

# Adverse Childhood Experiences and Alcohol Use Among Justice-Involved Youth

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## Introduction

### Background

- Research indicates significant associations exist between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and a wide variety of negative outcomes later in life (Chapman et al., 2004; Anda et al., 2006; Felitti et al., 2019).
- This is especially true regarding long-term substance abuse and risk for substance abuse disorder (Choi et al., 2017; Dube et al., 2002).
- Adults who retrospectively reported more ACEs were more likely to report problematic alcohol use (Felitti et al., 2019).
- Justice-involved youth have significantly higher ACEs when compared to peers of the same age which puts them at a greater risk for substance misuse (Ford et al., 2008; Baglivio et al., 2014).
- For justice-involved youth substance use is also a significant predictor of recidivism (Scott & Brown, 2018).
- In fact, 3 years after being released from detention justice-involved youth with substance use disorders had greater odds of violence (Elkington et al., 2015).

### Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to examine differences regarding the total score of the ACE Questionnaire (Dube et al., 2003) and alcohol use as measured by the Substance Use Questionnaire (SUQ).
- We hypothesized significant differences in overall ACE scores between youth who endorsed alcohol use those who denied alcohol use.

## Method

### Participants

- The sample consists of justice-involved youth that were detained at the time data was collected.
- Participants included 25 (64% male) justice-involved youth ages 13-17 years ( $M = 15.38$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ).
- Most participants identified as Hispanic/Latino (48%), African American (24%), Caucasian (8%), or other (20%).

### Measures

- Demographic Questionnaire
- Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire
- Substance Use Questionnaire (SUQ) which has been adapted from other validated substance use assessments.

## Method (continued)

### Procedure

- This data is part of a larger, ongoing project approved by the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board, Lubbock County Juvenile Justice Board, and the director of the detention center.
- Participants completed all measures in person while in detention.

## Results

### Main Analyses

- An independent samples t-test was run, and we found a nonsignificant difference between the youth who endorsed alcohol use ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 2.55$ ) and youth that did not endorse alcohol use ( $M = 3.33$ ;  $SD = 3.08$ );  $t(23) = 0.70$ ,  $p = 0.50$  and number of ACEs endorsed.
- Our hypothesis was not supported.

Table 1.  
Results of Independent Samples t-Test

Variable	n	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Alcohol Endorse	16	4.13	2.55	0.70	23	0.50	0.28
Alcohol Denied	9	3.33	3.08				

### Follow-Up Analyses

- Correlation results confirmed there was not a significant association between the total number of ACEs endorsed and alcohol usage.

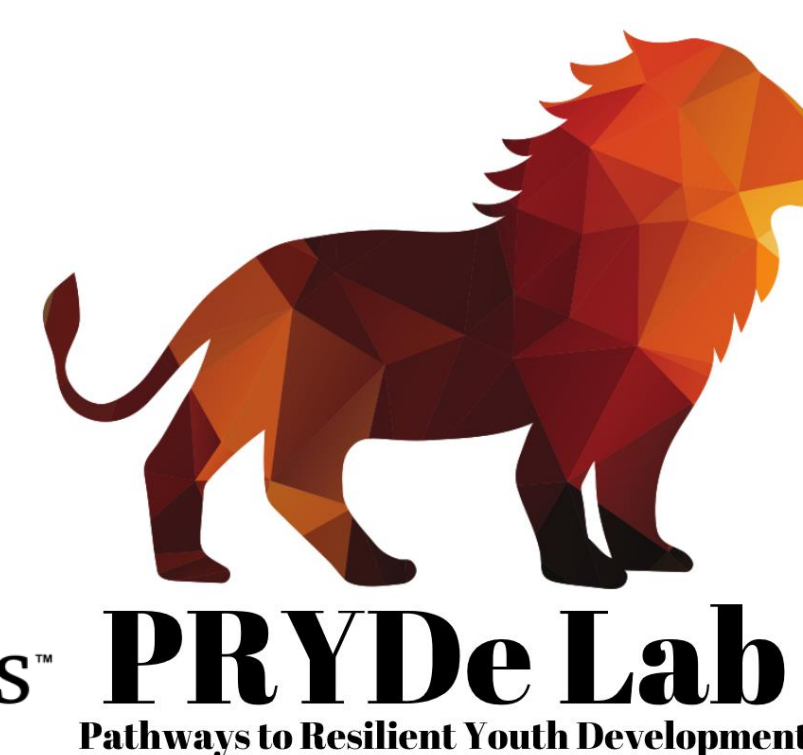
### Correlation

	ACE Total	Alcohol Use
ACE Total	1.00	
Alcohol Use	0.14	1.00



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## Discussion

- These results indicate justice-involved youth who have a history of alcohol use do not have significantly different ACE exposure than youth who have not ever used alcohol, according to youth self-report.
- This finding suggests ACE exposure may not be a specific risk factor for alcohol use among justice-involved youth.

### Limitations

- The small sample size and power could contribute to the nonsignificant results.
- The nonsignificant findings could be the result of other common risk factors among justice-involved youth.
- Both measures were youth self-report and it is possible youth did not accurately endorse a history of alcohol use or ACEs.

### Future Directions

- The results show that justice-involved youth, regardless of alcohol use, endorse multiple ACEs before the age of 18.
- Based on previous research, ACEs and substance use are strongly related, however more research is needed to understand what these factors entail for justice-involved youth longitudinally.
- These results highlight the need to further investigate common risk factors among justice-involved youth who endorse substance use to better understand what contributes to substance use among these youth.

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