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The Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Relation 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACE SCORES OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>0-3</th>
<th>4-6</th>
<th>7 OR GREATER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N = 6)</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>28.7% (N = 6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In completing the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, the three most commonly identified experiences (71.4% for each) were as follows:
  1. Divorce or separation of parents
  2. Living with problem drinker or alcoholic or street drug user
  3. 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.

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 practical 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.