

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park

Possible Risk Factors Among Baltimore City Narcotic Addicts: Parental Alcohol Abuse, Criminal Activity, and Separation Before Age 11

According to the results of a study of narcotic addicts in Baltimore City, children exposed to family deviance and/or disruption are more likely to become addicted than children who are not exposed. Between July 1986 and April 1991, narcotic addicts, peer controls, and community controls[¶] were interviewed about various factors considered likely to predispose narcotic addiction, including family deviance and disruption of the family structure. Addicts were more likely than members of both control groups to report the occurrence of family deviance and disruption prior to age 11. The specific types of deviance or disruption found to be significantly ($p \leq .01$) related to group membership (addicts, peer controls, or community controls) are shown in the table below. The authors conclude that “although family factors are not the only contributors to deviant behavior, the present findings suggest that preventive drug abuse interventions need to include components designed to reduce the adverse effects of an unhealthy family environment” (p. 112).

Percentage of Subjects Reporting the Occurrence of Family Deviance/Disruption Before Age 11

Type of Family Deviance/Disruption	Community		
	Addicts (n=255)	Peer Controls (n=147)	Controls (n=199)
Parents Separated/Divorced	32%	14%	15%
Parents Never Married/Lived Together	9%	3%	4%
Alcohol Abuse by Mother	9%	5%	2%
Criminal Activity by Father	6%	0.7%	0.5%

[¶]Narcotic addict: an individual who had used opiates on 4 days or more per week for at least a month. Peer controls: never-addicted individuals who lived in the same neighborhood and were associates of the addicts at age 11.

Community controls: never-addicted individuals who lived in the same neighborhood and were not associates of the addicts at age 11.

SOURCE: David N. Nurco et al., “Early family adversity as a precursor to narcotic addiction,” *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 1996, 43:103-113. For more information, contact Dr. Nurco at 410-837-3977.

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