

The Connection between Traumas during Childhood and the Use of Drugs and Alcohol in Adult Life

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Abstract: We are born with our own destiny, so they say, and at the same time this is the consolation of most people when they encounter certain situations, that “fate willed it.” But there is a difference between the destiny that has been given to us and the one we can shape. Adolescence is a key time that defines our personality. We are easy to impress, easy to annoy, easy to cheer, and, at the same time, easy to traumatize. Negative events such as family violence, death of a loved person, sexual abuse, or even minor ones such as a joke about something we care about can change all our beliefs and can influence our harmonious development as an adult. This paper is intended to highlight the extent to which childhood trauma can influence the actions of an adult and his/her way to seek happiness, he/she being more likely to find it in excess of vices.

Keywords: adolescence; traumas; development; alcohol; drugs; adulthood

1. Concept Definition

1.1. Addiction from the Perspective of the Desire to Affirm and Integrate

Adolescence (Banciu, Rădulescu, & Voicu, 1987) is the stage of shaping individuality and the beginning of personality stabilization that marks the end of childhood and the transition to adulthood. Physical and mental transformations that occur during this time, changes in attitudes and conduct make adolescence the most sensitive stage of the evolution to adult life. It is characterized not only by the multiple teachings that should prepare the young person for adult life, but also through aspirations, future projects that give a purpose to the person that will seek the means to reach them.

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Nevertheless, we often forget that teen-agers have problems different than those of adults, have specific mental structures and skills. If we want adolescents to obey the moral imperatives of the adults, we should regard the specific nature of personality factors and the social and family factors that characterize this period. It is the time when the young begin to define themselves, standing against their parents and educators, in general against the authority figures, and having an ambivalent attitude: obedience and resentment, independence and imitation, anti-conformity and integration, etc.

According to U. Şchiopu and E. Verza (1997), the teenager is searching for personal ways of being and appearing in the others' eyes. He/she is interested in responsibilities in which there are difficulties to overcome in order to measure his/her forces. Adolescence is characterized by the desire to become an adult, to organize a life independently of that of the parents, to participate in social activities that enable adolescents to integrate into the grown-up society.

Young people appeal to alcohol in the desire to assert their independence, to belong to a group. In adolescence, when the young person alienates from the family, the group of friends and its values become reference points in the development of his/her personality. If the group members drink alcohol, the young person will also do it, as it will continue to remain among the like. The group of friends will guide him/her in search of his/her own identity, give him/her opportunities to affirm, capitalize, give him/her the possibility to enrich the knowledge concerning the ways of communication and relationship with others. Wishing to prove that he/she is important, the teenager will appeal to risk behaviors, among which the use of substances (alcohol and drugs).

Drinking alcohol and taking drugs gives him/her the illusion of controlling his/her own life, offers him/her the possibility to go in risky behaviors through which would prove he/she is worthwhile, to strengthen his/her self-esteem.

By all means, popularity is not synonymous with alcohol and drug use, there are very sociable people who will never resort to this type of risk behavior. Thence, it also matters the group to which the adolescent belongs to, the rules to which he/she adheres. There are groups that categorically refuse to include alcohol consumers among their members. Therefore we should consider the importance for the young person of integration into one group or another.

We should also not override the solitary consumption when the person does not need the approval or impetus of others to use drugs. Here intervene the family and models of the early socialization of the young person.

The consequences of consumer behavior should also be analyzed: aggression in all its forms: verbal, beating, up to suicides and homicides.

Addiction from the perspective of traumas suffered in childhood

Although increasingly more studies have assigned the relation between childhood traumas and addiction to brain damage caused by trauma stress, there have also been a number of other, simpler explanations. In the study “Unfavorable Experiences of Childhood” carried over 17,000 patients of Kaiser Permanente, many experiences causing stress were correlated with many forms of substance abuse and impulsive control disorders. Many have related childhood traumas with abuses, but other stress-causing experiences are also neglect, loss of a parent, the presence during domestic violence or other types of violence or having a parent suffering from mental illness. People who had such experiences in childhood have had an increased tendency to become addicted to alcohol or drugs. They are also more susceptible to behavioral addiction, such as food addiction or sex addiction.

In most cases, experiences that are extremely traumatic for a child would be much less traumatic as an adult. There are some key reasons why these happenings have more importance and a longer effect on children. It is important to remember that, as a child, the abilities to make contextual interferences, which would enable them to process these experiences more efficiently, are limited. Without a reference framework, it is difficult to find any sense in these traumatic experiences, thus making the effect to last. Moreover, children usually rely on their loved ones for support during difficult times. But when the loved are the source of abuse, neglect or trauma - during these experiences - family support is not an option.

In many cases, a victim of childhood abuse also begins in turn to abuse alcohol and drugs as a means of self-medication, hoping to attenuate the residual effects of emotional hurt at a young age. On the other hand, it is also customary that the behavior concerning substance abuse in adulthood be modeled following a substance abuse behavior of a close, dear person - that was observed during childhood. In fact, the tendency of self-medication can be modeled and inherited.¹

⁴ <http://www.tratament-adictie.ro/legatura-nefericita-dintre-traumele-copilariei-si-dependenta-ca-adult-partea-a-II-a>.

2. The objectives of this paper can be divided into two categories: general objectives and specific or operational objectives.

a) *a) General objectives:* Studying the relationship existing between childhood traumas and alcohol and drug use in adulthood;

b) *Specific objectives*

→ *Objective No. 1:* Highlighting childhood traumas that lead to an imbalance as concerns the proper growing up of a child.

→ *Objective No. 2:* Signaling the differences between adults who have undergone traumas during childhood and those who have not.

3. Assumptions

In order to reach the above mentioned objectives, the following working assumptions have been approached:

→ *First assumption:* If a child experiences a traumatic event, then the risk of having an addiction during adulthood will be higher.

→ *The second assumption:* If an addicted adult fails to find support in a close person or an organized group, then there are fewer chances to give up the vice.

4. Methodology

In order to accomplish this paper, it has been used a single psychological test based on an evaluation questionnaire. The questionnaire also combines elements from the Rosenberg Scale and Locus Scale of control.

In the questionnaire participated 59 respondents, with an average age of 27.7 years.

The questionnaire was made through isondaje.ro and sent individually to a limited group within the Galati city limits.

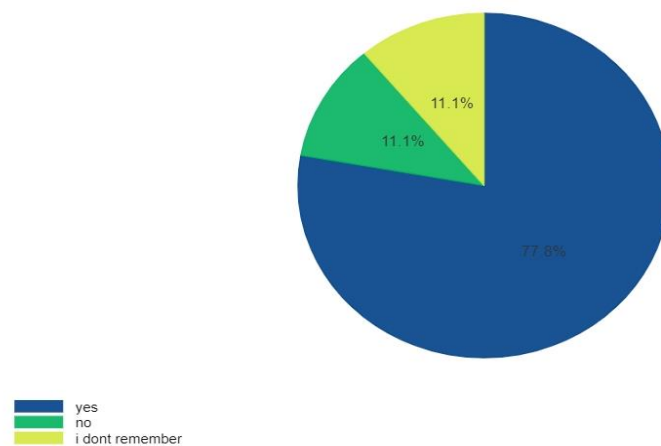
5. Quantitative Analysis and Interpretation of the Results

In this research it was assumed that the psychological variables measured with the investigative tools used will record significant correlations and differences between the two batches. However, any research is carried out under certain conditions, in a certain context. It should be admitted that, in one way or another, in the course of the investigated phenomenon may occur unexpected elements, caused by the structure of the group, the presentation of information and instructions by the examiner to the various groups of subjects and the context of the examination, etc.

→ **First assumption:** If a child experiences a traumatic event, then the risk of having an addiction on maturity is higher.

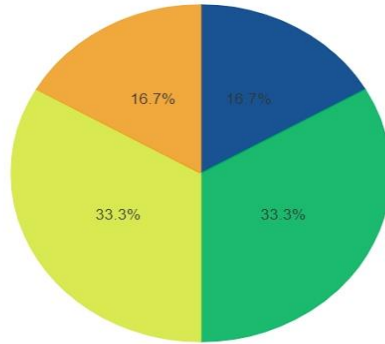
A high percentage of adults have encountered negative events that have scarred their childhood and other moments of life. Among the events most mentioned by the respondents are mentioned: death of a loved person, abuse, how he/she is treated by other persons, domestic violence, being present at various psychologically unsettling scenes.

Are there any events that have marked you in a negative way throughout your life?



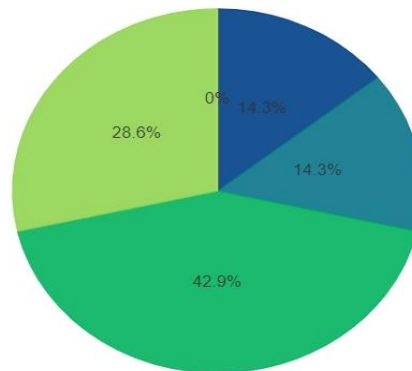
Among these respondents, around 50% of respondents often consume alcohol, out of which 32.7% consume drugs occasionally.

How often you drink alcohol?



- Rarely
- rare
- frequently
- very often

What are the reasons for which you use alcohol /drugs?

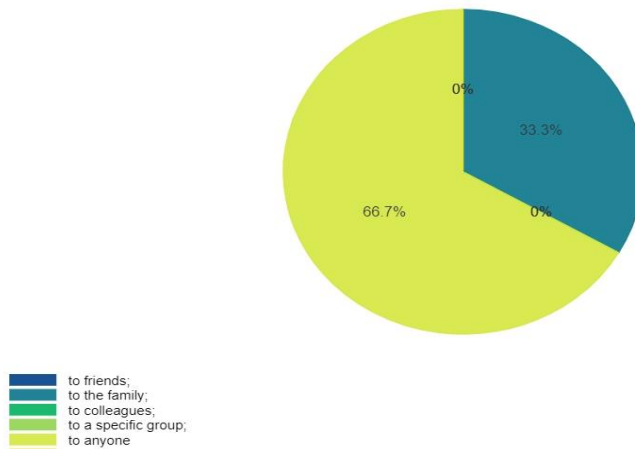


- Alcohol/drug consumption contributes to good humor and takes away stress;
- When I find myself among people who consume alcohol/drugs, I do not want to create a dissenting opinion;
- Alcohol /drugs help me to forget my past;
- Only when I drink alcohol /take drugs, I feel that I can express myself properly;
- For other reasons (please specify them).....

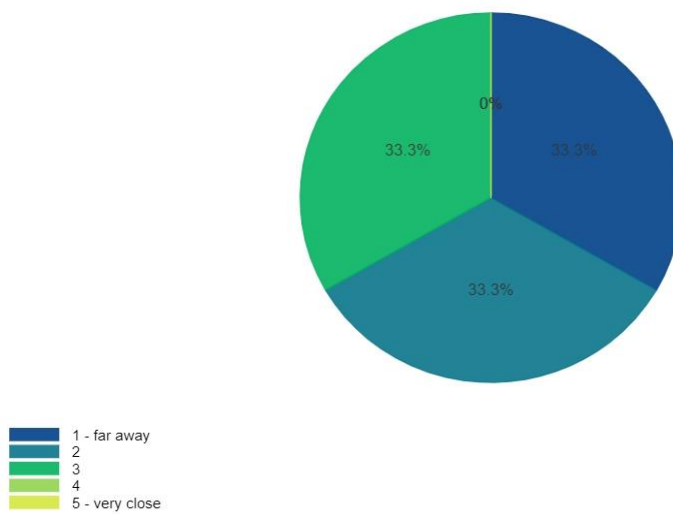
Previous results reveal that the previous assumption is valid, the use of alcohol and drugs being associated with the past, but also with possible traumas or negative events from the childhood.

The second assumption: If during adulthood, an addicted adult does not find support in a close person or an organized group, then there are fewer chances to give up the vice.

When did you try to quit alcohol /drug use?



How close do you think you are to achieving your goal of "being clean?"



An alarming number of alcohol or drug consumers do not appeal to anyone to get rid of this vice, and this leads to a perpetuation of the situation, as the lack of communication with someone close makes the objective of changing lifestyle to seem extremely faraway as shown by the percentage of about 70% above.

6. Conclusions

“CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TRAUMAS DURING CHILDHOOD AND THE USE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL IN ADULT LIFE” is a highly topical subject. The explosion of news talking about depression, its treatment, drugs, and alcohol sounds like the alarm about the current society. The above mentioned subject is much more complex than the data set forth from a small number of respondents. In this context, on a larger scale, the odds are that results may not look favorable at all. The need that this subject be continuously exploited and researched is major.

7. Bibliography

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Annex 1- Questionnaire

Directions: Read each question carefully and mark out the appropriate answer by circling the appropriate figure or figures (there are more answers possible). If you cannot find an answer to match exactly, mark out the closest match.

1. Do you consider yourself a happy person?

- a) Yes.
- b) No.
- c) I do not know.

2. Which of the following statements characterizes you??

- a) I have a positive attitude towards my own person.
- b) I think I have some remarkable qualities.

- c) I think I am a worthwhile person or at least as good as others.
- d) I generally incline to think that I am a failure, unfulfilled.
- e) From time to time I have the feeling that I am useless.
- f) Sometimes I think I am not good at anything.

3. Are there any events that have marked you positively throughout your life?

- a) Yes.
- b) No.

4. Are there any events that have marked you in a negative way throughout your life?

- a) Yes.
- b) No.

5. What are the positive events that marked you?

6. What are the negative events that marked you?

Are you drinking alcohol?

- a) Yes.
- b) No (skip to question....).

7. Do you consume drugs?

- a) yes
- b) no (skip to question....)

8. At what age did you start using alcohol /drugs?

9. What are the reasons for which you use alcohol/drugs?

- a) Alcohol/drug consumption contributes to good humor and takes away stress.
- b) When I find myself among people who consume alcohol/drugs, I do not want to create a dissenting opinion.
- c) Alcohol/drugs help me to forget my past.
- d) Only when I drink alcohol/take drugs, I feel that I can express myself properly.
- e) For other reasons (please specify them).

11. Have you ever tried to quit alcohol/drugs?

- a) Yes.
- b) No (skip to question....).

12. When did you try to quit alcohol/drug use?

- a) to friends.
- b) to the family.
- c) to colleagues.
- d) to a specific group.
- e) to anyone.
- f) another answer....

10.How close do you think you are to achieving your goal of “being clean?”

11.Sex.

12.Age.

13.Earnings.