

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Substance Abuse Among University Students Internationally

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Abstract

- A traumatic experience such as sexual abuse can bring on stress, which can have negative short and long-term impacts on various aspects of an individual's life.
- The present study aimed to examine the effects of childhood sexual abuse on substance abuse among an international sample of university students.
- The present study used data from the International Dating Violence Study (IDVS), conducted by a number of researchers between 2001-2008 at 68 different universities in 32 countries.
- The sample consisted of n=17, 404 university students. The present study found a positive and statistically significant association between sexual abuse and substance abuse.
- The findings from this study can be used in social work practice by providing proper care and resources to victims of sexual abuse.

Introduction

Significance of Study: Sexual abuse can lead to various negative outcomes in life such as substance abuse. This can make life harder for individuals such as getting/keeping a job, and maintaining families.

Purpose: examine the effects of childhood sexual abuse on substance abuse among an international sample of university students.

Research Question: What is the effect of childhood sexual abuse on substance abuse among an international sample of university students?

Hypotheses: Individuals who experience childhood sexual abuse will exhibit higher levels of substance abuse compared with individuals with no history of sexual abuse.

Individuals from Western countries will display higher levels of substance abuse as compared to individuals from Eastern countries

Literature Review

- Birth cohort studies conducted in a major obstetric hospital in Australia found that participants who experienced sexual abuse had higher rates of nicotine disorder.
- In Europe, a study of female adolescent students in Sweden found CSA was associated with increased regular smoking, consumption of alcohol, and use of narcotics in female adolescent students
- Researchers found that CSA was associated with these HIV-related risk behaviors in a sample of 96 inner-city African American adolescents.
- In a sample of high school students in Oregon, U.S. it was found that those who had who experienced CSA, had higher tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use.
- In a study of Latino-American men, 35.7% of the participants reported childhood physical abuse and 17.3% reported lifetime substance abuse.

Methods

Research Design

- The present study uses data from the International Dating Violence Study (IDVS), conducted by a number of researchers between 2001-2008 at 68 different universities in 32 countries.
- The present study used the entire data sample

Sample

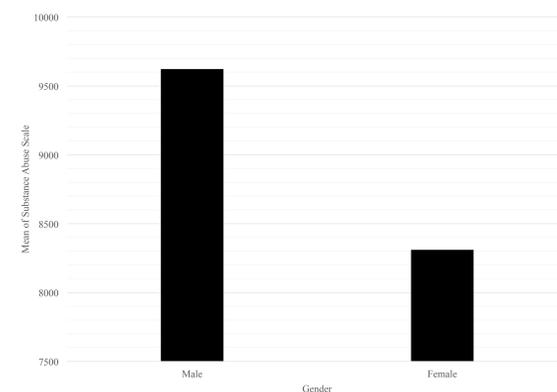
- The current sampling frame used secondary data from a cross sectional design
- The initial study administered 20,000 questionnaires
- The percent of women in the study was higher (70.1%) than that of men (29.9%).
- The average age of the participants for the total sample was 23.1 years
- The sampling frame consisted of the universities where the researchers were teaching courses.
- The sample design used was non-probability availability sampling
- The current study makes use of the total sample n=17, 404.

Measures

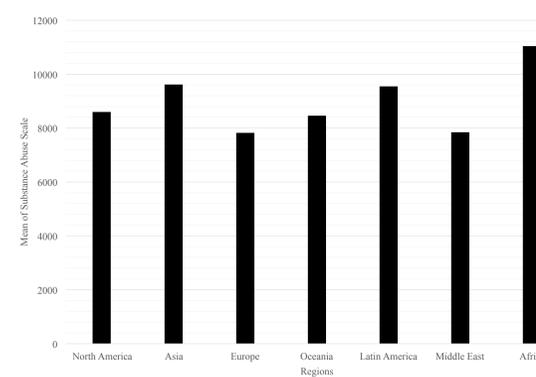
- Independent Variable: Sexual Abuse History. Three scale items were added to create a measure of sexual abuse history.
- Dependent Variable: Substance Abuse Problems. The substance abuse problem scale was created by summing three scale items.

Results

- The relationship between sexual abuse and substance abuse was examined using a Spearman *rho* correlation analysis. The results indicated a positive and statistically significant association between sexual abuse and substance abuse $r_s(17,402) = 0.37, p = <.01$. The strength of the correlation was weak. Experiencing sexual abuse had a statistically significant relationship to substance abuse.
- A Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to examine the difference in sexual abuse between male and female participants. Female participants had significantly lower sexual abuse scores (*Mean rank* = 8606.56) than male participants (*Mean rank* = 8927.24; $U = 30584661, p < .001$).
- A Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to examine the difference in substance abuse between male and female participants. Female participants had significantly lower substance abuse scores (*Mean rank* = 8310.24) than male participants (*Mean rank* = 9621.35; $U = 26970441, p < .001$).
- A Kruskal-Wallis *H* test was conducted comparing mean substance abuse scores among study participants from various regions of the world. A significant result was found ($H(6) = 936.52, p < .001$), indicating that the seven regions differed from each other. The region with the lowest mean substance abuse score was the Middle East and the region with the highest substance abuse score was Africa.
- A Kruskal-Wallis *H* test was conducted comparing mean sexual abuse scores among study participants from various regions of the world. A significant result was found ($H(6) = 588.08, p < .001$), indicating that the seven regions differed from each other. The region with the lowest mean sexual abuse score was Europe and the region with the highest sexual abuse score was Africa.

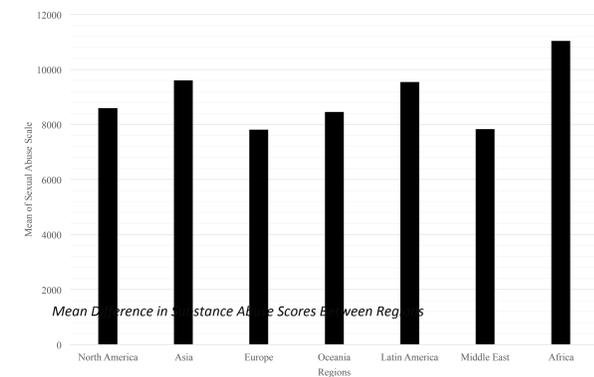


Mean Difference in Substance Abuse Scores Between Male & Female



Mean Difference in Sexual Abuse Scores Between Regions

Results Continued



Discussion

Strengths

- This study had a large sample size containing different regions of the world, which allowed for a comparison across the different regions, specifically Western and Eastern countries.
- The participants included both men and women, which allowed for any differences in gender to be seen.

Limitations

- This study only consisted of college and university students, which can limit generalizability.

Implications & Future Research

- The findings from this study can be used in social work practice by providing proper care and resources to victims of sexual abuse.
- Policies can also be aimed at serving the specific needs of sexual abuse victims.
- Future research can look into the correlation of sexual abuse and substance abuse on different populations to examine if the same results are found.

References

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