

Re-traumatization: Sexual Abuse, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Sexual Risk Behaviors among Club Drug Users

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The authors
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Introduction.....

- Exposure to trauma, especially in childhood, has been linked to substance use, as a self-medicate attempt and to dampen mood symptoms associated with a dysregulated biological stress response.

- Previous studies identified high rates of psychiatric symptoms among club drug users.

- There has been few research into sexual abuse and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) among club drug users.

Aim.....

To assess sexual abuse and subsequent development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and their outcomes in club goers

Method.....

Sample selection and procedures

- Target sampling and ethnographic fieldwork were used as recruitment strategies.

- Face to face Interviews were conducted in loco using the GAIN instrument to assess demographics, sexual risk behaviors, substance use patterns and psychiatric symptoms (based on DSM-IV criteria).

Inclusion Criteria:

- The sample comprised 240 club drug users, age 18-39 years, who had used ecstasy and/or LSD at least once in the last 90 days prior to the interviews.

- Not in treatment for drug or alcohol problems at the time of the study.

Statistics

- The association between sexual abuse and PTSD among club goers was analyzed by Chi-square test.

- Quantitative variables with symmetric distribution were compared by T-student test; whereas those with asymmetric distribution were compared with Mann Whitney test.

Ethics

- The study was approved by the IRB and Ethics Committee of the HCPA. All participants provided written informed consent.

Results.....

Table 1. Demographic characteristics among individuals with and without PTSD

Variable	Without PTSD (n=116)	With PTSD (n=123)	p
Age ± SD*	23.91±4.9	22.11±4.03	0.002
Gender (%)			0.152
Men	62 (53.4)	77 (62.6)	
Women	54 (46.6)	46 (37.4)	
Education (%)			0.001
High school	72 (62.1)	90 (73.8)	
Higher education	39 (33.6)	19 (15.6)	
Income (%)			0.001
Without income	18 (15.7)	24 (19.8)	
3 or less minimum wage	60 (52.2)	83 (68.6)	
3-5 minimum wage	26 (22.6)	7 (5.8)	
> 5 minimum wage	11 (9.6)	7 (5.8)	
Sexual orientation (%)			0.117
Heterosexual	88 (75.9)	82 (66.7)	
Homosexual/Bisexual	28 (24.1)	41 (33.3)	
Severity of drug use**	52.0 (32.2 – 78.4)	66.2 (38.4 – 91.0)	0.043

* T-student test, mean ± standard deviation; **Mann-Whitney test, median (interquartile range)

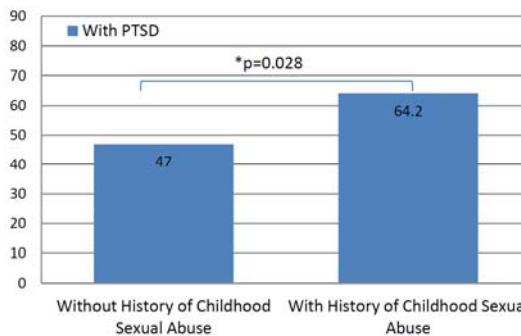


Figure 1. Club drug users with PTSD divided by with and without childhood sexual abuse

Table 2. Early onset of drug use, sexual abuse and PTSD among club drug users

Age of first use	Childhood Sexual Abuse Without PTSD	Childhood Sexual Abuse With PTSD	p
Ecstasy	17 (16 - 19)	21 (17 - 27.5)	<0.005
LSD	17 (16.25 - 18.75)	19 (17 - 27)	<0.005
Cocaine	15 (14 - 16)	16 (15 - 18)	<0.005
Alcohol	13 (12 - 14.25)	13 (11.75 - 13.25)	0.259
Marijuana	15 (13 - 16)	14 (11.5 - 16)	0.121

- 63.7% of the participants had unprotected sex.
- PTSD club drugs users showed a higher prevalence of sexual risk behavior: 69.8% of those with severe PTSD symptoms had unprotected sex, compared to 44.4% with no PTSD symptoms (p>0.047).

Discussion.....

- Club drug users have high rates of early sexual abuse;

- Club drug users with sexual abuse start earlier in drug use and have more chances to develop PTSD, denouncing an unfavorable socio-affective condition to process trauma, that continues to rise;

- Those with PTSD have a severe drug use pattern, seeking in drug an attempt to anesthesia, they also have more sexual risk behaviors;

- It creates a re-traumatization cycle:

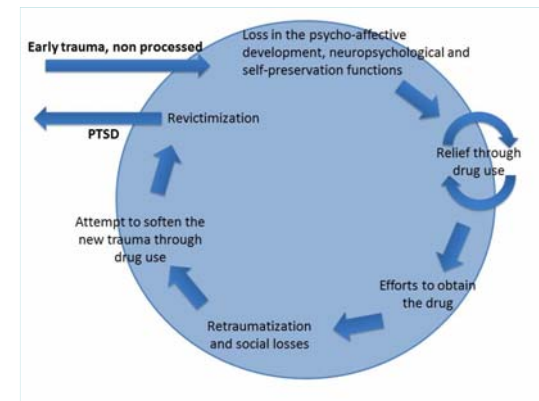


Figure 2. Retraumatization cycle

Conclusion.....

- Early sexual abuse among club drug users is associated with development of PTSD;

- Those with childhood sexual abuse and PTSD show a non-resolutive maintenance of the traumatic experience, which possibly drives:

- To a search for anesthesia through an earlier onset and more severe pattern of drug use;
- To additional sexual risk behaviors exposure.

References

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