

Childhood Maltreatment, Emotion Regulation, and Alcohol Use:

Is There a Connection?

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Background

- Childhood maltreatment is one of the most common forms of abuse. In Andalucía, Spain, nearly 18% of University students reported being neglected in childhood, with similar rates for men and women.
- Neglect refers to a parent failing to provide basic support for a child's health, well-being, safety, education, and shelter.
- Research shows a link between neglect and alcohol abuse, but the mechanism is not clear.
- One theory is that neglect during childhood can affect emotion regulation, and alcohol can be used as a coping mechanism to regulate emotions.
- The relationship between emotion regulation and alcohol abuse is well established. But, there is a gap in the dimensions of emotion regulation in the relationship between childhood neglect and alcohol abuse.

AIMS

- This study examined the role of the six dimensions of emotion regulation and the relationship between childhood neglect and alcohol, stratified by sex
- We hypothesized that poor emotion regulation (i.e., emotion regulation dimensions) would mediate the relationship between childhood neglect and alcohol use and that it would be significantly different by sex.

Methods

This was a Cross-Sectional Study of 629 University Students in Seville, Spain

Measures:

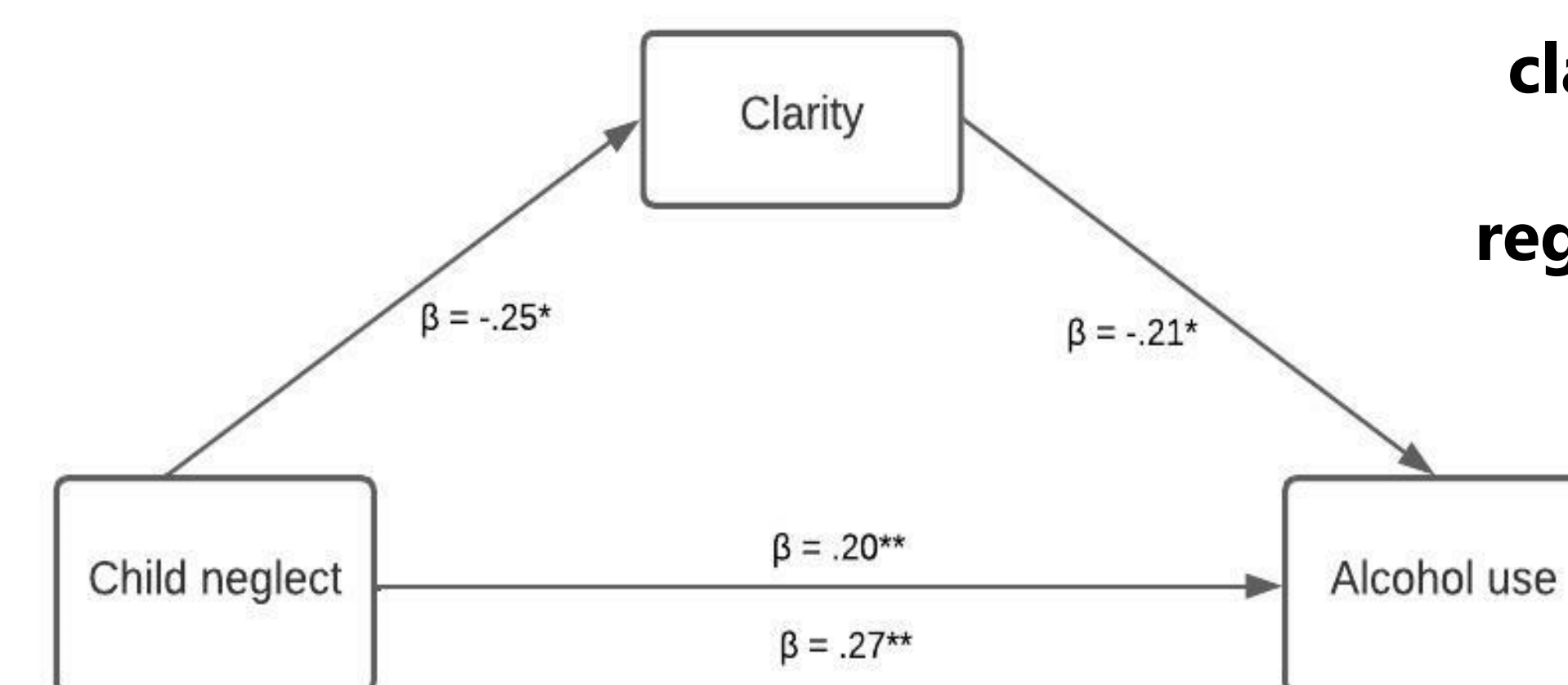
- Childhood Maltreatment was measured using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale, AUDIT Score measured alcohol use, and Emotion Regulation and subscales, non-acceptance, clarity, awareness, goal-directed behavior, Impulsivity, and strategies were measured with the DERS Scale.

Analysis:

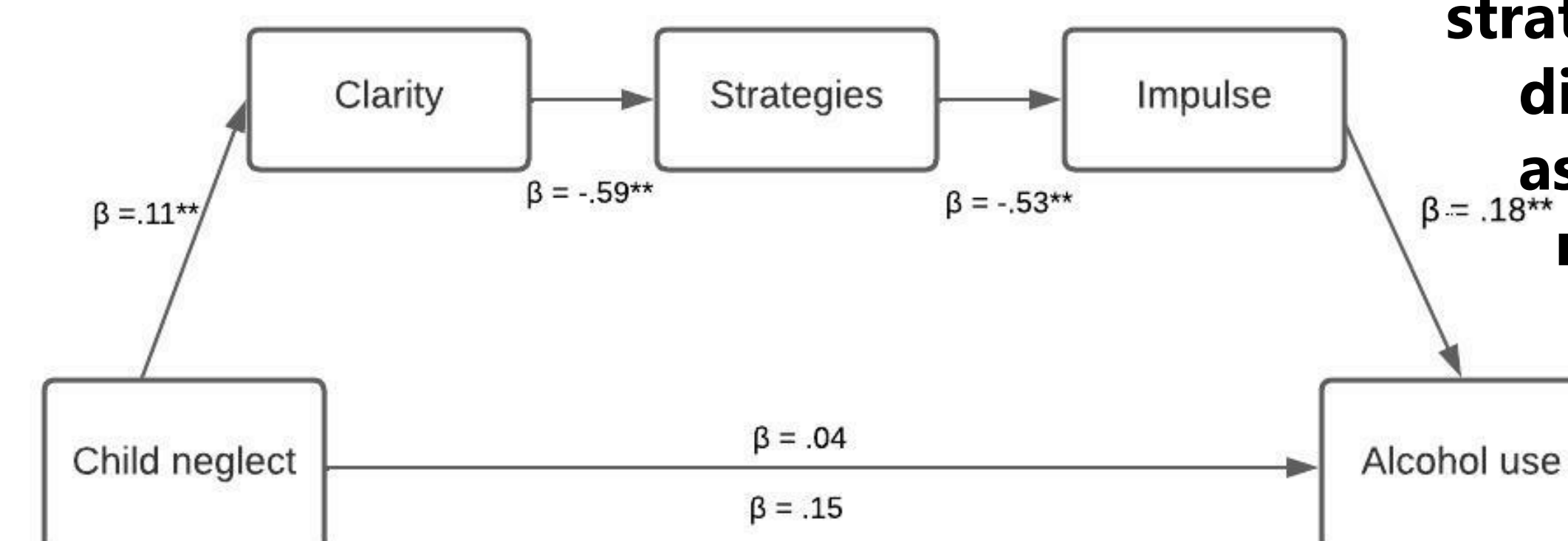
- the mediating mechanism of emotion regulation difficulties (i.e., 6-dimensions and total score) were assessed with multiple ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions through the SPSS macro PROCESS version 3.203 difficulties). The serial mediating model was tested using 10,000 resampling bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (95% CI).

Child Maltreatment is the most common form of abuse.

Young adults who have been neglected as children may not be able to regulate their emotions effectively leading to alcohol use.



In Men: Lack of emotional clarity was the only significant dimension of emotion regulation mediating childhood neglect and alcohol use



In Women: The lack of emotional clarity, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and impulse control difficulties were indirectly associated with childhood neglect and alcohol use

Results

Demographic Characteristics	Men n = 153	Women n = 452	P
Age, mean (SD)	22 (5.1)	21 (4.5)	.05
Marital Status, No (%)			.26
Single	129	392	
Married	4	12	
Separated	5	4	
Living with a partner	18	46	
Employment			.003
Yes	45	82	
No	107	369	
Other Characteristics			
Alcohol Use score mean (SD)	8.5 (5.8)	6.9 (5.3)	.001
Hazardous alcohol use			.03
Yes	65 (42%)	146 (32%)	
No	91 (58%)	312 (68%)	
Emotion Regulation mean (SD)			
Emotional regulation total score	94.4 (21.3)	97.7 (23.1)	.11
Nonacceptance of emotional responses	14.9 (5.4)	15.6 (5.6)	.18
Difficulties engaging in goal directed behavior	14.9 (4.0)	15.9 (5.6)	.016
Impulse control difficulties	14.7 (4.8)	15.6 (5.5)	.09
Lack of emotional awareness	17.1 (4.9)	16.7 (5.0)	.49
Limited access to emotion regulation strategies	20.0 (5.9)	21.2 (6.7)	.04
Lack of emotional clarity	12.9 (4.5)	19.9 (4.3)	.86
Childhood neglect			.012
Yes	100	247	
No	51	206	

*Mean age: 26. The mean alcohol use indicates hazardous alcohol use in men only. Difficulties with emotion regulation was significant in both groups and childhood neglect reported by the university students was 66% in males and 55% in females.

Discussion

- Childhood neglect is a complex problem requiring a multi-factored solution. Interventions focusing on specific emotion regulation dimensions in university students may prevent problematic alcohol use.
- Targeted treatments in the future should address the lack of emotional clarity, which may be a mechanism that can be targeted in prevention intervention programs for students with problematic drinking.