

'Quality' father involvement plays big role keeping abused children away from drugs

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Researchers have long-known that abused children are at higher risk of adolescent drug use. But a new study shows that quality time with a father figure serves as a "protective factor," helping to mitigate early childhood trauma.

Researchers from the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, in partnership with Ohio State University, analyzed data from 685 at-risk adolescents drawn from a [national survey](#), called the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect. They found a connection between early childhood (birth to 5 years old) physical [abuse](#) and early adolescent substance use.

The findings were recently published in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

Unlike previous research, said Dalhee Yoon, a [doctoral candidate](#) at the Mandel School and one of seven researchers involved in the analysis, their study specifically examines the link between physical abuse and child development.

Contradictory to past studies, their research found no relation between [adolescent](#) substance use and maltreatment—sexual and emotional abuse, neglect—regardless of when in a child's developmental the abuse occurred.

However, researchers found that the quality of a father's involvement in a young child's life served as a shield, preventing future substance abuse—regardless of the child's gender.

For every point higher on the quality of a so-called "father involvement scale," the odds of early substance use decreased by 6. The quantity of father involvement refers to the father's engagement in day-to-day shared activities with the child, and the level of closeness, trust, emotional support and affection in the father-child relationship.

"Our findings provide crucial practice implications for early substance use prevention and intervention efforts, critical for avoiding the escalation of substance use problems at later developmental periods," Yoon said. "Professionals working with adolescents with early substance use problems should be keenly aware of—and help—adolescents dealing with the negative effects of [early childhood](#) trauma appropriately."

More information: Susan Yoon et al. Vulnerability or resilience to early substance use among adolescents at risk: The roles of maltreatment and father involvement, *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.09.020](#)

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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