Associations Between Parental Relationship Quality and Substance Use Among High-Risk Emerging Adults

Fatima Khan,[1] Ashli J. Sheidow,[2] Maryann Davis,[3] Rachael T. Perrault,[2] Jessica N. Flori,[1] Lourah M. Kelly,[3] Kristyn Zajac[1]

[1]UConn School of Medicine, [2]Lighthouse Institute - Chestnut Health Systems, [3]University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School

Introduction

- Relationships with parental figures play a pivotal role in shaping development and behaviors, well into adulthood.[a]
- Positive parental relationships can protect against risky behaviors, such as substance use, while negative relationships can exacerbate risk factors and contribute to such risky behaviors.[b]
- There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of how parental relationships affect specific problems and populations. Little research has focused on parental relationships and substance use problems among emerging adults, the age group that has the highest rates of substance use and substance use disorders.[c]
- This study aims to examine associations between quality of mother and father figure relationships and substance use among emerging adults with mental illness and serious antisocial behavior. We examined these relationships cross sectionally and longitudinally.

Methods

This study utilized data from two randomized clinical trials of an intervention to reduce serious antisocial behavior in emerging adults

Participants: *N* = 376 participants aged 15-26, 54% white, 37.5% Black, 8.5% other races. 74.7% male, 25.3 % female. 376 participants completed baseline assessments, and 132 participants completed 12-month follow-up assessments.

Inclusion: recently arrested or released from incarceration within past 18 months (excluding probation/parole violations), diagnosed with a behavioral health disorder (i.e, mental health and substance use disorders)

Measure	Construct
Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI) (Emerging adults were asked to identify both a mother figure and father figure in their lives, which was not always a biological parent)	• Closeness of Relationship with Father Figure • Closeness of Relationship with Mother Figure • Discord in Relationship with Father Figure • Discord in Relationship with Mother Figure
Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) • Assesses problems related to alcohol or drug use in the past 30 days (e.g., neglecting responsibilities, engaging in unsafe behaviors). • Assesses number of days of alcohol or drug use in the past 30 days	• Substance Use Problems • Substance Use Frequency
Urine Drug Screen (UDS) • The number of different types of substances the participant tested positive for at baseline and 12-month follow-up • Tested for: Amphetamine, Barbiturates, Buprenorphine, Benzodiazepines, Cocaine, Methamphetamine, Ecstasy, Methadone, Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, Opiates, Oxycodone, Phencyclidine, Propoxyphene, Marijuana	• Any Positive Urine Drug Screen Results was coded as Substance Use

Results

Correlations Between Study Variables at Baseline

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Father Closeness	--					
2. Mother Closeness	.48***	--				
3. Father Discord	-.24***	-.10	--			
4. Mother Discord	-.17*	-.30***	.53***	--		
5. Substance Frequency	-.16*	-.11*	.22**	.01	--	
6. Substance Problems	-.23**	-.15**	.24***	.26***	.59***	--
7. Any Positive UDS	-.07	-.02	.15*	.12*	.33**	.32**

***p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001**

LONGITUDINAL ANALYSES

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine if mother and father closeness and discord at baseline predicted **changes in substance use problems, substance use frequency,** and **any positive urine drug screening results** between baseline and 12-month follow-up. We controlled for baseline substance use behaviors and intervention conditions.

Substance use problems:
- $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(6,62) = 1.28$, $p = .278$
- No statistically significant predictors of changes in substance use problems between baseline and 12-month follow-up.

Substance use frequency:
- $R^2 = 0.19$, $F(6,61) = 2.36$, $p = .041$
- Father figure discord was the only significant predictor and was related to an increase in substance use frequency between baseline and 12-month follow-up ($b = .35$, $p = .049$).

Any positive urine drug screen (UDS) results:
- $R^2 = 0.42$, $F(6,47) = 5.60$, $p = <.001$
- Mother figure closeness predicted an increased likelihood of any positive UDS ($b = 0.40$, $p = .012$) at 12-month follow-up compared to baseline. Additionally, baseline UDS was a significant predictor of any positive UDS at 12-month follow-up ($b = .51$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

- Cross-sectionally, closeness with parents is associated with fewer substance use problems and lower substance use frequency in emerging adults with antisocial behavior.
- Baseline father discord was significantly associated with an increase in substance use frequency by the 12-month follow up, while mother discord was not. These results may reflect unique child-father figure relationship dynamics that influence substance use.
- Baseline mother and father discord were not significantly associated with an increase in substance use problems by the 12-month follow up. These results may reflect that although parental discord may drive higher substance use frequency, it may not escalate into substance use problems, due to protective factors, or because substance use problems may take longer to manifest.
- Unexpectedly, baseline mother closeness was significantly predictive of an increased likelihood of a positive UDS at 12-month follow-up compared to baseline. Closeness may reflect a parent's permissiveness toward substance use, or it may reach a point where it signifies enmeshment.
- Parental relationship quality, specifically, father discord and mother closeness, are related to self-reported measures, such as substance use frequency, but also objective measures, such as urine drug screen results, emphasizing the importance of parental relationship quality in shaping substance use behaviors.
- This study has important clinical implications for family-based substance use interventions. Changing the relationship between the emerging adult and mother and father figures, in their individual contexts, could potentially impact substance use and frequency.

References

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