

The DRAM, Vol. 6(7) - Different reasons why men and women drink: Examining the underlying association between maltreatment during childhood and later alcohol problems

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Previous studies have demonstrated a positive association between maltreatment during childhood and drinking-related problems later in life (Bensley, Spieker, Van Eenwyk, & Schoder, 1999). However, the motivational mechanisms underlying this association have not been studied. This week DRAM reviews a paper that examines why men and women who report experiencing childhood maltreatment abuse alcohol (Goldstein, Flett, & Wekerle, 2010).

Method

- Eighty-six male and 132 female college students answered questions regarding
 - Childhood maltreatment (i.e., physical, sexual and emotional abuse; physical and emotional neglect), assessed with the 28-item Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein and Fink, 1998).
 - Drinking motives, assessed with the 28-item Modified Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised (M-DMQ-R; Grant et al., 2007)
 - Alcohol consumption and consequences, assessed with the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Saunders, Aasland, Babor, De La Fuente, & Grant, 2006).
- The researchers built models separately for men and women to examine which drinking motives mediate the effect of childhood maltreatment on alcohol problems.

Results

- Approximately half (51.6%) of the male students and 23.4% of the female students were binge drinking at least monthly.
- Overall, 31% of students reported experiencing any type of abuse and 30% reported any type of neglect
- There was a positive association between being abused ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) or neglected ($r = .28$, $p < .05$) and having alcohol problems.
- For men, the association between being maltreated (e.g., neglected or abused) and having alcohol problems was mediated by the motive “to feel good and get happy;” this model accounted for 42.12% of the variance in alcohol problems, adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$.
- For women, this association was mediated by the desire to cope with depression and anxiety (this model accounted for 22.54% of the variance in alcohol problems (adjusted $R^2 = .21$).

	Coping-anxiety motive	Coping-depression motive	Enhancement motive	Total model
Men	1.15	.31	2.01*	2.48*
Women	-.95	2.56**	2.02*	3.15**

Figure. Mediation effects (Z values) of drinking motives on childhood maltreatment to alcohol problems association for both genders. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Click image to enlarge.

Limitations

- Retrospective reports might reflect some memory bias. For example, individuals who have drinking problems might be inclined to recall more childhood maltreatment.
- Correlational design prevents causality interpretation.
- Convenience sample (i.e., students) decreases generalizability of the results to other populations.

Conclusion

Men who report experiencing maltreatment during their childhood tend to report drinking to feel good and to get happy. In other words, the enhancement motive mediates the association between childhood maltreatment and alcohol problems among men. For women who were maltreated, problematic drinking is associated

with a desire to cope with depression and anxiety. In other words, coping with depression and anxiety mediates the association between problematic drinking and childhood maltreatment among women. Further studies will need to conduct longitudinal studies to establish causality (i.e. to examine if childhood maltreatment indeed leads to future alcohol-related problems).

— Julia Braverman

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

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