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# Does Alcohol Mediate the Relationship Between Sexual Victimization and Risk Perception in a Date Rape Vignette?

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## Background

- Approximately 15-20% of women nationwide experience our society's legal definition of rape (Gidycz, McNamara, & Edwards, 2006). Furthermore, 54% of college women report some type of sexual victimization (Wilson, Calhoun, & Barnat, 1999).
- Current literature suggests that victimized women consistently respond differently than non-victimized women to a date rape scenario (Gidycz, McNamara, & Edwards, 2006).
- Consistently, alcohol and problematic drinking emerges as a risk factor for future victimization. Alcohol consumption was associated with more risky behavior in a date rape scenario (vignette) than those who had not consumed alcohol (Testa, Livingston & Collins, 2000).

## Purpose and Hypothesis

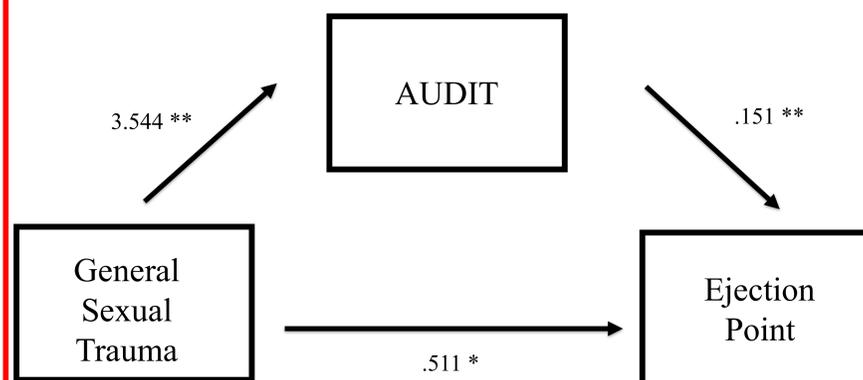
- Currently, more research is being conducted regarding sexual perpetration rather than victimization, but understanding both sides is critical.
- Literature suggests a pattern of re-victimization among rape victims (Gidycz, McNamara, & Edwards, 2006).
- Prior analysis indicated a potential problematic relationship between sexual trauma and AUDIT scores, suggesting a hypothesis of victims using alcohol as a coping mechanism.
- This study adds to existing literature by examining the role alcohol plays in the link between victimization, risk perception, and subsequently, re-victimization.
- **Our research hypothesis is that AUDIT scores mediate the relationship between General Sexual Trauma and Ejection Point (risk perception) for college women.**

## Materials and Methods

- **Participants:** Only females were included in this study. Participants were from UNL, Creighton, and a University in the Philippines. Mean age = 19.61 years, SD = 2.61 years.
- **Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test:** Participants reported their answer on a 0 to 4 scale, with higher scores indicating higher problematic alcohol use. Scores 8 or above reflected symptoms of problematic drinking.
- **Generalized Sexual Trauma:** Participants took an abbreviated version of the Sexual Experiences Survey, designed to assess sexual victimization in men and women.
- The survey assessed to what extent the participant had been victimized using 11 questions.
- The General Sexual Trauma variable is a binary variable for those who answered yes to one or more questions or those who did not answer yes to any of the questions.
- **Date-Rape Vignette Task:** The date-rape vignette was separated into 18 events. At the end of each event, participants were asked "Would you stop the social interaction at this point?" (answered by "Yes" or "No"). Lack of risk perception was operationally defined as how long the participant stayed in the date-rape scenario.
- The scenario used in the present example began with flirtation and consensual kissing, which was followed by unwanted touching and petting, verbal coercion, physical coercion, and ended in rape.
- It includes several instances in which the male perpetrator apologized, as well as instances in which the female victim attempted to repair the relationship by suggesting alternatives to what the perpetrator wants (e.g., to kiss without petting).
- Our independent variable was General Sexual Trauma, our Mediator was AUDIT scores, and our criterion variable was Risk Perception using our Ejection Point variable.

## Results and Tables

Figure 1  
Mediation Relationship



\*\*  $p < .00$  and \*  $p < .05$   
Note: AUDIT = Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test.

- A regression analysis was utilized in order to test our hypothesis which was that AUDIT scores mediate the effect of General Sexual Trauma on Ejection Point (risk perception).
- Step 1 of the mediation model showed that the regression of Ejection Point scores on General Sexual Trauma, ignoring the mediator, was significant:  $b = .511$ ,  $SE = .201$ ,  $p = .011$ .
- Step 2 showed that the regression of the mediator, AUDIT scores, on General Sexual Trauma, was also significant,  $b = 3.544$ ,  $SE = .299$ ,  $p = .000$ . These results support the mediation hypothesis.
- Step 3 found that in the regression of Ejection Point scores on General Sexual Trauma and the Mediator, AUDIT, General Sexual Trauma was no longer a significant predictor,  $b = -.019$ ,  $SE = .209$ , non-significant. In this analysis AUDIT scores did contribute ( $b$  weight of  $AUDIT = .151$ ,  $SE = .020$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This is consistent with the mediation hypothesis.
- Approximately 5.6% of the variance in Ejection Point was accounted for ( $R^2 = .056$ ).

Table 1  
Linear Regressions from Mediation Analyses

	B	SE	$\beta$	$R^2$	p
Step 1: The regression of the criterion, Ejection Point, on General Sexual Trauma					
General Sexual Trauma	.511*	.201	.078	.006	.011
Step 2: The regression of the Mediator, AUDIT scores, on General Sexual Trauma					
General Sexual Trauma	3.544**	.299	.340	.115	.000
Step 3: The Regression of Ejection Point on General Sexual Trauma and the Mediator, AUDIT scores					
General Sexual Trauma	-.019	.209	-.003	.056	.000
AUDIT					

\*\*  $p < .00$  and \*  $p < .05$   
Note: AUDIT = Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test.

## Conclusions

- Our data demonstrate that AUDIT scores mediate the relationship between General Sexual Trauma and Ejection Point.
- This suggests that problematic drinking explains the relationship between Sexual Trauma and risk perception.
- Our findings support the self-medication hypothesis which suggests that sexual trauma victims self-medicate using alcohol, impacting their ability to detect risk in a sexual situation.
- These findings add to the growing body of literature that victims are being re-victimized due to problematic coping mechanisms.
- These data are consistent with prior literature associating victims with greater likelihood for alcohol abuse (Miranda, Meyers & Long 2002).
- One study showed that emotional dysregulation was underlying alcohol coping by victims and that victims with increased emotional dysregulation were at a greater likelihood at being revictimized (Messman-Moore, Ward & Zerubavel, 2013).
- Further research should explore specific types of sexual trauma and the differences in both coping and reactions by victims from the trauma.
- The body of research is divided between childhood sexual victimization and adult victimization.
- Future research will focus on the extent to which indirect effects of AUDIT scores mediate the relationship between General Sexual Trauma and Risk Perception
- Knowledge regarding victimization and problematic drinking are solidifying and preventative measures could emerge from understanding the specifics of these associations.

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