



Short Communication

Child maltreatment, alcohol use and drinking consequences among male and female college students: An examination of drinking motives as mediators

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child abuse
Child neglect
Alcohol abuse
College students
Drinking motives

ABSTRACT

Although the relationship between child maltreatment and alcohol use and drinking problems is well established, the mechanisms involved in this relationship remain largely unknown and research has focused primarily on women. Using the Modified Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised (M-DMQ-R; Grant, Stewart, O'Connor, Blackwell & Conrod, 2007), drinking motives were examined as mediators in the relationship between childhood maltreatment and alcohol consumption and consequences among male and female college student drinkers ($N = 218$, 60.6% women). Participants completed questionnaires assessing child maltreatment, drinking motives, alcohol consumption and alcohol consequences. Enhancement motives in particular mediated the relationship between childhood abuse and alcohol consequences for men, whereas coping-depression motives mediated this relationship for women. Implications of these findings for alcohol interventions and future research are discussed, along with limitations of the present study.

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1. Introduction

Child maltreatment has been identified as a significant risk factor for alcohol use (Southwick Bensley, Spieker, Van Eenwyk, & Schoder, 1999), and alcohol problems (Brems, Johnson, Neal, & Freeman, 2004; MacMillan et al., 2001; Widom & Hiller-Sturmhofel, 2001; Wilsnack, Vogeltanz, Klassen, & Harris, 1997), but there are several voids in the literature. First, with some exceptions (e.g., Moran, Vuchinich, & Hall, 2004) most studies have focused on childhood sexual abuse. Neglect in particular has been omitted from previous research, although it remains the most common form of maltreatment investigated by child protective services in the United States (i.e., 62.8% of child abuse victims suffered neglect in 2005; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2007). Second, the majority of studies have relied on data from women (e.g., Demaris and Kaukinen, 2005; Downs, Capshaw, & Brindels, 2004; Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999; Grayson and Nolen-Hoeksema, 2005; Schuck and Widom, 2001; White and Widom, 2008), although retrospective reports indicate significant rates of abuse for both sexes (Briere and Elliott, 2003). Finally, research on the psychological mechanisms underlying the link between maltreatment and alcohol use is sparse, with some exceptions (Grayson and Nolen-Hoeksema, 2005; Schuck and Widom, 2001; White and Widom, 2008).

One possible mediating mechanism is drinking motives, which reflect both positive and negative reinforcement reasons for drinking (Cooper, 1994; Cox & Klinger, 1988) and are important proximal predictors of drinking and drinking problems (Cooper, 1994; Cooper, Russell, Frone, & Mudar, 1995). Drinking to cope is frequently associated with alcohol problems whereas social and enhancement drinking motives are typically associated with drinking problems only indirectly via alcohol consumption (Cooper, 1994; see also Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2006 for a review). Recently, Grant et al. (2007) identified a more complex relationship between coping motives and drinking patterns, with two aspects of drinking-to-cope, coping with depression and coping with anxiety, differentially predicting drinking quantity and problems. The relationship between conformity motives and alcohol use and consequences is less well established (for exceptions see Lewis et al., 2008; Martens, Rocha, Martin, & Serrao, 2008).

Although drinking for affect regulation may be particularly important for individuals with maltreatment histories, we are aware of only a single study (Grayson and Nolen-Hoeksema, 2005) that examined drinking motives as mediators between maltreatment and drinking and this study was limited to women and one form of maltreatment (sexual assault). In addition, recent research suggests that the cumulative effects of various types of maltreatment are often more severe than effects from a single type (Wekerle, MacMillan, Leung, & Jamieson, 2007; see also Higgins and McCabe, 2001 for a review) and that there may be some specificity in psychological reactions to maltreatment, with neglect eliciting increased feelings of depression and abuse eliciting increased feelings of anxiety (Lumley and Harkness, 2007).

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The goal of the present study was to examine drinking motives as mediators of the relationship between childhood maltreatment and alcohol use and consequences in a college student sample, using multiple types of maltreatment (abuse and neglect) a broader conceptualization of motives (coping with depression, coping with anxiety, positive mood enhancement, social and conformity motives) and including both men and women.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 218 (60.6% female) college student drinkers who completed questionnaires for course credit. On average, participants were 20.34 ($SD = 3.86$) years old and the majority were in their first year of study (69.7%). The sample was 50.2% Caucasian, 24.2% Asian, 7.0% African/Caribbean, 7.0% South Asian, 3.7% Hispanic, 3.7% Middle Eastern and 4.2% “other.”

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Childhood maltreatment

Childhood maltreatment (physical, sexual and emotional abuse; physical and emotional neglect) was assessed with the 28-item Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein and Fink, 1998). Each domain is measured with five items; response options range from 1 = never true to 5 = very often true. The CTQ has good psychometric properties; sample α s ranged from .61 (physical neglect) to .96 (sexual abuse). To avoid false positives, we used cut-off scores to establish the presence (1) or absence (0) of moderate levels of abuse or higher (see Anderson, Tiro, Price, Bender, & Kaslow, 2002) and scores were combined to reflect number of types of a) abuse and b) neglect experienced. As few participants endorsed three types of abuse ($n = 5$), scores on the abuse variable were 0, 1 and 2 or more types of abuse. Scores on the neglect variable were 0, 1 and 2 types of neglect.

2.2.2. Drinking motives

Drinking motives were assessed with the 28-item Modified Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised (M-DMQ-R; Grant et al., 2007), which was derived from the Drinking Motives Questionnaire (Cooper, 1994), but includes two coping motives scales: coping-depression and coping-anxiety. The M-DMQ-R assesses frequency of drinking (1 = almost never/never, 5 = almost always/always) across social, coping-anxiety, coping-depression, enhancement, and conformity motives. Subscale scores are based on the average of items comprising the subscale. Reliability estimates for the present study ranged from .76 (social) to .92 (coping-depression).

2.2.3. Alcohol consumption and consequences

Alcohol consumption and problems were assessed with the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Saunders, Aasland, Babor, De La Fuente, & Grant, 2006). We modified an item (How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion) to capture binge drinking for college student men (5+ drinks) and women (4+ drinks) (Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Rimm, 1995). Recent evidence suggests that the AUDIT is best represented by a two-factor solution reflecting alcohol consumption and alcohol-related consequences (Doyle, Donovan, & Kivlahan, 2007). We calculated two scores from the AUDIT based on the sums of the first three items (alcohol consumption; $\alpha = .74$) and the last seven items (alcohol-related consequences; $\alpha = .77$).

2.3. Data analyses

We tested mediation using methods outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008) for assessing indirect effects in a model with multiple mediators. Recent evidence suggests that internal motives may overlap (Goldstein & Flett, 2009) and that, although coping-anxiety and coping-depression motives are associated with distinct drinking patterns, they are significantly correlated ($r = 0.69$; Grant et al., 2007). By including all motives in the same model we could evaluate specific mediators while controlling for all other motives.

We first identified significant bivariate correlations between the independent variable (abuse/neglect), mediators (motives) and outcome variables (alcohol consumption/alcohol-related consequences). We then utilized Preacher and Hayes' (2008) SPSS (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL) macro (available at www.quantpsy.org), which computes the total indirect effect for all mediators combined, as well as specific indirect effects, with each mediator examined independently while controlling for the presence of other mediators. Statistics derived from this approach include point estimates (beta coefficients), standard errors and Z-scores for the total and individual indirect effects. In addition, the macro employs bootstrapping methods to account for deviations from normality typically associated with indirect effects and calculates a 95% confidence interval (CI) for indirect effects. Due to our interest in the relationship between child maltreatment, drinking motives and alcohol use and consequences for both men and women, we conducted separate analyses of the data split by sex.

3. Results

The majority of participants reported at least monthly drinking, with 45.4% drinking 2–4 times per month and 18.3% drinking at least two times per week. Approximately half (51.6%) of the male students and 23.4% of the female students were binge drinking at least monthly. Scores on the AUDIT were significantly higher for men ($M = 7.86$, $SD = 5.81$) than women ($M = 6.37$, $SD = 4.21$), $t(216) = 2.19$, $p < .05$. On the CTQ, rates of moderate or higher levels of child maltreatment were: 15.1% for physical neglect, 14.2% for emotional neglect, 19.7% for emotional abuse, 11.9% for physical abuse, and 11.9% for sexual abuse. Overall, 30.7% of participants reported experiencing any type of abuse and 30.2% reported any type of neglect.

Bivariate correlations are illustrated in Table 1. For men, abuse was significantly correlated with coping-depression, coping-anxiety, and enhancement motives and neglect was significantly associated with coping-depression, coping-anxiety and conformity motives. In addition, abuse and neglect, as well as all drinking motives, were associated with alcohol-related consequences and neglect was associated with alcohol consumption. For women, abuse was associated with coping-depression and coping-anxiety motives and these variables were significantly associated with alcohol consequences.

Based on these findings, we used a multiple mediator model to estimate the indirect effects of drinking motives on alcohol consumption and problems through child abuse and neglect. All models are illustrated in Table 2.

3.1. Mediation models for men

Taken together, coping-anxiety, coping-depression and enhancement motives mediated the effect of childhood abuse on alcohol problems. Examination of specific indirect effects indicates that, when other motives are controlled, only enhancement motives is a significant mediator. Overall, the model accounted for 42.12% of the variance in drinking problems (adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$).

When examined together, conformity, coping-anxiety and coping-depression significantly mediated the effect of childhood neglect on alcohol consequences, and coping-anxiety and coping-depression motives significant mediated the effect of neglect on consumption. For

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