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The Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Relation to Opioids

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THE ROLE OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN RELATIONSHIP TO OPIOIDS

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BACKGROUND:

- Previously published research:
 - Women with adverse childhood experiences during the early stages of life have increased the risk of substance misuse and becoming dependent (Fuller-Thompson et al., 2016).
 - A large percentage of opioid users have experienced at least one traumatic event and a smaller percentage have experienced two or more traumatic events (Heffernan et al., 2000; Enoch, 2011; Dube et al., 2003).
 - Childhood trauma is associated with later psychiatric illnesses, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use (Khoury et al., 2010).
- While previous research affirms the connection between adverse childhood experiences and substance abuse, it does not focus specifically on the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and opioid misuse.
- Target population was chosen based on the following:
 - Childhood trauma is found to increase the risk of substance use disorder at a higher rate for women versus that of men (Khoury et al., 2010).
 - Young adults are a key population impacted by opioid use as “their rates of opioid misuse are especially high, and emerging adulthood is a critical period of development of substance use patterns that can endure into adulthood” (Guarino et al. 2018).

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What is the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and opioid misuse among women ages eighteen to thirty-five?

MATERIALS & METHODS:

- Research participants were recruited at community service agencies throughout the Portland area and completed questionnaires measuring Adverse Childhood Experiences, substance use, and use of community supports.
- The Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire is a ten-question survey that determines an individual’s ACE score; an ACE score is a total of different types of abuse and neglect that one had exposure to during childhood (Shin et al., 2018).
- Statistical analyses were conducted to assess whether a correlation exists between childhood trauma and opioid use, as well as use of community supports among this population.

RESULTS:

Participant Demographics

- Sample size: 21
- 90.5% of survey participants identified their race as White.
- The highest percentage of participants were between the ages of 26-30 (38.2%).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- 61.9% of survey participants identified childhood trauma as a cause of their opioid use.
- 9.5% of survey participants who identified as childhood trauma victims did not believe it was related to their opioid use.
- 23.8% of survey participants did not identify as having childhood trauma.
- ACE scores can range from 0-10. The average ACE score of participants is 4.76.

ACE SCORES OF PARTICIPANTS	0-3	4-6	7 OR GREATER
	28.5% (N = 6)	42.8% (N = 9)	28.7% (N = 6)

- In completing the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, the three most commonly identified experiences (71.4% for each) were as follows:
 - Divorce or separation of parents
 - Living with problem drinker or alcoholic or street drug user
 - A household member had mental illness and/or suicide attempts

Opioid Misuse

- 95.2% of survey participants identified as having used opioids at some point in their life.
- Of this 95.2% of participants, 76.2% identified their opioid use as misuse (Figure 1).

Community Supports

- 85.7% of survey participants have at some point received support around opioid misuse. 81% of survey participants are currently utilizing supports.
 - Of those currently utilizing supports, rehabilitation services (76.2%) are the most commonly utilized form of support.
 - 14.3% of participants identified that they are not currently utilizing supports; when asked why they are no longer using supports, participants most commonly indicated that they are in recovery.

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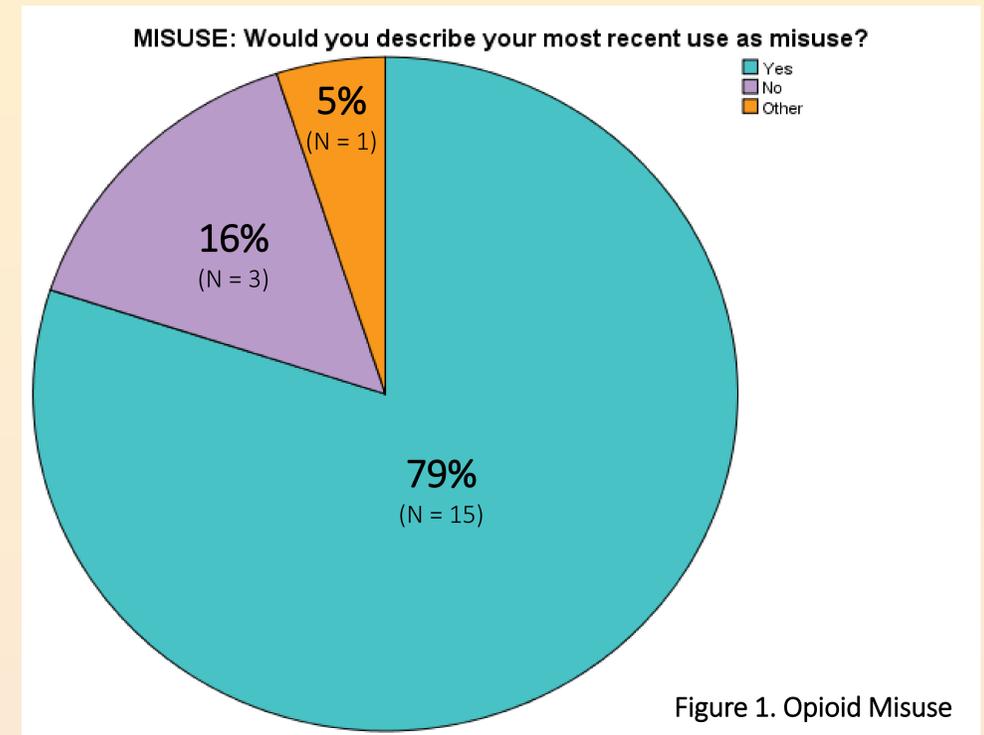


Figure 1. Opioid Misuse

What about your experience do you wish we understood better/did differently? (N = 18)

- “I remember seeing several doctors and all they did was prescribe me more meds. Listening was all I needed.”
- “Who knows. Maybe hope for my future, guidance.”

Part of the purpose of this study will be to suggest ways for mental health providers to be more responsive to the needs of their clients who use opioids. What would have prevented you from starting to use opioids? (N = 17)

- “If I had not started using other drugs at a young age, I probably wouldn’t have started using heroin.”
- “My journey of life. I wish there could have been a better connection and not continuously diagnose me with different mental disabilities just to be told by another that I do not have that.”
- “Not everyone is a drug seeker. We are all good people and shouldn’t be stereotyped.”

Figure 2. Qualitative Responses

DISCUSSION:

- The results of this study illustrate a relationship between adverse childhood experiences and opioid misuse.
- The large percentage of survey participants that stated they have received support around opioid misuse demonstrates that these individuals seek treatment, therefore, a practice implication is increasing the availability of appropriate supports.
- Replication with a larger sample is needed to confirm findings of the present study.
- Access to the target population limited the scope of this study; researchers attribute this to community service agencies’ concerns regarding the triggering nature of survey questions, as well as agencies’ policies.