**ORIGINAL ARTICLES** 

# Associations between drug/alcohol use and emotional abuse: Who perpetrates emotional abuse against Latina women?

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## ABSTRACT

Emotional abuse is the most prevalent form of violence against Latinas. We examined dimensions and characteristics of Latino mothers' and daughters' exposure to emotional abuse and the associations between emotional abuse and heavy alcohol use and illicit drug illicit substance abuse. This 5-year longitudinal study included 112 Latino mothers and 121 Latino daughters. Analyses included: chi-square test and logistic regression. The proportion of women who reported being emotionally abused at Wave 2 but who did not report any emotional abuse during Wave 1 (5 years total) was 21.2% for daughters and 14.3% for mothers. Among emotionally abused women, 33.3% of mothers and 36.1% of daughters were abused by 2 or more people. Almost half of the mothers (48.0%) were emotionally abused by their son/daughter; 36.1% of daughters were emotionally abused by their mother. Mothers who abused drugs were more likely to be emotionally abused (OR = 3.86; 95% CI = 1.32, 11.34). Our findings suggest that attention should be given to emotional abuse and its potential for leading to substance abuse among Latinas.

Key Words: Emotional abuse, Substance-related disorders, Latino, Mother/daughter, Substance abuse

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Emotional abuse is the most prevalent form of violence against Latina women–followed by physical and sexual abuse.<sup>[1–3]</sup> Emotional abuse occurs when a person verbally attacks another person with disrespect or fury (*e.g.*, criticism of others' appearance or personality, mockery, teasing, and swearing) that may generate psychological pain.<sup>[4]</sup> Emotional abuse carries with it negative social, physical, and emo-

tional consequences such as depression, hostility, and somatization<sup>[4]</sup> in addition to detrimental effects on women's gynecological, gastrointestinal, and central nervous systems.<sup>[5]</sup> Further, with chronic emotional abuse, women's risk for post-traumatic disorders is heightened,<sup>[6]</sup>which results in their decreased ability to recognize risky health behaviors (*e.g.*, HIV sexual risk behaviors) and symptoms of health problems.<sup>[7]</sup>

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The prevalence of illicit drug abuse among the U.S. Latino population increased from 6.2% in 2008 to 8.3% in 2012.<sup>[8]</sup> Among Latinos, a 2012 national survey revealed that current alcohol use (any amount) and current binge (five drinks or more in one occasion) alcohol drinking were 41.8% and 23.2%, respectively, for those 12 years and older.<sup>[8]</sup> The high prevalence of emotional abuse of women in conjunction with drug and alcohol abuse in Latinos<sup>[9]</sup> highlight the need for studies that investigate associations between illicit substance abuse/heavy alcohol use and emotional abuse. In addition, except for intimate partner violence (IPV), the emotional abuse literature is not clear regarding perpetrators against Latinas. It is also important to examine if older Latinas experience emotional abuse from persons other than their partners. In short, compared to other aging populations, Latinas are twice as likely to live with family members, and adult daughters are the usual caretakers for aging family members.<sup>[10]</sup> Major conflicts are likely to arise between older Latino family members who value familismo-the expectation that family members will support and assist one another-and the younger family members who strive for the American virtues of individualism and autonomy.<sup>[11]</sup> Consequently, emotional abuse between mothers and daughters, both of whom are in somewhat vulnerable positions, could be prevalent. We suspect that mothers and daughters emotionally abuse one another. However, no previous studies have explored emotional abuse of Latinas by persons other than their husbands/significant others; hence the focus of the current study.

It is additionally not known whether different social actors perpetrate emotional abuse against older versus younger Latina women. Because illicit substance and alcohol use and emotional abuse are both prevalent in Latinos,<sup>[12]</sup> it is important to study if Latina women suffer additional abuse by other Latino family members and their co-workers, friends, or acquaintances. In this context, the aims of this study were to determine: (AIM 1) whether the proportion of women who reported being emotionally abused at Wave 2 but who did not report any emotional abuse during Wave 1 varies between older and younger Latinas; (AIM 2) who are the perpetrators of emotional abuse against adult and older Latinas; (AIM 3) whether women are emotionally abused by different social actors during the same period of time; and (AIM 4) whether illicit substance abuse and heavy alcohol use are significantly associated with emotional abuse.

## 2. METHODS

Data for the present analyses were taken from a study of longitudinal intergenerational transmission of drug use between Latina mothers and daughters. Data were collected between 2005 and 2007 (Wave 1) and between 2010 and 2011 (Wave 2). At Wave 1, a non-clinical community based sample (N = 158) of Latina mother and daughter dyads were recruited using a snowball sampling technique.<sup>[13]</sup> The sample includes Latinas with and without substance use disorders. Given the fairly low representation of drug and alcohol abusers in the general population, an oversampling of substance abusing mothers and daughters was performed at Wave 1. Non-abusing Latinas were recruited to participate in the study through community health fairs, health clinics, radio announcements on local Spanish-language stations, and advertisements on local television channels. Substance abusing participants were recruited through substance abuse support groups such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and by advertising in a local alternative newspaper, on an FM radio station, and through announcements posted at local drug court programs. The inclusion criteria were: (a) consenting to participate; (b) being 18 years of age or older; (c) self-identifying as Latina; (d) living in Miami-Dade County, Florida; and (e) willingness to be contacted for follow-up. Women who were enrolled in a drug treatment program during the 12 months prior to the interview were excluded from the study. Trained bilingual female interviewers administered a 1-1.5 hour-long face-to-face interview in participants' homes or in public places using a paper and pencil format at Wave 1 and Computer Assisted Personal Interview software (CAPI) at Wave 2. The study was approved by, and conducted in compliance with, the Institutional Review Board at a major public university in South Florida.

## 2.1 Measures

## 2.1.1 Exposure to emotional abuse

During the past 30 days (Waves 1 and 2), during the past 5 years (Wave 2) and throughout the entire lifetime (Wave 1) was assessed using a subsection of the Addition Severity Index.<sup>[14]</sup> The first section asked participants to identify if they have had close, long lasting, personal relationships with a list of social actors. The second section asked participants to report the occurrence of significant periods of time when they have experienced serious problems getting along with these people. Then, the participants were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to the following question: "Did any of these people (mother, father, brother/sister, sexual partner/spouse, son, daughter, other significant family members, close friends, neighbors, and/or co-workers) mentioned in the last few questions abuse you emotionally, meaning, make you feel bad through harsh words; does not allow you to go out or meet with certain friends; and/or, break things in the house?" Those who answered "yes" were asked to identify who was/were the perpetrator(s). This measurement has been previously used in studies on substance abuse and emotional

## abuse.[15,16]

## 2.1.2 Illicit substance abuse and non-medical use of prescription medication

We used the *Drug Use Frequency measure* (DUF)<sup>[17]</sup> to assess the frequency of each separate illicit drug such as cannabis, cocaine, PCP, heroin, inhalants, and hallucinogens during the 12 months prior to assessment at each of the two time points. Frequency of use of non-medical use of prescription medication (*i.e.*, sedatives, hypnotics or tranquilizers, stimulants, or opioids) was also assessed using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never uses) to 8 (uses every day). Past research indicates that DUF scores correlate closely with collateral reports of other drug and alcohol use measures.<sup>[18]</sup>

#### 2.1.3 Heavy alcohol use

Participants' frequency of heavy alcohol use during the 12 months prior to assessment was assessed using items from the Health and Daily Living Form.<sup>[19]</sup> The form includes separate questions for each of three types of alcohol: beer, hard liquor, and wine. Items in this scale included questions such as, "How often did you drink beer during the last 12 months?" The answer in the 8-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (never uses) to 8 (uses every day). Heavy alcohol use was defined as meeting at least one of the following four criteria: (a) four to five glasses of wine or more in one occasion at least once a month; (b) three to four cans/bottles of beer or more in one occasion at least once a month; (c) three to four drinks or more in one occasion with 4 oz. of alcohol in each drink at least once a month; and/or (d) five to seven drinks or more in one occasion with 2 oz. of alcohol in each drink at least once a month.<sup>[9]</sup>

## 2.1.4 Socio-demographic variables

Socio-demographic variables include age, education, personal income, and country of birth.

#### 2.2 Statistical analysis

Chi-square and ANOVA tests were used to outline the characteristics of the sample at Wave 1 and Wave 2 and are described as proportions for categorical variables and as means and standard deviations (*SD*) for continuous variables. We calculated the proportion of women who reported being emotionally abused at Wave 2 but did not report any emotional abuse during Wave 1 (baseline). Using a subsample including women who reported being emotionally abused between Wave 1 and Wave 2, descriptive statistics were performed to assess frequency of mothers' and daughters' exposure to emotional abuse perpetrated by more than one social actor at the same time as well as by each specific social actor (mother, father, brother/sister, husband/sexual

partner, son/daughter, other family members, close friends, neighbors, and co-workers). Logistic regressions were used to identify significant associations between the abuse of illicit substances and heavy alcohol use with exposure to emotional abuse during the past five years. Pearson's correlation was used to assess potential multicollinearity between each pair of socio-demographic variables. Further bivariate logistic regression tested whether socio-demographic characteristics were associated with being exposed to emotional abuse. Country of birth, age in Wave 2, and education in Wave 2 were included in the following logistic regression models because they were not highly correlated with other sociodemographic variables and because they were associated with being exposed to emotional abuse. Substance abuse at sample configuration was also included in the following separate logistic regression models that tested the association between: (1) mothers' illicit substance abuse status and being a mother who was emotionally abused; (2) mothers' heavy alcohol use status and being a mother who was emotionally abused; (3) daughters' illicit substance abuse status and being a daughter who was emotionally abused; and (4) daughters' heavy alcohol use status and being a daughter who was emotionally abused. We used adjusted odds ratio and 95% confidence interval to estimate the associations between the exposure and the outcome. We performed analyses using SPSS 20.20

## **3. RESULTS**

This study included 112 mothers and 121 daughters. Compared to mothers, a higher percentage of daughters were never married [39.7% (48/121) *vs.* 6.2% (7/112)], and a lower percentage were divorced [12.4% (15/121) *vs.* 34.8% (39/112)] (see Table 1). The majority of mothers [82.1% (92/112)] and slightly more than half of the daughters [51.2% (62/121)] were non-U.S. born. The mean age in years at Wave 1 was 26.82 and 52.7 for daughters and mothers, respectively.

A significantly higher proportion of daughters compared to mothers were heavy alcohol users at Wave 1 [56.2% (68/121) *vs.* 36.6% (41/112); p < .001] and Wave 2 [20.6% (48/121) *vs.* 18.8% (21/112); p < .001]. A significantly higher proportion of daughters compared to mothers abused illicit substances at Wave 1 [55.8% (67/120) *vs.* 31.2% (35/112); p < .01] but not at Wave 2 [29.1% (34/117) *vs.* 25.5% (28/110); p = .54]. There were no significant differences in the exposure to emotional abuse between mothers and daughters neither at Wave 1 [19.6% (22/112) *vs.* 29.8% (36/121)] nor at Wave 2 [13.4% (15/112) *vs.* 19.0% (23/121)].

## Table 1. Socio-demographic summary

	Mothers (n =	112)	Daughters (n	= 121)	All (n = 233)		χ² Test
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Marital Status (Wave 1)							
Married	23	20.5	26	21.5	49	21.0	
Remarried	6	5.4	1	0.8	7	3.0	
Widowed	15	13.4	0	0.0	15	6.4	67.74 (df = 6)
Separated	15	13.4	10	8.3	25	10.7	p-value < .001
Divorced	39	34.8	15	12.4	54	23.2	<i>p</i> -value < .001
Never Married	7	6.2	48	39.7	55	23.6	
Living with a partner	7	6.2	21	17.4	28	12.0	
Country of Origin							
U.S. Born	20	17.9	59	48.8	79	33.9	24.79 (df = 1)
Non-U.S. Born	92	82.1	62	51.2	154	66.1	$p$ -value $\leq .001$
Mean age (Wave 1) in years (standard	52.74 (10.34)		26.82 (8.93)		39.28 (16.15)		421.60 (df = 1)
deviation)	02.7 1 (10.5 1)		20.02 (0.95)		5).20 (10.10)		<i>p</i> < .001
Education (Wave 1)							
Less than high school	42	37.5	37	30.6	79	33.9	
High school diploma	16	14.3	21	17.4	37	15.9	
High school equivalency diploma (G.E.D)	3	2.7	3	2.5	6	2.6	7.62 (df = 6)
High school for adults	2	1.8	1	0.8	3	1.3	p-value = .27
Some training/college after high school	27	24.1	45	37.2	72	30.9	
Bachelor's degree	19	17.0	11	9.1	30	12.9	
Graduate/Professional Studies	3	2.7	3	2.5	6	2.6	
Education (Wave 2)							
Less than high school	37	33.0	26	21.5	63	27.0	
High school diploma	11	9.8	16	13.2	27	11.6	
High school equivalency diploma (G.E.D)	4	3.6	4	3.3	8	3.4	
High school for adults	2	1.8	1	0.8	3	1.3	8.97 (df = 8)
Some training/college after high school	24	21.4	39	32.2	63	27.0	p-value = .35
Some training without completing high school	3	2.7	1	0.8	4	1.7	
Bachelor's degree	23	20.5	24	19.8	47	20.2	
Graduate/Professional Studies	7	6.2	10	8.3	17	7.3	
Other	1	0.9	0	0.0	1	0.4	
Exposed to emotional abuse (Wave 1)							
Yes	22	19.6	36	29.8	58	24.9	3.18 (df = 1)
No	90	80.4	85	70.2	175	75.1	p-value = .08
Exposed to emotional abuse (Wave 2)		00.1		,		,	
Yes	15	13.4	23	19.0	38	16.3	1.34 (df = 18)
No	97	86.6	25 98	81.0	195	83.7	p-value = .25
INU	71	00.0	70	01.0	175	03.7	P value .25





#### **3.1** Exposure to emotional abuse

Among women who were never exposed to emotional abuse at Wave 1, 17.8% reported being emotionally abused 5 years later (Wave 2). The proportion of women who reported being emotionally abused at Wave 2 but who did not report any emotional abuse during Wave 1 was higher for daughters than for mothers (21.2% vs. 14.3%). Among women who reported previous and current emotional abuse at Wave 1, 62.9% reported ongoing emotional abuse from Wave 1 to Wave 2. This percentage was higher for daughters than for mothers (69.0% vs. 53.6%).

 Table 2. Associations between substance abuse and heavy alcohol use with emotional abuse

	Latino mothers emotionally abused by any person <sup>*,#</sup>				
	O.R.	95% CI	Р		
Illicit Substance Abuse					
Mother abuses illicit substances	3.86	(1.32, 11.34)	.014		
Mother does not abuse illicit substances	1.00				
Heavy Alcohol Use					
Mother is a heavy alcohol user	0.86	(0.24, 3.03)	.811		
Mother is not a heavy alcohol user	1.00				
	Latino adult daughters				
	emotionally abused by				
	any person <sup>*,#</sup>				
	O.R.	95% CI	Р		
Illicit Substance Abuse					
Daughter abuses illicit substances	1.40	(0.63, 3.14)	.410		
Daughter does not abuse illicit	1.00				
substances	1.00				
Heavy Alcohol Use					
Daughter is a heavy alcohol user	1.33	(0.64, 2.79)	.444		
Daughter is not a heavy alcohol user	1.00				

\* Emotional abuse perpetrated by their mother, father, brother/sister, sexual partner/spouse, children (son/daughter), other significant family members, close friends, neighbors, and/or co-workers;

# Models adjusted for country of birth, age in Wave 2, education in Wave 2 and substance abuse at sample configuration.

#### 3.2 Who are the perpetrators of emotional abuse?

Among mothers who reported new or ongoing emotional abuse between Wave 1 and Wave 2, 66.7% were abused by one person, 26.2% by two people, and 7.1% by four people. Among daughters who reported new or ongoing emotional abuse between Wave 1 and Wave 2, 63.9% were abused by one person, 19.7% by two people, 13.1% by three people, and 3.3% by four people. Almost half of the mothers reported that the perpetrator was their son/daughter (48%) or husband/sexual partner (32%); for the daughters, more than half reported being emotionally abused by their husband/sexual partner (52.8%) or mother (36.1%) (see Figure 1).

## **3.3** The association between illicit substance abuse/heavy alcohol use and emotional abuse

Mothers who abused illicit substances were more likely to be emotionally abused (OR = 3.86; 95% CI = 1.32, 11.34, see Table 2).

## 4. DISCUSSION

Our findings revealed that a high proportion of women experienced onset of emotional abuse during a five-year period and a high period prevalence of ongoing emotional abuse in our sample of Latina women. Unique to our study, the inclusion of two generations of adult Latina women indicates that the proportion of women in the sample who reported being emotionally abused at Wave 2 but did not report any emotional abuse during Wave 1 was different between older and younger Latinas. Similar to findings from previous studies,<sup>[21,22]</sup> we found that the younger Latinas were more likely to report being emotionally abused than the older Latina women. More than half of the women who reported current or previous emotional abuse at Wave 1 reported ongoing emotional abuse at Wave 2 suggesting that emotional abuse is chronic in nature among Latina women. This percentage was higher for daughters than for mothers (69.0% vs. 53.6% respectively) suggesting, perhaps, that victimization of emotional abuse subsides as Latina women age or, perhaps that cultural differences in emotional abuse recognition result in underreporting of abuse in the older Latinas.

Among participants who reported being emotionally abused, one third of mothers and half of the daughters reported the perpetrator to be their husband/partners, supporting existent literature on the high prevalence of intimate partner violence among Latinas. The high prevalence of maternal emotional abuse from adult Latina daughters and vice versa is a new area of concern especially taking into account the major role that familial support plays in the Latino culture. Underlying reasons for abuse, such as substance use disorders within the family, should be explored further. Another key contribution to the literature is that participants reported being emotionally abused by more than one person, including family members, friends, or co-workers. Ethnographic research should be conducted to better understand how this emotional abuse manifests and whether the women recognize different types of actions as abuse.

In a systematic review by Capaldi *et al.*,<sup>[23]</sup> the authors concluded that there is some evidence to support the positive association between alcohol use and intimate partner violence, but it was of a low magnitude and not found consistently. On the other hand, Capaldi *et al.*<sup>[23]</sup> found evidence of a stronger association between drug use and IPV. A study by Caetano *et al.*<sup>[24]</sup> found that alcohol did not predict male to female partner abuse. Testa, Livingston, & Leonard found that women's heavy drinking did not increase the risk of being abused by their male partner in ongoing or new relationships, but marijuana and hard drug use increased the odds for becoming a victim in new relationships.<sup>[25]</sup> Accordingly, consistent with previous work, our results revealed an association between illicit substance abuse and being emotionally abused but not between heavy alcohol use and being emotionally abused. For the Latino mothers, the drug-abusers experienced higher odds of being emotionally abused. For the Latino daughters, drug abuse was not associated with emotional abuse.

Interpretation of our findings should be tempered by several considerations. This study used a single measure for self-reporting exposure to emotional abuse. Further work should include the use of complementary assessment tools, semi-structured and comprehensive interviews, clinicians' observations, and behavioral functional analysis of violent acts to expand our understanding of the patterns, characteristics, and severity of emotional abuse experienced by Latinas.<sup>[1]</sup> This study did not address participants' history of exposure to child abuse and/or account for witnessing abuse among family members-factors that could have potentially influenced children to become abusers or victims as adults.<sup>[26,27]</sup>

While this study addresses the potential confounding roles of country of origin, age, and education, we were not able to adjust for additional contextual characteristics (e.g., acculturation, stress), family factors (e.g., gender role, marianismo levels), peer associations and influence (e.g., association with deviant peers; social and emotional support), psychological and behavioral factors (e.g., conduct problems/antisocial behaviors, personality disorder, depression, suicide attempts, self-esteem), and cognitive factors (hostile attributes, attitudes, and beliefs).<sup>[23]</sup> This study did not adjust for substance abuse and heavy alcohol use in the household, factors that can potentially be correlated with substance abuse and alcohol use among offspring. The oversampling of dyads in which both mothers and daughters were substance users may have influenced the inclusion of more cases of women exposed to emotional abuse. Findings from this study may not be generalizable to other Latino subgroups or other race/ethnic groups. Another limitation is that we did not examine the risk of being emotionally abused in Wave 2 among those women who were already abusing substances or using alcohol in Wave 1.

The proportion of women in the sample who reported being emotionally abused should be interpreted cautiously as different factors could have influenced reporting of emotional abuse. Underreporting could be associated with social desirability bias, recall bias, and the possibility that a mother 100 and her daughter may have discussed their responses among themselves. Due to *familism*, the cultural value stipulating that a woman must be loyal and protect her family, Latinas may have been reluctant to report emotional abuse. Additionally, Latinas may be further reluctant to report emotional abuse due to fear that extended family members will retaliate against their children and fear of deportation of their family members and themselves.<sup>[1]</sup> Researchers suggest that a lower proportion of Latina women, in comparison to their Latino male partners, report being abused by spouses.<sup>[28, 29]</sup> Another important limitation is that this study did not assess whether emotional abuse was a consequence of illicit substance abuse.

This is one of the few studies examining emotional abuse among U.S. and non-U.S. born Latino mothers and daughters primarily from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. As the Latino community continues to grow, firstgeneration Latinos increasingly comprise a large proportion (37.4%) of the Latino community in the United States.<sup>[30]</sup> Therefore, it is important to develop a better understanding of the adult and older Latino mental health issues in this population.<sup>[31]</sup> Future studies should expand on our study by comparing biological and non-biological mothers/daughter dyads. Finally, the intersection between emotional, physical, and sexual abuse should be studied because although emotional abuse is the most prevalent, victims of abuse are often exposed to more than one type of violence.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study found that emotional abuse is prevalent in our sample of Latinas and that—when examining Latinas' exposure to emotional abuse—the focus should not only be directed at husbands/partners, but also at the violence perpetrated by other family members and social actors (*e.g.*, daughters, sons, and mothers). Our findings suggest that women's illicit substance abuse is associated with exposure to emotional abuse. This study lays a foundation for future research examining emotional abuse from other family members and social actors and, factors that may exacerbate risk for emotional abuse.

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