

Adolescents in the Foster Care System: The Correlation Between Mental Disorders and Substance Use

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BACKGROUND

- Of the 144,159 adolescents ages 12-18 enrolled in America's foster care system, it is estimated that nearly 80% have diagnosed mental disorders (The AFCARS Report, 2019).
- Prevalent rates in foster care adolescents for alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and drug dependency are two to five times higher than their peers with no histories of foster care involvement (Vaughn, 2007).
- With a possible correlation between diagnosed mental disorders and substance use, there is enough concern for a social worker to identify a disparity in the foster care system.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to identify the correlation between diagnosed mental disorders and substance use amongst adolescents in the United States foster care system.

PARTICIPANTS

- Adolescents ages 12-18 enrolled in National Youth Advocate Program's foster care system in southern Ohio for one calendar year.
- All cases selected must have a mental disorder diagnosis of one of the following; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Unspecified Trauma and Stressor Related Disorder, Other Specified Trauma and Stressor Related Disorder, Persistent Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or Social Anxiety Disorder.

METHODS

- Quantitative results extracted from 50 randomly selected case's Diagnostic Assessment Form. All results were recorded on an Excel sheet to be formed into various graphs later.
- Demographics and listed mental disorder diagnosis recorded first.
- Questions:
 - Recorded substance use?
 - Substance(s) used?
 - Length of use?

DATA ANALYSIS

- After collecting all of the data, graphs were created to display the data.
- The software that was used was Microsoft Excel and National Youth Advocate Program's database Evolv.

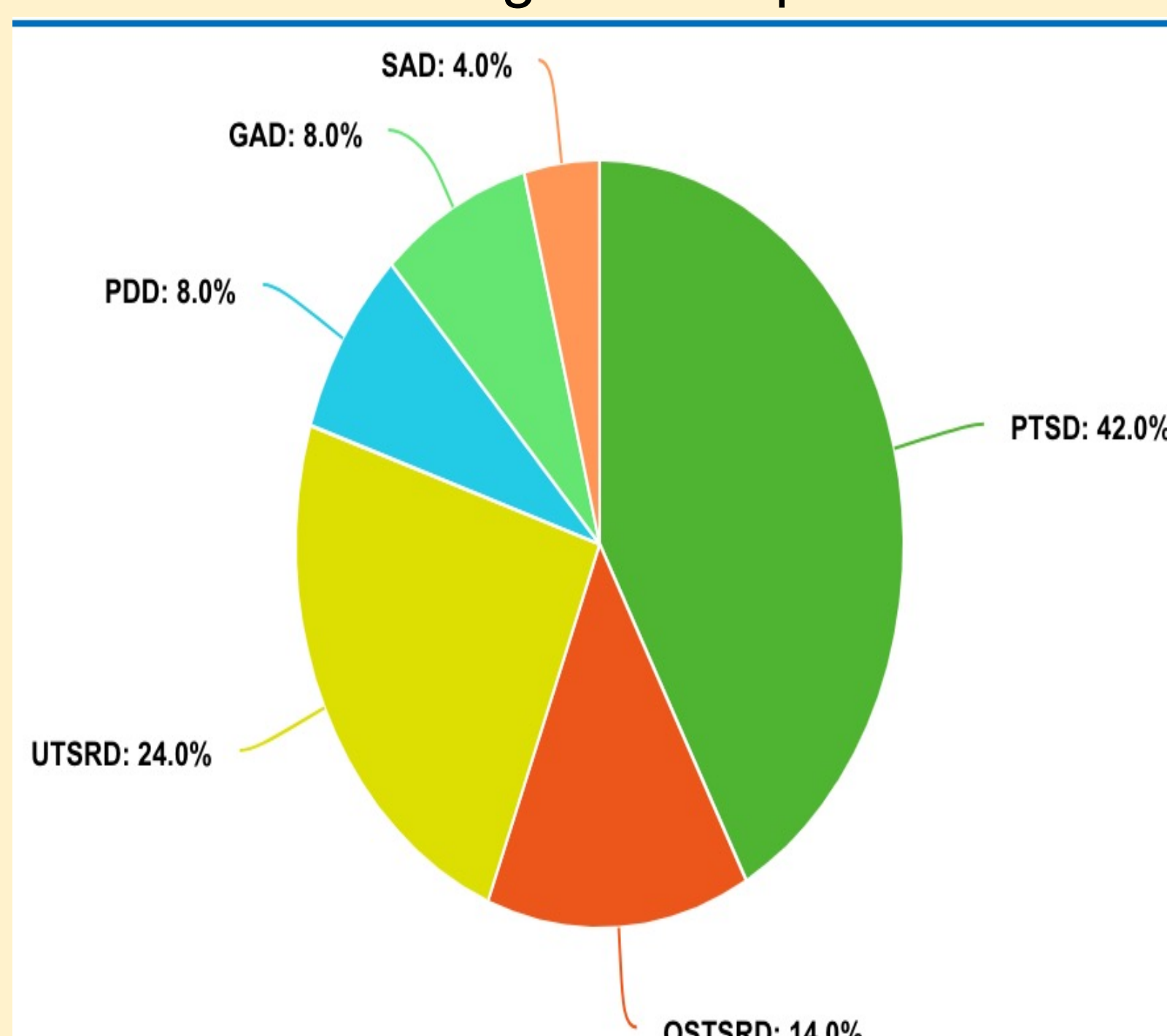
LIMITATIONS

- Participants limited to subjects living in Southern Ohio.
- Age range causing a skew of data.
- Specific calendar year chosen.
- Unable to verify honesty of participants answer to Diagnostic Assessment Form.

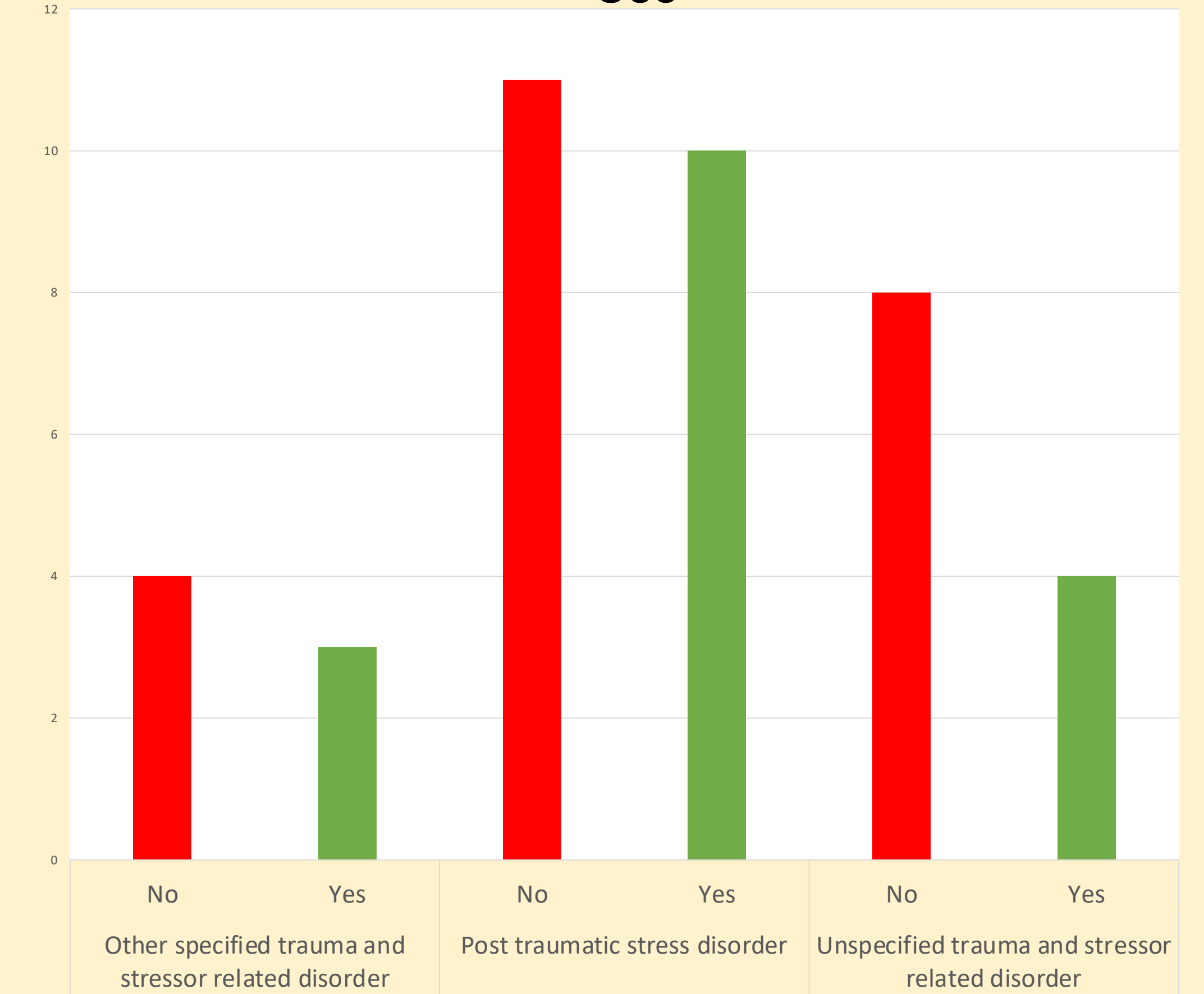
RESULTS

- The most common recorded mental disorder diagnosis and highest rates of substance use was the subjects with trauma disorders.

Recorded Mental Disorder Diagnosis Amongst Participants



Trauma Disorders and Recorded Substance Use



DISCUSSION

- 38% of subjects have used substances, and results show a strong linkage in increasing substance use with age.
- Trauma is strongly correlated to substance use and mirrors previous research conducted by Vaughn on substance use and mental disorders.
- Harder drugs such as cocaine, meth, and hallucinogenics used solely by subjects with a trauma diagnosis

CONCLUSIONS

- A closer look at mental health treatment, trauma-informed care, and implementation of substance use education/programming can decrease substance use amongst adolescents in the United States foster care system.

REFERENCES

- United States. Children's Bureau. *The AFCARS report*. [Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.
- Vaughn, M. G., Ollie, M. T., McMillen, J. C., Scott, L., Jr, & Munson, M. (2007). Substance use and abuse among older youth in foster care. *Addictive behaviors*, 32(9), 1929-1935. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2006.12.012>

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