

Child trauma and alcoholism in women

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Negative consequences of child trauma

Child trauma has been linked with a multitude of negative consequences in both early life and adulthood:

- alterations in brain structure and function (Bremner, 2003)
- variation in personality traits (McFarlane et al., 2005)
- increased risk of depression and anxiety (Heim and Nemeroff, 2001)
- earlier age of onset of alcohol use and abuse (Rothman et al., 2008)

The problem

- Women in treatment for alcoholism report childhood sexual abuse twice as often as women without alcohol problems. Their reports are corroborated by court records that confirm sexual or physical abuse.
- For men, no relationship was found between alcohol problems in adulthood and childhood victimization.
- For women, however, the relationship was significant, even after ruling out parameters like a family history of alcohol or drug problems, poverty, race, and age.
- Girls who are sexually or physically abused have higher probability of becoming problem drinkers in adulthood.

Childhood physical abuse is related to alcohol problems in adulthood

- Women's experiences of parental childhood physical abuse are related to alcohol problems in adulthood (Miller and Downs, 1995; Simpson and Miller, 2002; Widom and Hiller-Sturmhofel, 2001)
- Research has shown that experiences of parental childhood physical abuse are significantly related to adult alcohol problems among diverse samples of women:
 - a sample of Alaska Native pregnant women (Brems and Namyniuk, 2002)
 - a prospective sample of black women who were victims of childhood sexual assault (Jasinski et al., 2000)
 - a prospective sample of women who had been substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect matched with comparison cases (Schuck and Widom, 2001).

Measuring childhood trauma the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire

- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (SF), a 28-item self-report questionnaire
- Numerical scores for 5 categories of childhood trauma exposure:
 - emotional abuse
 - physical abuse
 - sexual abuse
 - emotional neglect
 - physical neglect.
- The quantitative scores are based on multiple Likert scale ratings for each type of trauma and range from 5 to 25.
- Cutoff scores are indicated for none, low, moderate, and severe levels of trauma
- The CTQ provides both a measure of presence or absence of trauma and a measure of severity of exposure.

Women's experiences of sexual abuse during childhood.....

- There is a significant association between women's experiences of sexual abuse during childhood and alcohol problems in adulthood (Jasinski et al., 2000; Miller et al., 1993; Wilsnack et al., 1997).
- There is an association between experiences of childhood sexual abuse and
 - adulthood alcohol or drug problems (Polusny and Follette, 1995)
 - alcohol problems (Langeland and Hartgers, 1998; Miller and Downs, 1995)
 - severe alcohol problems (Moncrieff and Farmer, 1998).
- However, a study of adult female inpatients at alcoholism clinics did not find that childhood sexual abuse was related to a psychoactive substance abuse diagnosis (Windle et al., 1995).

- Children who suffer early loss are at higher risk of many problems, also to alcoholism.
- Strong correlation between early separation from a parent and problem drinking among women.
- After following over a ten-year period the drinking habits of 696 American women it was found that women who had been separated from either parent before the age of six were **five times more** likely than other women to develop a drinking problem, or to have an existing problem get worse. (Wilsnack, 2000)

A prospective Norwegian study

- A population sample of Norwegian adolescents from the Oslo area was followed-up through five data collections over a 6-year time span. Alcohol-related predictors and consequences of sexual assaults were investigated.
- 17% of the girls reported that they had been sexually assaulted at some time: 7% in childhood, 6% in early adolescence (13–16 years) and 4% in late adolescence (17–19 years). Only 1% of the boys reported having been sexually victimized.
- Female childhood sex victims reported increased alcohol consumption from their mid-teens, with dramatic increase in alcohol-related problems at the end of their teens.
- Victims of childhood sexual abuse seem to be at high risk for alcohol abuse and dependency
- Late adolescent victims did not report increased alcohol consumption either prior to or after the assault.

- ◆ General population study. Method: 90 min personal interviews in 1100 women. Five-year follow up.
- ◆ Questions on level of drinking, and specific sexual activities (exposure of the woman's own genitals, exhibitionism by the perpetrator, touching or fondling, sexual kissing, oral-genital activity, anal intercourse, and vaginal intercourse). The activities did not count as abuse unless they occurred before age thirteen, the perpetrator was at least five years older, and were unwanted.
- ◆ After analysing data: childhood sexual abuse predicted the onset of problem drinking over a five-year follow up period: 51% of the women who were not problem drinkers at interview, and reported sexual abuse, had become problem drinkers five years later, compared with 19% of those who had not been abused.
- ◆ Women abused in childhood were three times more likely to report symptoms like black-outs and inability to control themselves while drinking, and were more than twice as likely to report drinking-related problems in the last year.
- ◆ Half of the women who had alcohol problems reported sexual abuse in their childhood.

Child trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder

Women who were severely and chronically traumatized as children may fit the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder.

- Frightening hallucinations and flashbacks
- Irritability and angry outbursts
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Hyperarousal
- Insomnia
- Exaggerated startle response.

Trauma cognitions, alcohol cravings, and alcohol-related consequences in individuals with PTSD and alcohol dependence

- To study gender-specific associations between trauma cognitions, alcohol cravings and alcohol-related consequences in individuals with dually diagnosed PTSD and alcohol dependence (AD). Participants (N = 167, women 58) had entered a treatment study for concurrent PTSD and AD.
- **METHODS** Baseline information was collected from participants about PTSD-related cognitions in three areas: (a) Negative Cognitions About Self, (b) Negative Cognitions About the World, and (c) Self-Blame. Information was also collected on two aspects of AD: alcohol cravings and consequences of AD.
- **RESULTS** Negative Cognitions About Self are significantly related to alcohol cravings in men but not in women
- Interpersonal consequences of AD are significantly related to Self-Blame in women but not in men.
- The findings suggest that for individuals with comorbid PTSD and AD, psychotherapeutic interventions that focus on reducing trauma-related cognitions are likely to reduce alcohol cravings in men and relational problems in women.

Lifetime victimization and past year alcohol use in a U.S. population sample of men and women drinkers

AIM Search of alcohol use among victims of physical and sexual violence. Associations between lifetime victimization and diverse past year alcohol use patterns and problems and whether these associations differ for men and women.

METHODS Population data from the 2005 U.S. National Alcohol Survey (NAS11, n=6919) are reported for 4256 adult men and women drinkers. Models controlled for demographics and parental history of alcohol abuse and examined interactions of gender with victimization.

RESULTS

- Lifetime victimization is associated with increased risk for diverse alcohol use problems for both men and women.
- These associations did not differ by type of lifetime victimization (physical only vs any sexual).
- The association of physical only victimization with drinking to intoxication was stronger for victimized vs non-victimized women compared to victimized vs non-victimized men.

Impact of multiple types of childhood trauma exposure on risk of psychiatric comorbidity among alcoholic inpatients

- Overall prevalence of single- and multiple-type childhood trauma exposure (sexual, physical and emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect) among 196 (w=62) alcoholic patients undergoing inpatient detoxification and treatment: **55.1%**
- Specific prevalence:
 - emotional abuse 21.4%,
 - physical abuse 31.1%,
 - sexual abuse 24.0%,
 - emotional neglect 20.4%,
 - and physical neglect 19.9%
- 31.7% and 18.9% reported at least 2 and at least 3 childhood trauma exposure types, respectively
- A history of emotional abuse increased the risk of mood disorder (major depressive disorder and PTSD)
- Physical abuse contributed to the prediction of suicide attempts
- Sexual abuse was associated with anxiety disorder, PTSD, and multiple comorbidities
- The number of reported childhood trauma exposure types predicted an increased risk of having single or multiple psychiatric comorbidities as well as suicide attempts.

Long-term effects of child abuse and neglect on alcohol use and excessive drinking in middle adulthood.

- Individuals with documented cases of childhood physical and sexual abuse and/or neglect (n = 500) and matched controls (n = 396) were followed and interviewed in middle adulthood. (USA)
- Women with history of child abuse or neglect reported higher past-year consumption ($p < .01$) and past-month number of days drinking >8 drinks ($p < .05$) than non abused/non neglected women.
- After controlling for parental alcohol/drug problems, the effect of child maltreatment on excessive drinking in middle adulthood was not significant for women.
- For women, the final model revealed an indirect path through alcohol diagnosis in young adulthood ($p < .05$) to excessive drinking in middle adulthood ($p < .001$) but no direct path from child abuse and neglect to excessive drinking in middle adulthood.
- For men, there were no significant paths from child abuse and neglect to alcohol diagnosis in young adulthood or excessive drinking in middle adulthood.
- For men and women, parental alcohol/drug problems had a significant indirect effect on the offspring's drinking in middle adulthood through young adult alcohol diagnosis