

## Personality Disorder Diagnosis in Substance Dependent Women in Iran : Relationship to childhood Maltreatment

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**Objective:** Few studies have examined the relationship between childhood maltreatment and personality disorder in later years of the children's life especially in Eastern Mediterranean countries .

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and personality disorder during their later years of life in an Iranian sample. A cross sectional study was conducted in Kerman , a city in South East of Iran in 2005 .

**Method:** Cases were 148 substances dependent women who were admitted in Shahid Beheshti hospital and women who were in Kerman's prison for detoxification.

With emphasis on confidentiality and obtaining oral consent, we asked the subjects to fill out a questionnaire which included demographic variables and 27 questions concerning all types of abuse , neglect and household dysfunction . Using multivariate Logistic regression, the association between baseline characteristics, childhood maltreatment and household dysfunction variables and personality disorder were analyzed .

**Results:** The mean age of the cases was  $33.13 \pm 10.94$ , and borderline personality disorder (24.3%) was the most frequent type of personality disorder in this sample. Physical abuse (45.4%) , emotional abuse (36.2%) and emotional neglect (92.1%) were the most frequent type of maltreatment. While dependency was considered as an independent variable, with logistic regression analysis, sexual abuse was the only type of childhood maltreatment which showed statistically significant association with personality disorder .

**Conclusion:** There was a statistically significant association between increased prevalence of severe personality disturbances among those experiencing multiple types of abuse and neglect .Such studies are important for a more complete understanding of these problems and for practical efforts to alleviate them .

**Keywords:** Addiction, Adult survivors of child abuse, Personality disorders, Women

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**R**esearch conducted over the past decade indicates that a wide range of psychological and interpersonal problems are more prevalent among those who have been abused including but not limited to sexual abuse than among individuals with no such experiences (1-3). A good deal of scholarly attention has been paid to the possibility that maltreatment during the first 18 years of life increases the likelihood of symptoms of dissociation ,increased hostility ,higher impulsivity Levels , borderline personality disorder and drug use during adolescence .

The deficits in cognitive, social, emotional , behavioral functioning and negative peer relationships are associated with maltreatment (4-7).

An increased prevalence of severe personality disturbances was observed among those experiencing

multiple types of abuse including emotional , physical , sexual and neglect (3, 4, 7) .

Women are at high risk for being exposed to childhood maltreatment (3, 8-10).

Furthermore, we conducted this study to further clarify the relationship between personality disturbances and childhood maltreatment in substance dependent women in Iran as improved understanding of the potential outcomes could lead to better targeted efforts for secondary prevention.

### Materials and Method

A cross – sectional study was conducted in Kerman, a city in South East of Iran in 2005 . At first, the cases were 152 substance dependent women admitted in Shahid Beheshti hospital and those in Kerman 's

prison ; 4 subjects dropped out of the study for they have no completely compliance.

The diagnosis of substance dependency and personality disorder was made by means of semi structural clinical interview for DSM – IV axis I and II disorder (11) by a psychiatrist or assistant of psychiatry .

The subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire which included demographic variables and 27 questions concerning child maltreatment including abuse(physical , emotional , or sexual )and questionnaire and neglect as child and teenager questions measuring household dysfunction including household substance abuse, parental separation or divorce. (Table1).

The Validity of questionnaire was acceptable according to the reference (12, 13)and an expert panel ;and cronbach’s alpha was calculated as 0.81 as a whole in items measuring childhood maltreatment .

Using logistic and linear regression, the association between sociodemographic , childhood maltreatment types , personality disorder diagnosis and substance use disorder was analyzed .

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS for windows software (version 12.0).

**Results**

One hundred forty eight subjects enrolled in the study. The mean age of the subjects was 33.13 ± 10.94 .

The mean age of onset of substance use was 25.77 ± 9.80. Subjects were mostly opium users (51.3%)and heroin users(48.0%).

Baseline characteristics of the subjects are shown in Table 1 . Of the mentioned subjects , 36(24.3%) had borderline personality disorder , 12(8.1%) suffered from antisocial personality disorder, 4 (2.7%) had mixed personality disorder (borderline–Antisocial) ,and 96(64.9%) did not have any personality disorder. Of the subjects ,36.2% mentioned emotional abuse , 45.4% physical abuse and 26.3% reported sexual abuse (Table 2).

**Discussion**

Childhood abuse is likely to be a factor in the development of personality disturbances and substance use problems. In addition, child abuse has long term

**Table 2. Prevalence of each type of abuse / neglect and the household dysfunction and personality disorder variables**

Characteristic	Prevalence
Emotional abuse	36.2%
Physical abuse	45.4%
Sexual abuse	26.3%
Emotional neglect	92/15
Household substance abuse	74.3%
Parental separation/ divorce	18.4%
Borderline personality disorder	24.3%
Antisocial personality disorder	8.1%
Mixed(Borderline – antisocial)	2.7%
No personality disorder	64.9%

**Table 3. Logistic regression analysis to assess the association between independent Variable of substance-dependency and types of maltreatment and personality disorder**

Characteristic	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P – Value
Emotional abuse	0/012	1/62	0/205
Physical abuse	0/019	2/54	0/114
Sexual abuse	0/035	4/75	0/031
Neglect	0/016	2/18	0/143
Personality disorder	0/032	4/23	0/042

consequences in the later years of children's life (3, 14) and it predisposes them to develop troublesome personality characteristics (15).

It is necessary for the health provider to have comprehensive information about these problems in the society for early detection and necessary intervention with the aim of preventing or attenuating its later sequelae .

This study was conducted to examine the link between all types of child maltreatment and personality disorders in substance dependent women in an Eastern Mediterranean country .

The main limitations of the study are stated as follows : Firstly, due to lack of number of inpatient substance users for analysis, substance dependent women in Kerman's prison who were detoxified also participated in this study . Furthermore, the study was based on a clinical sample which may limit generalizability of the results. Secondly, childhood events were questioned via self report retrospective questions which may be underreported owing to recall bias. Data were gathered from a clinical sample providing new information on the link between all types of abuse, neglect and personality disorders, educational and socioeconomic level, household functioning and substance abuse .

The results indicated that borderline personality disorder (24.3%) and antisocial personality disorder (8.1%)were the most frequent types of personality disorder in this sample .

Physical abuse (45.4%) , emotional abuse (36.2%) and emotional neglect (92.1%) were the most frequent types of maltreatment . Sexual abuse was the only type of childhood maltreatment which showed a statistically

**Table 1. Baseline characteristics of patients**

(n = 148 )

Characteristic	Number (frequency%)
<b>Education</b>	
≤ Primary school	73(49.3)
Secondary	73(49.3)
College	2(1.4)
<b>Marriage</b>	
Single	20(13.5)
Married	87(58.8)
Divorced or separated	41(27.7)
<b>Residence</b>	
Urban	88(59.5)
Rural	60(40.5)

significant association with personality disorder, while dependency was considered as independent variable (Table 3).

Bierer suggests that childhood emotional abuse and neglect are broadly represented among personality disorders, and are associated with indices of clinical severity among patients with borderline personality disorder (16).

Haller and Miles reported (50%) emotional, (42%) physical, and (42%) sexual abuse in drug dependent women. Emotional and physical abuse were at increased risk of borderline, masochistic and avoidant personality disturbances. They reported that sexual abuse was twice as likely to be antisocial; however, no association was found with borderline personality (15).

The difference may be due to concealing sexual abuse by victims and their families in the society as this problem is a stigma.

According to one study, there was a high prevalence of sexual abuse (40%) in the substance dependent group (17).

In many cases, the experience of abuse appears to lead in later life to increased feelings of depression and anxiety while, not sufficient to result in the diagnosis of a mental health disorder may place the victims at greater risk of developing substance abuse or dependency, as a result of self medication (18).

Powerlessness and betrayal call as traumagenic dynamics to sexual abuse. These dynamics alter children's cognitive and emotional orientation to the world, and create trauma by distorting children's self concept, world view, and affective capacities.

For example, powerlessness is to impair a person's sense of efficacy and coping skills.

Some aggressive behaviors seem to compensate for the pain of powerlessness.

Thus, hostility, anger and aggressive behavior are reactions to betrayal, and may be considered primitive ways to protect self against future betrayals (19).

In the present study, there was a statistically significant association between increased prevalence of severe personality disturbances among those experiencing multiple types of abuse and neglect. Furthermore, there was a significant association between severity of type abuse / neglect and age of onset of substance abuse. In this study, 73.3% of the subjects reported household substance use, while in one study it was reported to be 60% (15). In this study subjects had higher suicidal risk; however, no association was found with other types of personality disorder, and it may be due to prevalence of types of personality disorder in the society.

Fergusson and et al, suggest that child sexual abuse (CSA), and particularly severe CSA, was associated with increased risk of psychiatric disorder in young adults (20).

There was a statistically significant association between the mean of the marks emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect with type of personality

disorder ( $p < 0/05$ ).

The subject's educational and socioeconomic status showed no statistically significant association but could be effect.

Results suggested that all types of maltreatment, including neglect are related to higher levels of personality disorder and substance use and should be considered serious risk factors during adolescence.

Such studies are important for a more understanding of these problems and for practical efforts for alleviating them in female victims of childhood maltreatment.

It should be noted that educating physicians more about childhood maltreatment and its effects may lead to improved care and improved outcome.

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