

# Reviewing the Association between the History of Parental Substance Abuse and the Rate of Child Abuse

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## Original Article

### Abstract

**Background:** Substance abuse is a social, and health problem in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran. One of its most devastating effects is domestic violence against children. This study examined the association between the history of parental substance abuse, and rate of child abuse in Ahvaz, Iran.

**Methods:** This was a case-control study. The study population included all parents with high school children in Ahwaz within the academic year 2012-2013. The sample size was 384 people in two groups; with a history of substance abuse (case group) and no history of substance abuse (control group). Multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used through the Cochran formula. The data collection tools included a Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein, 1995), a demographic questionnaire, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (DSI), and a researcher-made questionnaire for the history of substance abuse. For data analysis, statistical indicators such as percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and correlation and regression analysis were used.

**Findings:** Data analysis showed that there was a significant positive correlation among parents with a history of substance abuse and domestic violence toward children. Mean and standard deviation of the violence level in families with normal parents were  $61.34 \pm 16.88$ , and in families with a history of substance abuse were  $98.99 \pm 32.07$ . Therefore, the test results showed that there was a significant difference between normal families and families with history of substance abuse and violence toward children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $t = 8.60$ ).

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings, the history of domestic violence and parental substance abuse (physical and emotional abuse, emotional and physical neglect) had a significant positive correlation with their behavior toward their children. After matching the two groups we found that the most common types of violence against children by their parents were, respectively, emotional violence ( $r = 58\%$ ), physical neglect ( $r = 54\%$ ), emotional neglect ( $r = 46\%$ ), and then physical violence ( $r = 39\%$ ).

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Childhood trauma questionnaire (CTQ), History of substance abuse, Parents, Aspects of domestic violence, Children

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## Introduction

Substance addiction is known as one of the social, treatment, and health problems in the current century. Addiction not only leads to severe and profound physical and psychological damage to an individual, but also has social outcomes such as increased rate of divorce, domestic violence, crime, and unemployment. Substance abuse and addiction are one of the most evident social and mental damages which can easily ruin the basis of individual, family, social, and cultural life of a society. Today, addiction is considered as a general health issue all over the world.<sup>1</sup>

One of the adverse and harmful socio-psychological consequences of substance abuse, which might be a social and familial crisis, is domestic violence against children. Child abuse is a global scourge devastating the family structure and threatening individuals' health. It also causes many people to suffer from physical, sexual, and mental disorders. Besides, its social consequences may jeopardize the health of families and the society.<sup>2</sup>

According to the statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO), 40 million newborn to four-year-old children are exposed to various types of child abuse annually.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the related effects of this issue emerge in all the developmental growth domains and in various domains such as cognitive, social, academic, and psychological functions.<sup>4</sup>

Substance abuse is one of the major factors intensifying violence with children.<sup>5</sup> In fact, since the personality of addicts is transformed during the addiction period, they lose their self-esteem, and their mood changes which accordingly leads to incidence of violent behaviors with their spouse and particularly with their children.<sup>6</sup>

According to the study by Murphy et al. of 206 child abuse victims, over 50% of them had one parent with substance abuse, among which alcohol, cocaine, and heroin were higher than others. The rate of child abuse behavior in such individuals was clearly higher than parents with no history of substance abuse.<sup>7</sup>

Belsky believes addiction is one of the most important factors based on which the infrastructure of parent's personality is highly influenced by in the family system and it triggers child abuse.<sup>8</sup> Kelleher et al. also mentioned addiction as a predictor of child abuse and neglect.<sup>9</sup>

The study by Patrick et al. suggested that 40% of adults, who have already shown the criteria of behaviors related to physical child abuse, suffered from drug and alcohol use disorder during their life.<sup>10</sup> The study by Taylor illustrated that presence of anti-social behaviors such as addiction and somatoform disorders in parents could considerably increase child abuse.<sup>11</sup> deRoux and Prendergast in a study during seven years on child abuse factors in New York concluded that 10% of severe trauma in children have been caused by substance addiction of parents.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the adverse consequences of substance abuse on child violence are not confined to family members and can also influence other social and even economic institutes. Generally, violence in families brings about individual, institutional, and social issues. Thus, the present study aimed to review the association of parental substance abuse with the rate of child abuse in Ahvaz, Iran.

## Methods

This was a case-control study, given the objective of the study and the nature of the research. The study population included all the parents of high-school students in Ahvaz during 2012-2013.

The sample size was calculated to be 384 subjects using the Cochran formula. The study subjects were divided into those with the history of substance abuse (case) and those without the history of substance abuse (control). Multi-stage cluster sampling method was utilized for this research.

After selecting the 8 districts of the Education Department in Ahvaz, two schools, and 6 classes in each school and two classes in each grade were randomly selected, and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) was distributed among them and then collected. Moreover, the place of living of their parents in each district had already been randomly selected, and the required questionnaire with full explanations of the researcher was distributed among them.

After data extraction, 45 parents with highest obtained score of substance abuse history were selected as the case group, and 45 parents with the lowest obtained score of substance abuse history were selected as the control and normal group.

The questionnaire was equally and randomly distributed among the two groups. After its

completion by the respondents, the data were analyzed through SPSS for Windows 16.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL., USA) by descriptive and inferential statistics using percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD), Pearson correlation and regression analysis, and t-test. For the validity of the questionnaire, first 40 questionnaires were completed by the subjects and their validity coefficient was calculated by Cronbach's alpha to determine the compatibility of the items.

### Research Tools

#### 1. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein, 1995) was used in this study to measure the child abuse rate.<sup>13</sup> CTQ is a self-report tool for assessing the traumas during childhood. CTQ measures the trauma in five subscales and provides a total score indicating the overall misbehavior. CTQ's five subscales included emotional abuse (EA), physical abuse (FA), sexual abuse (SA), emotional neglect (EN) and physical neglect (PN).

In this research, the CTQ was derived from the questionnaire by Shahani Ylagh et al., in which the articles for sexual abuse subscales were omitted for cultural and ethnic issues.<sup>14</sup> In total, 40 items were applied for assessing the rate of child abuse by parents. In this present study, the reliability coefficient by Cronbach's alpha obtained 0.91 for overall child abuse, 0.87 for EA, 0.85 for PA, 0.70 for EN, and 0.75 for PN.

Two methods were used for higher reliability and validity of the assessing items. The first was the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the constituent items. The results of this calculation showed that the calculated alpha coefficient indicated the reliability of the questionnaire. The second method to insure the validity and reliability of the items was calculating the correlation coefficient of the intensity and content of these variables.

The results of the study suggested that there was a very high significant correlation (over 95%) among each of the items with intensity and content. For the face validity, first the questionnaire was implemented on 40 subjects and the ambiguous items were omitted based on the results. In addition, Cronbach's alpha 0.91 was used for more reliability and validity or more accurate inter-reliability to assess the combined variable.

#### 2. Parental History of Substance Abuse Index

This was a researcher-made questionnaire designing to gain knowledge about the history of parent's substance abuse or dependency of one of the parents to drugs. This index assessed questions based on history of substance abuse and also drugs such as opium, morphine, heroin, and so forth by one of the parents.

Content and face validity methods were used for the reliability and validity of this tool. Content validity was approved after counseling with experts and professionals, and was finally confirmed by ten experts. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used for determining the reliability, i.e., more accurate inter-reliability of the items for assessing the combined variable and concept ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ).

## Results

#### First hypothesis

There is an association between the history of substance abuse by parents and the rate of child abuse toward their children.

The mean  $\pm$  SD of rate of violence toward children in normal families is  $61.34 \pm 16.88$ , and in families with the history of substance abuse it is  $98.99 \pm 32.07$ . The results of independent t-test illustrate that there is a statistically significant difference between normal families and families with the history of substance abuse in terms of domestic violence rate ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $t = 8.60$ ). The higher the rate of history of substance abuse in parents, the higher the likelihood of violent behaviors against their children. This finding showed that the first hypothesis can be confirmed in this study.

As indicated in table 1, 74.0% of families with the history of substance abuse have the history of using opium, 6.5% heroin, 2.1% methamphetamine, 4.3% morphine, and 13.1% other types of substances.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of history of substance abuse in the addicted group

Type of addiction	Frequency	Percentage
Opium	33	74.0
Heroin	3	6.5
Methamphetamine	1	2.1
Morphine	2	4.3
Others	6	13.1
Total	45	100

### Second hypothesis

There is an association between the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of abuse domains (emotional, mental, and neglect) by their parents.

*Hypothesis 2-1:* There is an association between the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of mental abuse toward their children.

The results of Pearson correlation test showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse in parents and emotional abuse toward their children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.58$ ).

*Hypothesis 2-2:* There is an association between the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of physical abuse toward their children.

The results of Pearson correlation test showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse in parents and physical abuse toward their children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.39$ ).

*Hypothesis 2-3:* There is an association between the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of emotional neglect toward their children.

The results of Pearson correlation test showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse in parents and emotional neglect toward their children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.46$ ).

*Hypothesis 2-4:* There is an association between the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of physical neglect toward their children.

The results of Pearson correlation test showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse in parents and physical neglect toward their children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.54$ ).

### Third hypothesis

There was an association between the socioeconomic base of the normal group and the group with the history of substance abuse, and

the rate of violence toward their children. With increase in the socio-economic status of parents, the amount of domestic violence towards children reduces.

Table 2, the results of one-way ANOVA showed that families with a low socioeconomic base and mean of 282.22 had the highest rate of domestic violence against their children. This means, the higher the parent's socioeconomic base, the lower the rate of domestic violence.

In addition, according to table 2, the results of one-way ANOVA suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between the normal group and the one with the history of substance abuse in terms of socioeconomic base for parental violence toward children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $F = 18.80$ ). Mean socioeconomic base of the respondents indicated the better situation of the normal group than those with the history of substance abuse.

The results illustrated a statistically significant difference between the normal group and the one with the history of substance abuse in terms of education. Therefore, the higher educated parents had better parenting and upbringing behavior with children, and also their home violence rate was lower ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $F = 3.76$ ).

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the normal group and the group with the history of substance abuse in terms of family income. The higher the family income rate, the lower their domestic violence behavior and child abuse ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $F = 6.04$ ).

The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the normal group and the parents with the history of substance abuse in terms of occupation. Parents with a better job and financial status showed lower rates of violence toward children ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $F = 12.78$ ).

As a result, hypothesis 3 in the study was confirmed.

**Table 2.** Results of one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) in the comparison of the scores of the groups with the overall socioeconomic base compared to the domestic violence

Variable	Group	Total squares	Mean squares	F	Significant level
Socioeconomic base	Normal group	10613.36	530.68	18.80	P < 0.001
	Substance abuse group	107526.37	282.22		
	Total	118139.74	-		

## Discussion

The history of substance abuse in parents is one of factors intensifying domestic violence. In fact, since the personality of addicts is transformed during the addiction period, they lose their self-esteem and their mood changes, which accordingly lead to incidence of violent behaviors with their spouse and particularly with their children. Moreover, since, today, home violence against children is considered as a common social damage, it has made families, officials, and health planners concerned about this. The present study aimed to review the association among the history of substance abuse in parents and the rate of child abuse. The results of the study, in general, showed that the history of substance abuse in parents in a family is associated with increased domestic violence against children.

Thus, the association of the independent variable (the history of substance abuse) with the rate of their violence against children was reviewed.

The findings suggested that 74.0% of the families had the history of opium abuse, 6.5% heroin, 2.1% methamphetamine, 4.3% morphine, and 13.1% other types of substances. The highest rate of substance abuse for those with the history of substance abuse was opium (74.0%). The rest were addicted to other types of substances.

The results of the study suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between the normal group and the parents with the history of substance abuse for the overall child abuse. This finding showed that the main hypothesis of the study can be confirmed. In fact, deprivations arising from substance abuse, impulsive behavior of addicts, non-appropriate use of coping strategies, inability in social life, low self-esteem and self-respect, and also financial issues were the most important roots of violence with children.

Addicted parents with the history of substance abuse also suffer from different types of personality disorders, including anti-social personality disorder. Since such a disorder encompasses a wide range of antisocial acts, such as child abuse, the high percentage of child abuse rate in parents of the present study and the study of Kaplan and Saduk were in accordance with each other. Both studies showed that substance abuse by parents is a factor which increases

violence toward and neglect of children.<sup>15</sup> The findings of the present study showed that the rate of child abuse in the addicted group was higher than the normal families. The group with the history of substance abuse had a higher rate of violence toward their children in all the domains and aspects of violence (mental, physical, and neglect). The results of the present study were in accordance with the study results of Leonard,<sup>16</sup> Taylor,<sup>11</sup> deRoux and Prendergast,<sup>12</sup> Belsky,<sup>8</sup> and Murphy et al.,<sup>7</sup> who showed that history of substance abuse in children increased the probability of emerging violent behaviors toward children.

The results of the study suggested that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse in parents and the emotional abuse of their children. Substance abuse and addiction are important factors exacerbating the mental abuse against children.<sup>5</sup> In fact, since the personality of addicts is transformed during addiction period, they would lose their self-esteem, and their mood changes which accordingly results in the incidence of violent behaviors toward their spouse and particularly their children.<sup>17</sup> The obtained findings were in accordance with the study of Eriksson et al., who illustrated that substances abuse by fathers in a family is influential in the incidence of violent behaviors against women and children.<sup>18</sup> Researches, particularly in previous years, have suggested that most violent and aggressive behaviors with children are rooted in uncontrolled behaviors which are elevated by substance use.<sup>19</sup>

The results suggested that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse and physical abuse. The study of Leonard<sup>16</sup> showed that child physical abuse is associated with drug consumption, and 40% of adults who had shown criteria related to the child physical abuse suffered from alcohol and drug use disorder during their life.

The results of this study also indicated that physical abuse by parents with the history of substance abuse increased depression, anxiety, anger, somatic signs, and medical diagnosis in children. In the present study, the highest type of physical abuse was slapping in the face. The results of this study were in accordance with the

studies of Springer et al.,<sup>20</sup> Cross et al.,<sup>21</sup> Patrick et al.,<sup>10</sup> and Kelleher et al.<sup>9</sup> They showed addiction in parents leads to incidence of physical abuse signs such as burns, broken bones, burn scars on the body, and etcetera.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse and emotional neglect of children. Addicts have low ethical commitments and social values, and accordingly they have no morals, commitment, feeling of responsibility for their families, and no fear of not meeting the emotional needs of their children. The results of this study were in accordance with the results of Patrick et al.<sup>10</sup> and Kelleher et al.<sup>9</sup> who showed addiction is one of the predictors of emotional neglect of children.

The results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the history of substance abuse and physical neglect. Parents in families with the history of substance abuse do not consider the material needs and physical growth of their children.

In the present study, the findings showed that the most common type of neglect in the group with the history of substance abuse were inattention, depriving children of recreation, and lack of attention to their health, nutrition, and clothing. This finding was in accordance with the study results of Tirosh et al. who believed addicts and those with the history of substance abuse are not able to supply their family with their health needs, nutritional needs, housing, and etcetera.<sup>22</sup>

The study suggested that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the socioeconomic base of the group with the history of substance abuse and the normal group, and the rate of violence against children. The findings indicated that with increase in the socioeconomic base of families, the rate of their violence and crime is reduced. The study results showed that there was a difference between the normal group and those with the history of substance abuse in terms of education. Parents with higher education levels had better parenting and upbringing behavior with children, and their home violence rate was lower.

Low educational level of parents was an

influencing factor in child abuse. This may be due to the promotion of self-confidence and awareness of human and children rights in views of educated parents. The findings of the present study were in accordance with the results of Rivera-Rivera et al., and Javadiyan who showed that educational level of parents was significantly associated with domestic violence.<sup>23,24</sup>

The results showed that there was difference between the two groups in terms of occupation. This means that parents with a better job and financial status showed lower rates of violence toward children. This was in accordance with the results of the study by Gillham et al., who believed that there is higher probability of unemployed people showing violent behavior toward children.<sup>25</sup> In addition, since people who work have higher self-confidence, they show lower rates of violent behavior.<sup>26</sup>

The findings suggested that there was a statically significant difference between the two groups in terms of family income. This means that families with lower income rates had higher rates of domestic violence and child abuse. Furthermore, they are always faced with economic and resources shortage, due to high expenditures of substances, and always show stress and aggressive behavior towards family members and others.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

In general, the results showed that there was a statistically significant association between the history of substance abuse in parents and rate of child abuse. Given the findings, special attention to the families of addicts seems necessary in terms of child abuse, supporting abused children, treating addicts, early diagnosis of child abuse, and intervention, treatment, and prevention of incidence of adverse effects of child abuse. This issue is an alarm for the health administrators of Iran to plan, provide necessary cultural provisions, and inform others of the dangers of addiction for the incidence of child abuse and its prevention methods.

## Conflict of Interests

The Authors have no conflict of interest.

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## بررسی رابطه بین سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر والدین با میزان کودک آزاری آن‌ها نسبت به فرزندان

محمود یعقوبی دوست<sup>۱</sup>

### مقاله پژوهشی

### چکیده

**مقدمه:** سوء مصرف مواد مخدر و عوارض آن یک معضل بهداشتی- اجتماعی در کشورهای خاورمیانه مانند ایران است و از جمله مخرب‌ترین عوارض آن خشونت خانگی علیه کودکان می‌باشد. مطالعه حاضر با هدف، بررسی رابطه بین سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر والدین با میزان کودک آزاری آن‌ها در شهر اهواز انجام شد.

**روش‌ها:** روش پژوهش حاضر از نوع مورد- شاهدی و جامعه آماری آن شامل والدین دارای فرزند دانش‌آموز مقطع دبیرستان در شهر اهواز در سال تحصیلی ۹۲-۱۳۹۱ بود. حجم نمونه برابر با ۳۸۴ نفر و نمونه پژوهش را دو گروه دارای سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر (مورد) و گروه فاقد سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر (شاهد) تشکیل می‌دادند. روش نمونه‌گیری تصادفی خوشه‌ای چند مرحله‌ای و با استفاده از فرمول Cochran بود. ابزار اندازه‌گیری شامل پرسش‌نامه کودک آزاری و ضربه (Childhood trauma questionnaire یا CTQ)، پرسش‌نامه محقق ساخته سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر، پرسش‌نامه اجتماعی- اقتصادی Duncan و پرسش‌نامه جمعیت‌شناختی بود. برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از شاخص‌های آماری درصد، میانگین، انحراف استاندارد، همبستگی Pearson، آزمون t و تحلیل رگرسیون (Regression analysis) استفاده شد.

**یافته‌ها:** بین سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر والدین با کودک آزاری آن‌ها نسبت به فرزندان همبستگی مثبت معنی‌داری وجود داشت. میانگین و انحراف استاندارد و نمره میزان خشونت والدین به فرزندان در گروه خانواده‌های عادی به ترتیب ۶۱/۳۴ و ۱۶/۸۸ و در گروه خانواده‌های دارای سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر به ترتیب ۹۸/۹۹ و ۳۲/۰۷ بود، بنابراین نتیجه آزمون‌ها نشان داد که بین خانواده‌های عادی و دارای سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر از نظر میزان خشونت آن‌ها نسبت به فرزندان تفاوت معنی‌داری ( $t = ۸/۶۰$  و  $P = ۰/۰۰۱$ ) وجود داشت.

**نتیجه‌گیری:** بین سابقه سوء مصرف مواد والدین با ابعاد خشونت خانوادگی (جسمی- عاطفی، غفلت عاطفی و غفلت جسمی) نسبت به فرزندان همبستگی مثبت معنی‌داری وجود دارد. پس از تطبیق دو گروه بیشترین ابعاد و انواع خشونت علیه کودکان توسط والدینشان به ترتیب شامل: خشونت عاطفی ( $r = ۰/۵۸$ )، غفلت جسمی ( $r = ۰/۵۴$ )، غفلت عاطفی ( $r = ۰/۴۶$ ) و خشونت جسمی ( $r = ۰/۳۹$ ) می‌باشد.

**واژگان کلیدی:** کودک آزاری، پرسش‌نامه کودک آزاری و ضربه (CTQ)، سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر، والدین، ابعاد خشونت خانوادگی، کودکان

**ارجاع:** یعقوبی دوست محمود، بررسی رابطه بین سابقه سوء مصرف مواد مخدر والدین با میزان کودک آزاری آن‌ها نسبت به فرزندان. مجله اعتیاد و سلامت ۱۳۹۲؛ ۵ (۳-۴): ۱۳۳-۱۲۶.

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