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Association between maltreatment and polydrug use among adolescents[☆]

M.J. Alvarez-Alonso^{a,*}, R. Jurado-Barba^{a,b,c}, N. Martinez-Martin^d,
J.C. Espin-Jaime^d, C. Bolaños-Porrero^e, A. Ordoñez-Franco^e,
J.A. Rodriguez-Lopez^e, D. Lora-Pablos^f, J. de la Cruz-Bértolo^f,
M.A. Jimenez-Arriero^{a,b,f,g}, J. Manzanares^{h,i}, G. Rubio^{a,b,f,h}

^a Hospital 12 de Octubre[†] i+12 Research Institute, Av. Cordoba s/n, 28041 Madrid, Spain

^b Complutense University, Av. Séneca 2, 28040 Madrid, Spain

^c Camilo José Cela University, Castillo de Alarcón, 49, Villafranca del Castillo, 28692 Madrid, Spain

^d 12 de Octubre University Hospital, Av. Cordoba s/n, 28041 Madrid, Spain

^e Addictions Institute "Madrid Salud", Madrid City Hall, Juan Esplandiú 11, 28007, Spain

^f Clinical Research Unit, I+12-CIBERESP, Hospital 12 de Octubre, Av. Cordoba s/n, 28041 Madrid, Spain

^g Centro de Investigación Biomédica en Red de Salud Mental, CIBERSAM, Monforte de Lemos 3-5, 28029 Madrid, Spain

^h Networks for Cooperative Research in Health (RETICS-Addictive Disorder Network), Institute of Health Carlos III (ISCIII), MICINN and FEDER, Madrid, Spain

ⁱ Neurosciences Institute, Universidad Miguel Hernández, Campus San Juan, Alicante, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Different studies have related sexual and physical abuse during childhood and adolescence to the development of substance abuse disorders. Nevertheless, we are not aware of the role that other more common maltreatment types, such as neglect, will play among the most risky pattern of consumption: the polydrug use. A clinical sample of 655 adolescents, divided into two groups: *polydrug users* and *non-polydrug users*, were assessed on their pattern of drug consumption, history of childhood maltreatment, current psychopathology and their family history of alcoholism. Polydrug users had a greater prevalence of all types of maltreatment, although the most associated to this group were sexual abuse and emotional neglect. Other relevant variables to adolescent consumption were: the diagnosis of depressive disorder, the presence of anxiety traits and the family history of alcohol dependence. Polydrug users have higher risks of having had problems during infancy and adolescence, such as maltreatment and other psychopathological conditions, with the addition of family history of alcoholism. Accordingly, practitioners should take into account that those variables may influence polydrug abuse because it is the most risky pattern for subsequent dependence of substances, and they should always be considered during treatment.

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Introduction

Alcohol consumption is a great global concern; the WHO reports that 2.5 million deaths are associated to alcohol every year (WHO, 2014). When alcohol consumption in young people is taken into consideration, numbers are even more alarming:

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* Corresponding author.

9% of 15–29 year-olds die direct or indirectly due to alcohol use and abuse (WHO, 2009). Alcohol is in many cases consumed in combination with another illegal drug in a pattern defined by some scholars as polydrug use (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2009).

Alcohol and drug use among adolescents is a worrying fact because it is known that almost half of 13–15 years-olds have already used drugs, and this amount will increase in the following few years (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012).

The European project on the prevalence of alcohol consumption in high-school 15–16 year-old students (ESPAD, 2011) found that 87% of survey respondents had consumed alcohol; 79% of them during the last year and 57% in the 30 days before the study. Data from Spanish assessments (ESTUDES, 2012–2013) were similar to those found in the European Project. Habit of alcohol consumption is frequently combined with the abuse of other drugs; negative consequences of consumption will be therefore greater after the combination of multiple substances (Armour, Shorter, Elhai, Elklit, & Christoffersen, 2014).

One of the most studied relationships between substance consumption and drinking inducement among young people is childhood maltreatment, which entails a higher risk of developing an alcohol-use disorder later in life (Enoch et al., 2009).

Nowadays, most of results highlight the association between childhood maltreatment and substance abuse. Researches mostly belong to clinical and epidemiologic retrospective studies conducted amongst representative samples of adults (Afifi, Henriksen, Asmundson, & Sareen, 2012; Armour et al., 2014; Dube, Anda, Felitti, Edwards, & Croft, 2002; Dube et al., 2006), and only some piece of research was carried out regarding adults with alcohol or drug abuse disorders (Lake et al., 2014; Rothman, Edwards, Heeren, & Hingson, 2008; White & Widom, 2008; Widom, DuMont, & Czaja, 2007; Young-Wolff, Kendler, Ericson, & Prescott, 2011), since data from the USA's NESARC epidemiologic study (Bierer et al., 2003) showed that having suffered childhood maltreatment situations increased by 1.4 times the risk of developing a future abuse-dependence of alcohol (Pilowsky, Keyes, & Hasin, 2009).

Concerning studies carried out with adolescents, two aspects were the most common: some were performed among community adolescents (Arata, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Bowers, & O'Brien, 2007; Goldstein, Faulkner, & Wekerle, 2013) and found high rates of childhood maltreatment with a strong relationship between adverse experiences and alcohol and drug use; the occurrence of more types of maltreatment yielded to more symptomatic individuals, and the magnitude of psychopathological moderators were emphasized. Some studies (Hyucksun Shin, 2012; Shin, Hong, & Hazen, 2010; Shin, Hong, & Wills, 2012; Shin, Miller, & Teicher, 2013; Wekerle, Leung, Goldstein, Thornton, & Tonmyr, 2009), have assessed high risk adolescents, investigating whether the occurrence of particular types of maltreatment might have an effect on drug consumption and binge drinking.

In summary, more of studies carried out so far confirm a consistent relationship between maltreatment and substance abuse; nevertheless, few are the studies that had centered their attention precisely on those adolescents that sought help due to problems related to substance consumption. Clark, De Bellis, Lynch, Cornelius, and Martin (2003) conducted a research in which adolescents receiving treatment for alcohol use disorders were evaluated on the occurrence of physical and sexual abuse as well as on the presence of depressive disorders that could mediate in the relation of consumption and maltreatment.

Clinical studies executed to date among adolescents omitted two facts that are of special relevance to us; it has been relatively frequent to put the focus in alcohol or illegal drugs intake, missing the pattern of polydrug use. This pattern of consumption is common among youth and is the more associated with the risk of developing subsequent alcohol, tobacco or other drugs dependence disorders (Font-Mayolas et al., 2013; Hodgins, Lovenhag, Rehn, & Nilsson, 2013; Huang et al., 2011). The other remarkable element among clinical studies is that they centered their attention in sexual and physical abuse, thus impact over drug abuse concerning other types of maltreatment such as emotional abuse or neglect, has sometimes underestimated (Armour et al., 2014; Clark et al., 2003; Darke & Torok, 2014; Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008; Lo & Cheng, 2007; Molnar, Buka, & Kessler, 2001; Nelson & Wampler, 2002; Shin et al., 2010). As a matter of fact, those called "minor" types of maltreatments might have great impact on the risk of substance consumption (Arata et al., 2007; Shin, Edwards, & Heeren, 2009).

Taking these reports into consideration, the main objective of this study was to conduct an exhaustive search for the possible associations between different types of maltreatment, including emotional abuse and neglect and the polydrug use pattern of drug consumption (alcohol and other illegal drug intake) amongst adolescents seeking treatment.

In this study we considered as polydrug users adolescents reporting abusive consumption of alcohol plus any illegal drug, assessed through the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and the Personal Experience Inventory. For the assessment of childhood maltreatment, Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein & Fink, 1998) was employed, since it includes assessment of principal maltreatment types: physical abuse (PA), sexual abuse (SA), emotional abuse (EA), physical neglect (PN) and emotional neglect (EN).

This report constitutes an extension of previous studies, complemented with some elements that may help to increase understanding of the relationship between drug consumption and prior childhood maltreatment, since all kinds of substances of abuse were considered, as well as different patterns of consumption. In addition, the assessment of psychopathologies was conducted within a clinical environment, pursuing methodological accuracy and reliability through clinical interviews, in order to increase consistency in relation with previous studies in which accuracy in the clinical context has not always been followed (Winters, Latimer, & Stinchfield, 2002).

Since we assessed a clinical sample, we expected to find adolescents in high risk of developing a substance abuse disorder. Among them, patterns of consumption and their association with all types of experiences of childhood maltreatment were evaluated. Our hypothesis of work was that we would find more maltreatment situations among adolescents showing more

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