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THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL PROBLEMATIC DRINKING
ON DAUGHTER'S MENTAL HEALTH: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Indianna Bouch
Alexzandria Haro

May 2025

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ABSTRACT

Background: Parental alcohol use is a widespread issue and is known to have negative impacts on children's mental health. However, research on parent-child dyads concerning parental problematic alcohol use and child mental health outcomes has much less research. **Objective:** This systematic review aims to examine recent literature on the impact of mothers' problematic drinking on daughter(s) mental health. **Methods:** The following databases were used: EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The keywords included "mother", "AUD", "maternal AUD", "impact on daughters", "female COA", "female ACOA", "mothers with an AUD", "problematic drinking", "maternal alcoholic", "impact on relationships", "impact on mental health" and "substance use". We searched for articles with multiple filters, including peer-reviewed articles, articles written in English, articles published between 2013 to 2024, and articles in full text.

Keywords: Maternal problematic drinking, offspring, mental health

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Introduction

Alcohol use is a commonly abused substance in the US, and understanding the effects of alcohol abuse may help break the cycle of intergenerational alcohol abuse. The major purpose of this chapter is to answer the following questions. First, what is alcohol use disorder? Second, how common is AUD in the general population and among parents? Third, what are the impacts of parental AUD and SUD on their offspring? Fourth, who is at the highest risk for developing an AUD? Lastly, what are the risk factors for developing an AUD?

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)

AUD is a mental health disorder that is listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., text rev.; DSM-5-TR) in the substance-related and addictive disorders section (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022). The broad diagnosis for the majority of disorders under the substance-related and addictive disorders section is substance use disorder (SUD). AUD is a specific diagnosis of a SUD. AUD is a problematic alcohol consumption pattern that results in distress or impairment that is clinically significant (has an impact on daily life). Based on the number of symptoms, out of a possible 11, in the previous 12 months, AUD can be classified as mild,

moderate, or severe (APA, 2022). Broad descriptions of symptoms of AUD include: cravings, loss of control, interference with responsibilities, continued use despite consequences, impacted emotional state, building a tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. AUD differs from alcohol misuse in that AUD is a mental health disorder that is listed in the DSM-5-TR in the substance-related and addictive disorders section (APA, 2022). Alcohol misuse can result in developing an AUD, but misusing alcohol does not signify that there have been significant impairments in one's life due to alcohol misuse, which is one of the major criteria for being diagnosed with an AUD (APA, 2022).

Prevalence of AUD

The prevalence of AUD varies between race, gender, and ethnicity but is most common among Caucasians and men (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2024). Data from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health revealed that 28.1 million people had an AUD in the past year. Of these 28.1 million people, 18.2 million were White, 4.6 million were Hispanic or Latino, 3.3 million were Black or African American, 979,000 were Asian, and 150,000 were American Indian or Alaska Native. In addition, of the 28.1 million people diagnosed with AUD in 2023, 16.6 million were men and 11.5 million were women (SAMHSA, 2024). Regarding physical health, alcohol misuse is the 3rd-leading lifestyle-related cause of death in the United States, and in 2006, more than 1.2 million emergency room visits and 2.7 million clinic

visits were related to excessive alcohol drinking (Bouchery et al., 2011; Mokdad et al., 2004; Pilar et al., 2020).

Prevalence of Parental AUD

The prevalence of parental AUD is significant and differs based on who the offspring lives with. The National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (2017) collected data from 2009-2014 on children with parents who have a substance use disorder (SUD) and found that 8.7 million children ages 17 and younger lived with one parent who had a SUD (Lipari & Van Horn, 2017). More specifically, 7.5 million lived with at least one parent who had an AUD. Of that 7.5 million, 6.1 million children lived in a two-parent household with at least one parent who had an AUD and 1.4 million lived in a single-parent household with at least one parent who had an AUD.

Impact of Parental SUD and AUD

Parental AUD can have several negative impacts on their children, including their children's relationships, mental health, and the likelihood of using substances (Finan et al., 2015; Salvatore et al. 2019).

Relationship Effects

Marital outcomes of children with parents who have an AUD differ from those who do not have parents with an AUD (Salvatore et al., 2019). Salvatore et al., (2019) conducted a quantitative study using logistic regression models on 1,171,070 participants meeting criteria through their medical and pharmacy

records. It was found that adult children of parents with an AUD were more likely to marry at a younger age and were more likely to partner with someone who has an AUD. Both of these effects were stronger with children who had two parents with an AUD compared to one. This study finding indicates that parental AUD can have a negative impact on their children's relationships later in life.

Physiological Effects

Because of the way our bodies are hardwired to handle sudden stress, trauma affects our physical health. When an individual perceives a threat to their life, their body naturally prepares to either fight or flight (run) to get them out of harm's way. This process happens without conscious knowledge or rational thought and is driven by the amygdala. The center of the stress response system, the amygdala, is extremely perceptive to socioemotional cues, particularly those that convey danger, uncertainty, or other important information (Suarez et al., 2024). The brain instructs the endocrine system to release hormones that stop biological processes (like digestion) that are not required for fight or flight and prime other body systems for action, such as boosting oxygen delivery to muscles to enable sprinting. Every thought and effort is directed toward surviving during that dangerous moment. The body's preferred response to a threat to survival is fight or flight, but in other situations, like child abuse, where the threat is severe or there is no way out, a third kind of survival response called the "freeze" response is triggered, where individuals cannot move (Berrol, 2015). When faced with overwhelming trauma, reorienting may not happen;

instead, the shutdown—a kind of biological freeze—lingers (Berrol, 2015). Unaware that they are entering a state of freeze, children do this to survive during traumatic events because they are unable to fight adults or leave and survive on their own. It has been proposed that stressful events, like maltreatment as a child, may affect an individual's long-term health through biological aging (Graf et al., 2022). Stressful events include exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including neglect and living in dysfunctional households, which are experiences children of alcoholics (COAs) commonly endure (Bond et al., 2021).

Psychological Effects

Human behavior, emotions, and decision-making processes are greatly influenced by psychological factors. These variables cover a broad spectrum of elements, such as personality traits, emotions, cognitive functions, and social influences. Children who grow up in an alcoholic home are subjected to the violence and abuse of their parents, which can result in the development of negative and aggressive behaviors and emotions (AlSaad et al., 2023). In COAs, personality traits and personality characteristics are thought to provide insight into psychological disorders. Three major categories of personality traits associated with COAs have been the subject of studies which include: impulsivity, sociability, and neuroticism (AlSaad et al., 2023). The term neuroticism personality describes the propensity to feel vulnerable, depressed, and anxious. People with high neuroticism may be more prone to anxiety,

tension, and mood fluctuations. This characteristic is frequently linked to an increased risk of mental health problems (AlSaad et al., 2023). Researchers found that females who experienced adverse childhood events (ACEs) have a higher risk of developing mental health issues, and there are reporting differences between females and males (Lee & Chen, 2017). More recurring reports regarding mental illness in the home, sexual abuse, and substance abuse have been reported by females (Lee & Chen, 2017). Women often internalize their responses to ACEs, especially concerning abuse and victimization. This includes substance abuse, repressed anger, self-harm, and mental illness, such as depression, anxiety, or PTSD (Boppre & Boyer, 2021; DeHart et al., 2018). Additionally, adolescents with parents who problematically drink have an increased risk of drug use, alcohol use, aggressive behaviors, and rule-breaking (Finan et al., 2015). Research has also found that maternal AUD conferred a greater risk for externalizing psychopathology than paternal AUD overall, regardless of offspring sex (Long et al., 2018). However, having two parents with AUD increased the risk of externalizing psychopathology significantly more than having only one parent with AUD.

Risk Factors of Developing an AUD

Several risk factors contribute to the development of an AUD, with three key factors being genetics, stress, and mental health issues.

Genetics

An individual's genetic make-up can significantly increase the probability of developing an AUD. A study by Teixeirs et al. (2016) sampled 102 alcoholic patients from inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities and found that 55% of these patients had a family history of AUD or other SUDs. More specifically, over half (60%) of the participants have at least two relatives who are affected by AUD or SUD. This indicates that developing an AUD is not solely dependent on environmental factors but is attributed to genetic factors as well.

Stress

Stress also plays a significant role in the risk of developing an AUD. A review conducted by Enoch (2010) examined the characteristics of early life stress and how it influenced adolescent and adult alcohol use. Results from the review indicate that experiences of maltreatment early on during development and before puberty permanently alter the brain's reward pathways, but not all children who experience early-life stress develop mental health problems. Overall, this review found that the experience of childhood maltreatment and other life stressors were associated with an increased risk of early-onset problem drinking among adolescents.

Mental Health

Though AUD is a mental health diagnosis in the DSM-5-TR, being diagnosed with other mental health disorders (comorbid) increases the risk of developing an AUD. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Lai et al. (2015)

showed that anxiety disorders are highly associated with AUD and that major depression co-occurs with AUD at a high rate. Specifically, the odds of developing anxiety disorder among those with alcohol abuse was found to be 1.64 and the odds of developing major depressive disorder with alcohol abuse was 1.53. These results further indicate that mental health issues amplified the likelihood of developing AUD.

Conclusion

In summary, AUD is a prevalent mental health disorder that can lead to severe impairment and distress. AUD in parents has been found to result in several negative outcomes in their children. Individuals with a genetic history of AUD, those under high amounts of stress, and those with mental health issues can influence an individual's risk for developing an AUD. Research has looked at the impact of AUD broadly, however, there is less research on the impact of parental AUD on their offspring's mental health.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, we will summarize existing studies discussing the impacts of parental alcohol abuse and maternal substance use. Next, we will explore systematic reviews examining how prenatal substance use impacts offspring's mental health and well-being. We will then review the Intergenerational Transmission of Mental Health, Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory, which will inform the research question. This chapter will conclude with a description of the study's significance. By reviewing the current evidence, this chapter seeks to identify gaps in knowledge to inform future research and clinical practice.

Individual Studies

This literature review will summarize the findings of several individual original research focusing on how parental alcohol use and maternal substance use impacts the mental health of their offspring.

Parental Alcohol Use

Parental alcohol use and its impact on children has been well investigated. Research has found that parental alcohol use has been associated with a host of negative outcomes, including poor psychological and social well-being for new mothers and those residing with their alcoholic parent(s), and an increase in the

likelihood of offspring drinking and abusing substances. For example, Johnsen et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study of adult children of alcoholics. All of the women in the study were expecting their first child, and of the twelve women included in this study, seven of them had an alcoholic father and the other five women had an alcoholic father and an alcoholic mother. None of the women in the study exclusively had an alcoholic mother. The study found that daughters of alcoholic parents reported low self-esteem and low self-worth as well as few supportive relationships. Additionally, an observational study comparing 45 children living with parents who harmfully consume alcohol versus 45 children who do not live with parents who harmfully consume alcohol revealed that the children who live with parents who harmfully consume alcohol had lower levels of psychological well-being (Lacopetti et al., 2019). These children were also more likely to develop psychiatric disorders such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and generalized anxiety disorder.

Another study by Holst et al. (2019) explored how parental AUD comorbid with mental health disorders or parental AUD alone impacted offspring's likelihood of developing AUD. Using data from Danish nationwide registries, a cohort-based study was conducted and found that both paternal and maternal AUD increased the risk of offspring developing an AUD with or without exposure to parental mental health disorders. More specifically, it was found that maternal AUD impacted offspring's risk of developing AUD more than paternal AUD. Lastly, Marino et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study using online surveys

to analyze how parental problems with drinking impact their children. Using data from 148 parent-child dyads, the authors found that children's alcohol and substance misuse were related to parental drinking.

Maternal Substance Use

Maternal substance use, although less investigated compared to parental alcohol use, has still been well explored. This body of research demonstrates that maternal substance use during childhood is linked to an increased risk for drug use disorders and mental health issues. A 5-year longitudinal study with 144 female participants between the ages of 6 and 17 years old and their siblings sought to examine if exposure to parental SUD increased the risk of their offspring developing SUD (Yule et al., 2013). This study found that exposure to maternal substance use during adolescence can increase the risk of offspring developing a drug use disorder. Another study by Kuo et al. (2021) investigated how parental and peer cross-substance use impacts adolescent problematic alcohol use. A multinomial logistic regression model was used on the data of 4,445 adolescents between the ages of 12-17 years old from the 2014 National Survey of Substance Use. The study found that peer and parental substance use impacted both daughters' and sons' alcohol use and, specifically, the mother's tobacco use impacted daughters' alcohol use. Lastly, Wolfe et al. (2016) researched how maternal AUD impacts offspring mental health. This secondary data analysis used data from 1992-2000 from both the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (NLSY79) and the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979

Children and Young Adults and found maternal AUD negatively impacted their offspring's mental health and the quality of childhood relationships.

Past Systematic Reviews

This literature review will investigate three systematic reviews focusing on the effects prenatal substance use has on children. Researchers have sought to explore the aspects of a child's life impacted by prenatal substance use and analyze how these impacts will present in the child's life. Empirical evidence supports that prenatal substance use has negative impacts on children and can culminate in attachment issues, early out-of-home placement, and mental health disorders. For example, a systematic review and meta-analysis of 11 studies was conducted and looked at the relationship between mother's substance use and the type of attachment their child (six years old or younger) has with them (Hyysalo et al., 2021). The study found a small but significant link between maternal substance use and insecure attachments in children (Hyysalo et al., 2021). Another systematic review and meta-analysis of 16 studies that used a mixture of study designs investigated how prenatal and early-life substance use would impact children at risk for maltreatment (Powell et al., 2024). The study found that maternal substance use was associated with the highest risk of infants being taken into child protection at birth and children being placed in out-of-home care. Lastly, a systematic review of 33 articles sought to determine how prenatal alcohol use, even in low amounts, impacts the mental health of offspring (Easey et al., 2019). The study found a positive association between prenatal substance

use and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and conduct disorders in children (Easey et al., 2019).

Gaps and Limitations in Literature

There is a lack of recent research on the impact of mothers' problematic drinking on their daughters' mental health. A variety of individual studies focused on how parental alcohol use and maternal substance use impact the mental health of their offspring, but these studies did not address gender-specific outcomes, such as the impacts of maternal versus paternal alcohol use. Additionally, several systematic reviews have examined the association between prenatal substance use and offspring mental health and well-being; however, these reviews provide limited knowledge on postnatal mental health and no information on offspring mental health outcomes by gender. Another factor that contributes to the lack of research on the impact of mothers' problematic drinking on their daughters' mental health is the year the studies were published.

Purpose of the Study

This systematic review aims to synthesize and analyze the existing literature on how mothers who problematically drink influence their daughters' mental health. The authors seek to utilize articles published within the last ten years to encompass more recent findings for this research gap. A notable strength of systematic reviews is that it allows for an in-depth analysis of conflicting findings.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Several theoretical frameworks can be used to help conceptualize how mothers who problematically drink affect their daughter's mental health. The following theories could guide this conceptualization: Intergenerational Transmission of Mental Health, Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

The concept of intergenerational transmission of mental health is not a single theory; rather, it is a collection of theories and research findings about the transmission of mental health problems from one generation to the next. In 2013, David Johnston, Stefanie Schurer, and Michael Shields discovered that there is a roughly 50% greater intergenerational correlation in mental health through the maternal line than the paternal (Johnston et al., 2013). They investigate how mental health disorders can be passed down through both environmental and genetic pathways. This encompasses environmental factors, behavioral modeling, and genetic predisposition.

According to Attachment Theory, people's emotional and social development is shaped by their early relationships, especially those with their primary caregivers (Cassidy et al., 2013). The attachment dynamics between daughters of mothers who problematically drink can affect the daughters' mental health. According to Family Systems Theory, families are interdependent systems in which the dynamics and behaviors of their members affect the family as a whole (Calatrava, 2022). Examining the relationships between mothers who

problematically drink and their daughters can shed light on how roles, boundaries, and communication styles affect the type and quality of experiences daughters have in their lives. According to the social learning theory, people pick up attitudes and behaviors through modeling, reinforcement, and observation (Mukhalalati et al., 2022). It is possible to learn more about the intergenerational transmission of alcohol use and its effects on daughters' behavior and decision-making by examining how daughters of mothers who problematically drink internalize and replicate their mothers' behaviors. Researchers and clinicians can better understand the complex dynamics at work in the relationship between mothers who problematically drink and their daughters by utilizing these and other pertinent theoretical frameworks. The interventions, preventive tactics, and support networks that are customized to meet the unique requirements of this demographic can be informed by the aforementioned theoretical guidelines.

Significance of the Study

There are many benefits of gaining knowledge on the research gap. By conducting research on how maternal problem drinking impacts daughters' mental health, the findings could help inform gender-specific treatment. These findings would also be beneficial in family therapy given that gender-specific dyads create certain outcomes that will have an impact on the outcome of treatment. The knowledge gained by this research would also help mental health treatment providers create more customized treatment plans for children

whose parent(s) problematically drink alcohol, especially the mother-daughter dyad.

Summary

This systematic review aims to compile studies conducted on the subject of the effects of mothers who problematically drink on their daughter's mental health. There has been a lack of research focusing exclusively on the mother-daughter dyad of maternal problem drinking. The primary focus is how maternal problem drinking affects the daughter's mental health. Recognizing knowledge gaps and carrying out additional research specifically on the mother-daughter dyad will have a positive effect on outcomes related to mental health that are important for mental health treatment providers.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study will seek to describe the limited knowledge of the effects mothers who problematically drink have on their daughters' mental health. This chapter contains details of how articles for inclusion in the systematic review will be identified.

Methods

The authors will conduct a comprehensive literature review extending from the years 2013 to 2024 to identify original research on the impact of mothers' problematic drinking on daughters' mental health. In this systematic review, "problematic drinking" encompasses those diagnosed with an AUD, as determined by the Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test or self-reported alcohol consumption (Alsaad et al., 2023; Finan et al., 2015; Long et al., 2018; Salvatore et al., 2019; Talley et al., 2018). Preliminary review found that terms like "AUD," "substance use," and "alcoholism" were used interchangeably, leading to the adoption of "problematic drinking" to cover these various descriptions of mothers' drinking.

The inclusion criteria will be studies that provide information on mothers who problematically drink, the daughters of those mothers, and results indicating the impact of a mother's problematic drinking on their daughter's mental health.

Studies will not be excluded based on study design or settings. The exclusion criteria will be articles that are not peer-reviewed, articles that are not published in English, articles published more than 10 years ago, and articles that are not available in full text. The key terms “mother”, “AUD”, “maternal AUD”, “impact on daughters”, “female COA”, “female ACOA”, “mothers with an AUD”, “problematic drinking”, “maternal alcoholic”, “impact on relationships”, “impact on mental health” and “substance use” will be used in the search engines EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Each search includes a keyword involving a mother drinking, a daughter, and either substance use, impact on relationships, or mental health. For example, the keywords “mother AUD”, “daughter”, and “impact on mental health” will be input into EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier with the filters including only peer-reviewed articles, articles written in English, articles published between 2013 to 2024, and articles in full text.

Two reviewers will examine the articles yielded by the search. The articles one reviewer identifies as meeting the research criteria will be cross-examined by the other reviewer to ensure agreement on the articles that will be included in the study. Any disagreement on an article’s eligibility to be included in the study will be shown to a non-biased third-party individual to determine the article’s eligibility.

Upon completion of the review, the shortlisted articles will be categorized based on how the daughters’ mental health were impacted by their mothers’

problematic drinking. This will be done by placing the articles in a spreadsheet that identifies the study’s design, the total number of participants in the study, participants sociodemographic characteristics, measurement of mothers’ problematic drinking, measurement of the impacts on the daughters’ mental health, and main findings (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data Extraction Form

Title	Authors (Publication Year)	Study Aim(s)	Study Design	Participants	Measurement of Problematic Drinking	Measurement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Daughters	Findings

Summary

This systematic review will examine how mothers’ problematic drinking will impact their daughters’ in regards to daughters’ mental health. There is limited knowledge on this research question, so completing a systematic review will bring all available information forward and allow for analysis of the existing literature to ensue. This analysis will shed light on what is known about how daughters are impacted by their mothers' problematic drinking, as well as identify what research is needed to gain more information on this topic.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This research project was completed collaboratively by Indianna Bouch and Alexzandria Haro.

The following sections were completed as follows:

1. Article Identification & Analysis: Indianna Bouch and Alexzandria Haro.
2. Written Report and Presentation of Findings: Indianna Bouch and Alexzandria Haro.
3. Abstract: Indianna Bouch and Alexzandria Haro.
4. Chapter One, Introduction: Indianna Bouch and Alexzandria Haro.
5. Chapter Two, Literature Review: Indianna Bouch.
6. Chapter Three, Methods: Alexzandria Haro.