

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Moderates the Life Stress Pathway to Alcohol Problems in Children of Alcoholics.

Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research (April 2007) Vol 31, Is 4: 564-574.

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This research was supported by grant AA015100 from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Research was also supported in part by AA11873, AA00202, AA08746, AA12342, AA0626, and grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (DA12414, DA05605, F31DA017546), the National Institute on Mental Health (MH12010, MH4815, MH47390, MH45576, MH50467, MH53554), and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (ES0515-08).

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Abstract

Background: Parent alcoholism is a well-established risk factor for the development of pathological alcohol involvement in youth, and life stress is considered to be one of the central mechanisms of the parent alcoholism effect; however, little is known about the moderators of the life stress pathway. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has also been shown to predict pathological alcohol involvement, however, little is known about whether or not ADHD interacts with parent alcoholism to increase offspring risk. The goals of this study were to examine stressful life events as mediators of the relationship between parent alcoholism and adolescent pathological alcohol involvement, and to examine whether or not this mediated pathway was stronger for adolescents with ADHD than for adolescents without ADHD.

Method: Participants were 142 adolescents with a childhood ADHD diagnosis (probands) and 100 demographically matched control adolescents without childhood ADHD. Probands, controls, and at least 1 parent were interviewed about drinking behavior; probands and controls were interviewed about negative life events.

Results: A moderated mediation paradigm was used to test the hypotheses using ordinary least squares regression. Results showed that the relationships between parent alcoholism and 2 of the stress variables ("family" stress and "peer" stress) were significant for probands only, and that stress in the probands mediated the parent alcoholism effect on offspring alcohol involvement.

Conclusions: These results provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that offspring characteristics might moderate the life stress pathway to alcoholism, and

indicate that ADHD may serve to facilitate the transmission of pathological alcohol use from parent to child.