



What is the Relationship Between Depression and Substance Use Among Female Adolescent Sexual Assault Victims?

Courtney Grutbo
Department of Social Work



Abstract

- Female adolescents are considered a vulnerable population and are at high risk for sexual assault in the United States.
- Female adolescent sexual assault victims are more at risk to engage in substance use and express symptoms of depression.
- The study provided key implications for social work practice by informing mental health professionals of coping mechanisms and symptoms present among female adolescent sexual assault victims to provide appropriate care and services.



Objectives

Significance of the Study

- Experience of sexual assault can impact the adolescent's self-esteem, social networks, and how they interpret control in their lives. If the adolescent does not gain help after the assault this can cause risks of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, dissociation or increased risk-taking behaviors (Trickett et al., 2011).

Purpose of the Study

- To increase knowledge related to health of sexual assault victims.
- To provide information to mental health professionals on the importance of identifying coping mechanisms and symptoms after exposure to sexual trauma.

Research Question

- What is the relationship between depression and substance use among female adolescent sexual assault victims?

Hypothesis

- The higher the depression symptoms, the higher the substance use will be among female adolescent sexual assault victims.

Literature Review

Depression and Sexual Assault

- Research has shown adult females who had experienced sexual assault are more likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety than males (Choudhary et al., 2012).

Substance Use and Adolescent Sexual Assault

- Moreland et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between childhood sexual abuse and alcohol and drug use.
- Charak et al. (2015) found females adolescents who experienced sexual assault coped with multiple substances, including tobacco, alcohol, and nonprescription drugs.

Depression and Substance Use and Adolescent Sexual Assault

- Danielson et al. (2010) found female adolescent sexual assault victims who had symptoms of PTSD and depression, also reported cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol use.
- Dworkin et al. (2017) found female adolescent sexual assault victims had higher reports of depressed symptoms and coped with alcohol use more than females who did not report being a victim of sexual assault.

Gaps in Research

- Limited diverse range of ethnicities in the studies.
- Limited availability of cross-sectional studies.

Methods

Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescents to Adult Health (Add Health), 1994-1996, 2001, and 2008.
- The original study provided information on adolescent health and behaviors between 7th through 12th grade in the U.S. (Harris & Udry, 2018).
- The current study's focus was on the relationship between depression and substance use among female adolescent sexual assault victims.

Sampling Method

- The final sample size was 264 female adolescents from the 6,504 adolescent participants pulled from the original study's Wave I in-home survey.
- Inclusion criteria for this study was female adolescents responding yes to the sexual assault victim question and fully answering all the depression and substance use questions.

Measures

- Independent variable:** The independent variable for this study is substance use. Substance use was defined as adolescent use of tobacco, marijuana and/or alcohol.
- Dependent variable:** The dependent variable for this study is depression. Depression was defined as feelings of hopelessness and sadness.

Conclusion

- The results from the Bonferroni post hoc test indicated the higher the alcohol use, the higher the depression symptoms among female adolescent sexual assault victims.
- Ever tried tobacco, marijuana, or alcohol were not significantly affected by the amount of depression symptoms among female adolescent sexual assault victims.
- The frequency of tobacco and marijuana use were not significantly affected by the amount of depression symptoms among female adolescent sexual assault victims.
- Strong external validity will allow for study results to be generalized to female adolescent sexual assault victims across the United States.

Implications for Social Work Practice

- It is importance for clinicians to be aware and assess for depression symptoms and alcohol use while working with female adolescent sexual assault victims.
- Provide trauma screenings, depression scales, and substance use screenings as a part of program policy during assessments when working with female adolescents.



References

Charak, R., Koot, H., Dvorak, R., Elklit, A., & Elhai, J. (2015). Unique versus cumulative effects of physical and sexual assault on patterns of adolescent substance use. *Psychiatry Research, 230*(3), 763-769. doi:10.106/j.psychres.2015.11.014

Choudhary, E., Smith, M., & Bossarte, R. (2012). Depression, anxiety, and symptom profiles among female and men victims of sexual violence. *American Journal of Men's Health, 6*(1), 28-36. doi:10.1177/1557988311414045

Danielson, C., McCart, M., De Arellano, M., MacDonald, A., Doherty, L., & Resnick, H. (2010). Risk reduction for substance use and trauma-related psychopathology in adolescent sexual assault victims: Findings from an open trial. *Child Maltreatment, 15*(3), 261-268. doi:10.1177/1077559510367939

Dworkin, E., Sessarego, S., Pittenger, S., Edwards, K., & Banyard, V. (2017). Rape myth acceptance in sexually assaulted adolescents' school contexts: Associations with depressed mood and alcohol use. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 60*(3-4), 516-526. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12173

Harris, K., & Udry, R. (2018). National longitudinal study of adolescent to adult health (Add Health), 1994-2008 [Public Use]. *Ann Arbor, MI: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill [distributor], Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]*. doi:10.3886/ICPSR21600.v21

Moreland, A., Walsh, K., Hartley, C., Hanson, R., Danielson, C., Saunders, B., & Kilpatrick, D. (2018). Investigating longitudinal associations between sexual assault, substance use, and delinquency among female adolescents: Results from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 63*(3), 320-326. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.04.002

Trickett, P., Noll, J., & Putnam, F. (2011). The impact of sexual abuse on female development: Lessons from a multigenerational, longitudinal research study. *Development and Psychopathology, 23*(2), 453-476. doi:10.1017/S0954579411000174

Results

Table 3

Frequency of Alcohol Use and Depression

	Post Hoc Comparisons: Mean Difference (SE)		
	Never	Sometimes	Often
Never	—	-0.58 (1.37)	-4.38 (1.72)*
Sometimes	0.58 (1.37)	—	-3.80 (1.54)*
Often	4.38 (1.72)*	3.80 (1.54)*	—

*p < .05

- No significant difference was found regarding depression scores of participants who ever smoked tobacco, ever used marijuana, and ever drank alcohol.
- No significant difference was found regarding depression scores with frequency of tobacco use among participants.
- No significant difference was found regarding depression scores with frequency of marijuana use among participants.
- Study participants who used alcohol often in the past year had significantly higher depression ($M = 20.42$, $SD = 10.69$) than study participants who drank sometimes in the past year ($M = 16.62$, $SD = 8.84$), and study participants who never drank in the past year ($M = 16.04$, $SD = 9.73$).