



## Early Use of Drugs Can Lead to Psychiatric Disorders Later

One of the challenges of research is understanding the impact of co-occurring illnesses on patient care. A major problem associated with co-occurrence of both substance abuse and mental disorders in patients, is determining both the order in which these disorders occur and the factors that they share.

### Research Design

Recent NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse) findings come from a longitudinal study that has followed more than 700 individuals from early childhood into their late twenties. This longitudinal data set is unique because it follows one group of people through their lives. It collects data roughly every 5 years on drug abuse patterns, psychiatric disorders, and other factors.

Since most studies obtain data on psychiatric disorders and drug abuse simultaneously, it then becomes almost impossible to determine which problem set came first. Now, for the first time, this study confirms one sequence of events in the complex problem of co-occurrence.

By using this approach, it is allowing researchers to study the progression of drug abuse, how it affects a person's functioning, and how it relates to subsequent psychiatric disorders.

### Study Findings

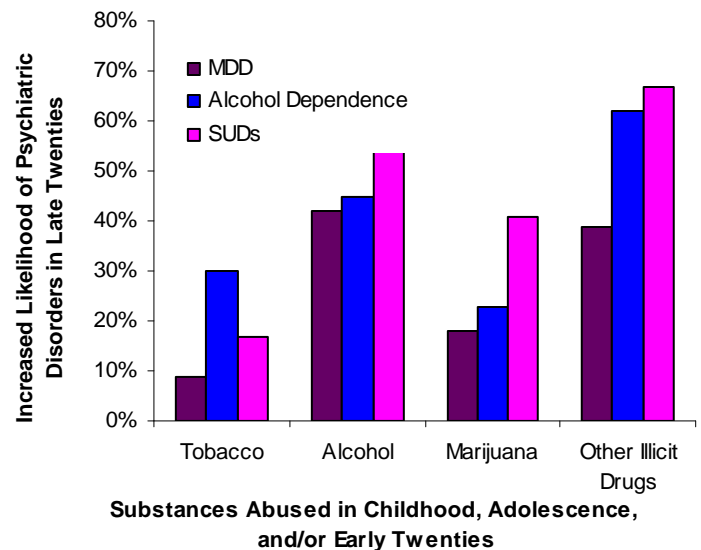
Research can now provide evidence that early substance abuse significantly predicts the later occurrence of psychiatric disorders. This, includes major depressive

disorder (MDD), alcohol dependence, and substance use disorders (SUDs).

**Overall findings document that alcohol and substance abuse during a person's early formative years is significantly related to later psychiatric disorders.**

These findings hold true even after statistically controlled for age, sex, parents' education level, family income, and episodes of prior psychiatric symptoms.

**Early Substance Abuse Increases Likelihood of Developing Psychiatric Disorders in Late Twenties**



The cumulative frequency of substance abuse from childhood through early adulthood is strongly associated with episodes of major depressive disorder and substance use disorders in the late twenties.

## Summary

The relationship between earlier use of all four substances: tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drug use was more strongly related to a later substance use disorder than to later episodes of major depressive disorders.

**Treatment providers can benefit by considering the close relationship between early substance abuse and later psychiatric disorders.**

Well coordinated interventions against the earliest use of drugs could alleviate the physiological and psychosocial problems that are related to adult psychiatric disorders.

This longitudinal data set is extremely valuable because it allows researchers to track the relationship between early drug abuse and later psychiatric disorders.

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