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Associations Between Childhood Adversity, Adult Stressful Life Events, and Past-Year Drug Use Disorders in the National Epidemiological Study of Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC).

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Abstract

Stress sensitization, whereby CA lowers tolerance to later stressors, has been proposed as a potential mechanism explaining the association between exposure to childhood adversities (CA) and drug use disorders in adulthood. However, this mechanism remains untested. This paper begins to address this gap through exploring associations between CA exposure and stressful events in adulthood for predicting drug use disorders. We used data drawn from Wave 2 of the U.S. National Epidemiological Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions (n = 34,653) to explore whether the association between past-year stressful life events and the 12-month prevalence of disordered cannabis, stimulant, and opiate use varied by the number of types of CA that an individual was exposed to. Past-year stressful life events were associated with an increased risk of cannabis, stimulant, and opiate use disorders among men and women. Exposure to CA was associated with increased risk for disordered cannabis use among men and women and opiate use among men only. Finally, we found significant associations between exposure to CA and past-year stressful life events in predicting disordered drug use, but only for women in relation to disordered stimulant and opiate use. Findings are suggestive of possible stress sensitization effects in predicting disordered stimulant and opiate use among women. Implications of these findings for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders and for future research are discussed. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2014 APA, all rights reserved).

PMID:25134042[PubMed - as supplied by publisher]

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