72)	31.27 (19.82)
Female	3.47 (0.74)	44.6 (29.58)
t-test (t)	0.46	0.15

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests of Drug Abusers on DAST-10 and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) (n=30)

Note. DAST – 10: Drug Abuse Screening Test- 10

Hypothesis H1 (A): Rejected.

	Conventional Crime	Child Maltreatment	Peer and Sibling Victimization	Sexual Victimization	Witnessing and Indirect Victimization
	<i>M1 (SD1)</i>	<i>M2 (SD2)</i>	<i>M3 (SD3)</i>	<i>M4 (SD4)</i>	<i>M5 (SD5)</i>
Male	9.87 (9.43)	2.8 (3.61)	5.3 (4.75)	2.93 (3.31)	10.13 (5.15)
Female	9.73 (8.28)	7.4 (5.95)	8.0 (5.36)	9.73 (8.64)	10.93 (9.87)
t-test (t)	0.97	0.02	0.16	0.01	0.78

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests on Dimensions of Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) for Drug Abusers (n=30)

Hypotheses H1 (B), H1 (C), H1 (D), H1 (E), and H1 (F): Rejected.

	AUDIT	Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization)
	<i>M1 (SD1)</i>	<i>M2 (SD2)</i>
Male	10.6 (2.75)	24.53 (20.39)
Female	10.93 (2.67)	25.47 (15.90)
t-test (t)	0.74	0.89

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests of Alcohol Abusers on AUDIT and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) (n=30)

Note. AUDIT: Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test

Hypothesis H2 (A): Rejected.

	Conventional Crime	Child Maltreatment	Peer and Sibling Victimization	Sexual Victimization	Witnessing and Indirect Victimization
	<i>M1(SD1)</i>	<i>M2(SD2)</i>	<i>M3(SD3)</i>	<i>M4 (SD4)</i>	<i>M5(SD5)</i>
Male	7.4 (7.99)	1.93 (3.17)	2.66 (4.12)	4.13 (5.15)	8.2 (6.54)
Female	8.33 (5.15)	3.6 (2.97)	3.66 (4.4)	3.66 (4.37)	6.86 (5.78)
t-test (t)	0.71	0.15	0.53	0.79	0.56

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests on the Dimensions of Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) for Alcohol Abusers (n=30)

Hypotheses H2 (B), H2 (C), H2 (D), H2 (E), and H2 (F): Rejected.

Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) (r)	
Substance Abuse (DAST – 10 and AUDIT)	-0.19

Table 6

Correlation between Substance Abuse (DAST-10 and AUDIT) and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) (n=60)

Note. DAST – 10: Drug Abuse Screening Test – 10

AUDIT: Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test

Hypothesis H3: Rejected

	Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization)	Conventional Crimes	Child Maltreatment	Peer and Sibling Victimization	Sexual Victimization	Witnessing and Indirect Victimization
	(r)	(r1)	(r2)	(r3)	(r4)	(r5)
Drug Abuse	0.08	0.29	0.12	0.17	-0.13	-0.13
Alcohol Abuse	1	0.21	0.05	0.31	0.004	0.19
Male Drug Abusers	-0.03	0.23	-0.16	0.08	-0.55*	-0.27
Female Drug Abusers	0.23	0.36	0.42	0.34	0.1	-0.05
Male Alcohol Abusers	0.46	0.55*	0.05	0.42	-0.22	0.55*
Female Alcohol Abusers	-0.12	-0.34	0.005	0.19	0.29	-0.2

Table 7

Correlation between Drug Abuse; Alcohol Abuse and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) and its Dimensions (n=60)

Note. *: $p < 0.05$

Hypotheses H4 (A), H4 (B), H4 (C), H4 (D), H4 (E), and H4 (F): Rejected.

Hypotheses H5 (A), H5 (B), H5 (C), H5 (D), H5 (E), and H5 (F): Rejected.

Hypothesis H6 (E): Accepted.

Hypotheses H6 (A), H6 (B), H6 (C), H6 (D), and H6 (F): Rejected.

Hypotheses H7 (A), H7 (B), H7 (C), H7 (D), H7 (E), and H7 (F): Rejected.

Hypotheses H8 (B), and H8 (F): Accepted.

Hypotheses H8 (A), H8 (C), H8 (D), and H8 (E): Rejected.

Hypotheses H9 (A), H9 (B), H9 (C), H9 (D), H9 (E), and H9 (F): Rejected.

The inter correlation matrix presented in the above table showed a significant positive correlation between Male Alcohol Abusers and Conventional Crimes, $r(13) = .55, p < .05$ and Male Alcohol Abusers and Witnessing and Indirect Victimization, $r(13) = .56, p < .05$. There was a significant negative correlation between Male Drug Abusers and Sexual Victimization, $r(13) = -.55, p < .05$.

	Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization)	Conventional Crimes	Child Maltreatment	Peer and Sibling Victimization	Sexual Victimization	Witnessing and Indirect Victimization
	(X^2)	($X^2 1$)	($X^2 2$)	($X^2 3$)	($X^2 4$)	($X^2 5$)
Substance Abuse	0.97	0.8	0.8	0.44	1	0.8
Drug Abuse	1	0.71	1	0.71	1	1
Alcohol Abuse	0.93	1	0.71	0.71	1	0.71
$X^2(1,30)$ $p = n.s$						

Table 8

Association (chi-square) between Substance Abuse; Drug Abuse; Alcohol Abuse and Childhood Abuse (Juvenile Victimization) and its Dimensions (n=60)

Hypotheses H10 (A), H10 (B), H10 (C), H10 (D), H10 (E), and H10 (F): Rejected.

Hypotheses H11 (A), H11 (B), H11 (C), H11 (D), H11 (E), and H11 (F): Rejected.

Hypotheses H12 (A), H12 (B), H12 (C), H12 (D), H12 (E), and H12 (F): Rejected.

4. Discussion

Analysis of prevalence of *Substance Abuse* in adults with an Abusive Childhood (Table 1) indicated that there was a significant deviation on the *Childhood Abuse* Scale from its mean. This may have been possible due to a wide range of individual differences obtained on the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire.

Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H7, H9, H10, H11, H12, H6 (A), H6 (B), H6 (C), H6 (D), HD (F) and H8 (A), H8 (C), H8 (D) and H8 (E) were not in accordance with the hypotheses.

A negative non significant correlation existed between *Childhood Abuse* and *Substance Abuse* (Table 6). This Negative Correlation can be explained with the rationale that Individuals who are abused as Children have higher levels of resilience to cope with the stressors of life (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987).

Statistical analysis of the inter correlation matrix (Table 7) indicated a significant negative correlation between Drug Abuse in men and Sexual Victimization [H6 (E)]. This may be explained with the rationale that men seek great pleasure in sexual intercourse (Denny, Field & Quadagno, 1984) and may substitute this pleasure to the 'high' attained after taking drugs. Literature also points out to the fact that victims of sexual abuse may often turn into perpetrators (Virani, 2000) and seek their 'high' from engaging in sexual activities rather than indulging in *Substance Abuse*.

The table also indicated a high positive correlation between Alcohol Abuse in men and Conventional Crimes [H8 (B)] and Alcohol Abuse in men and Witnessing and Indirect Victimization [H8 (F)]. Considering the presence of closely knit family structures and presence of the mother as the primary caregiver especially in the Indian cultures (Jacobson, 2004) it may be said that individuals experience higher levels of *Childhood Abuse* outside the house in the form of Indirect Victimization. Bloom (2000) in Poverty, Violence and *Substance Abuse* in the Lives of Women and Children denotes that exposure to violence has profound impact on a child's cognitive, emotional, social and moral development which leads to irreversible alterations in neural development. One of the adverse consequences of these alterations is that our brain is henceforth suited to a dangerous and adverse environment and it is very difficult to feel safe. Under such circumstances children use behaviors and external substances (alcohol or drugs) to feel better and manage distressing emotions.

In recent years a greater percentage of individuals have resorted to using drugs and alcohol for many reasons. Jill Nicholson in his cause/effect essay stated that youth in today's world resort to drug abuse in order to impress friends, for the sake of curiosity and to escape reality. They do so in order to feel a little braver, stronger, smarter and more important. However, those who use drugs fail to understand and identify the major health risks associated with drug use. They need to understand and study the various consequences of drug use to beware of them.

5. Implications

- a. The study can be used as a basis to study cultural variances in multicultural societies.
- b. Culturally informed definitions of concepts like abuse are required especially when they inform legislation.
- c. The study highlights the importance to sensitize people about what constitutes abuse and how it affects children. It proposes a need for family intervention in varied cultures to understand childhood abuse and its effects.

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