

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Problematic Alcohol Use: With Friendship Quality as a Moderator

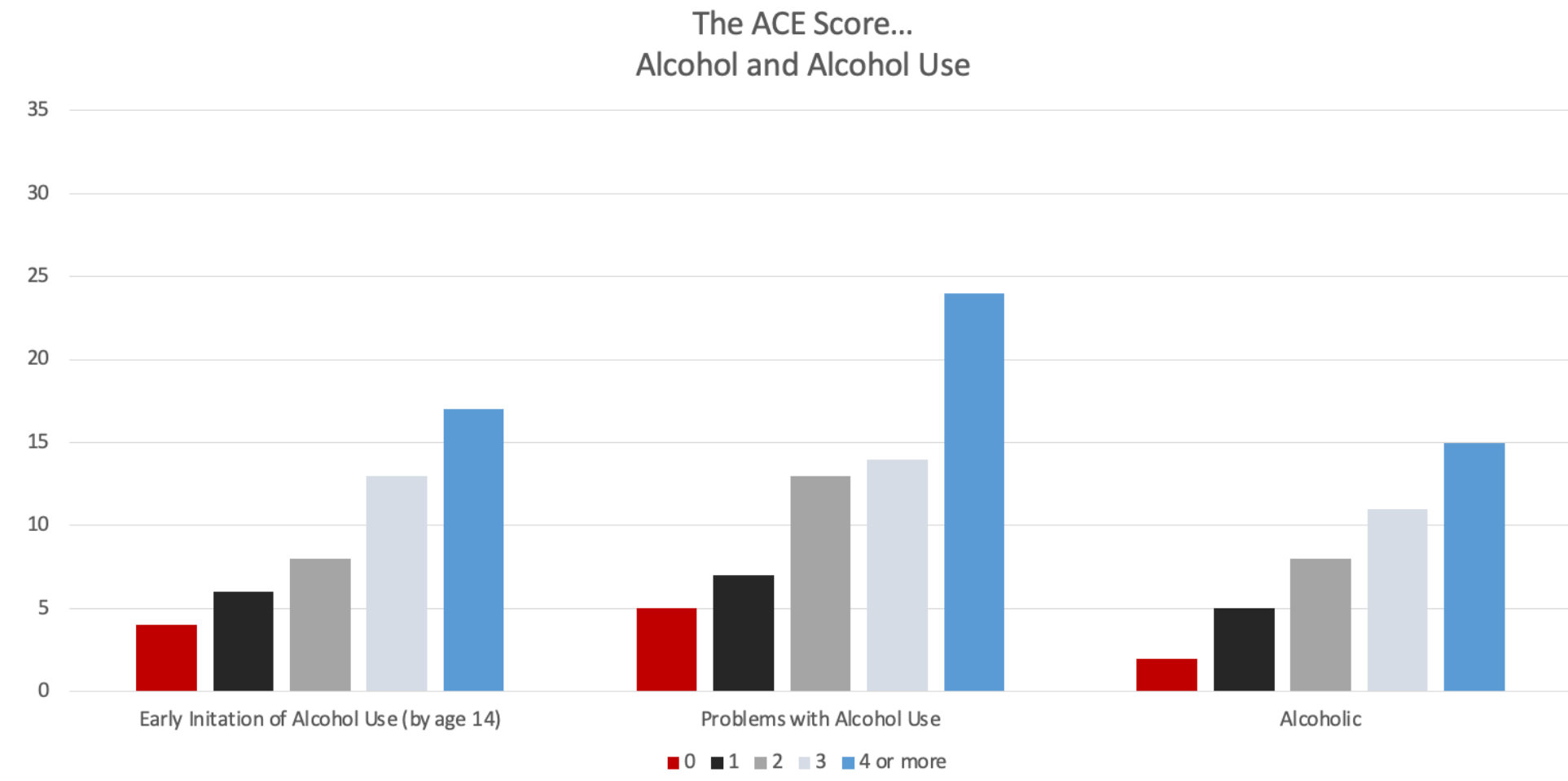
Jessica Hausmann,
Estephan A. Hakim, M.A., & Kristina L. McDonald, Ph.D.
The University of Alabama

ABSTRACT

- The current study examined if Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is related to problematic alcohol use (PAU) and if this association varies at different levels of friendship quality.
- A sample of 390 young adults (53.1% male; 46.9 % female; ranging in age from 18-25 years old) were recruited from an undergraduate subject pool and Amazon MTurk.
- Participants completed measures of childhood adverse experiences, friendship quality, and alcohol use online.
- A regression analysis was performed to analyze how Adverse Childhood Experiences can affect problematic alcohol use at different levels of friendship quality.
- Results indicated that Adverse Childhood Experiences were a significant predictor of problematic alcohol use. However, this effect was moderated by gender and friendship quality.
- For women, more childhood trauma was associated with more problematic drinking, especially for those who reported lower friendship quality.
- For men, childhood trauma was more predictive of problematic drinking and this association was strongest when friendship quality was high.

INTRODUCTION

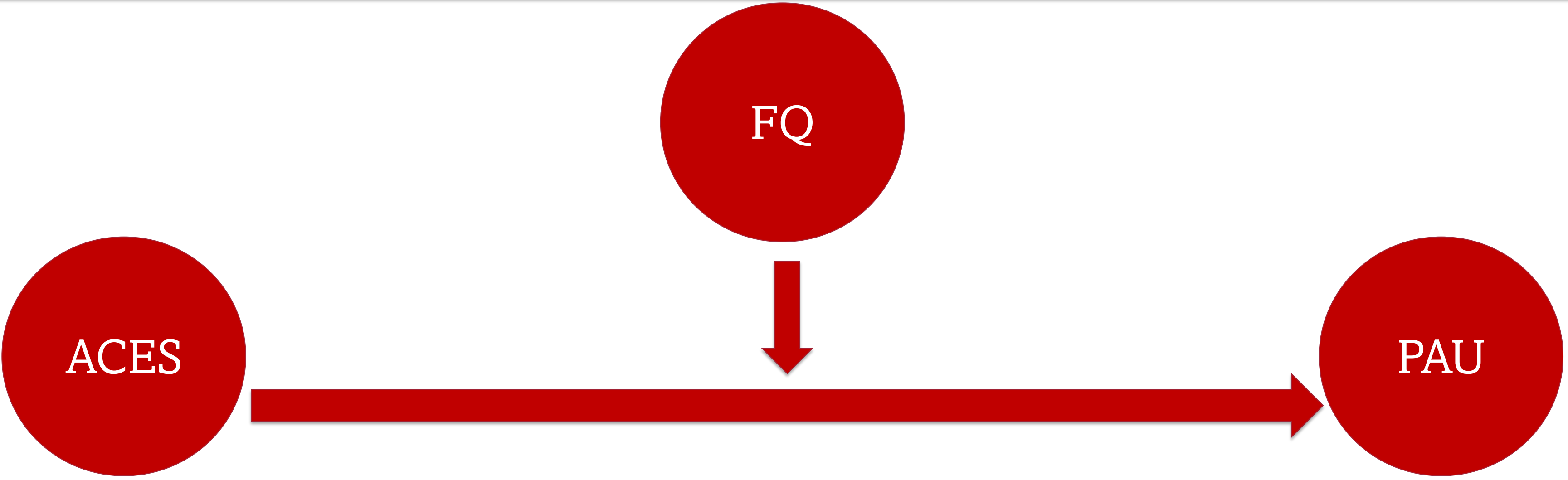
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) occur due to exposure in childhood to parental incarceration, parental psychiatric disorders, sexual, verbal, emotional, physical, and substance abuse and/or experiencing neglect or household dysfunction.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences have been seen to increase the likelihood of early drug and alcohol initiation (Dube et al., 2006; Macleod et al., 2008).



Source: Robert Anda, MD, MS, "The Health and Social Impact of Growing Up With Alcohol Abuse and Related Adverse Childhood Experiences: The Human and Economic Costs of the Status Quo," http://celebratingfamilies.net/PDF/RobertAnda_article.pdf

- Adverse childhood experiences may be linked to problematic alcohol use in young adulthood.
- However, social supports, such as friendships, have been shown to be a protective factor for the onset of alcohol use disorders (Groh et al., 2007; Wills & Ainette, 2012).
- On the other hand, a lack of social support, such as friendships, may exacerbate problematic alcohol use (Mackinnon, 2017).
- This study examined how the total number of adverse childhood experiences one experiences could relate to problematic alcohol use in early adulthood, while also examining the role of friendship quality in this association.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL



METHODS

Participants:

- Participants were 390 young adults (46.9% women, 53.1% men), aged 18-25 ($M = 22.51$, $SD = 2.43$), recruited from the University of Alabama (61%) and Amazon MTurk (39%).

Measures:

- Demographic variables: Participants reported their age, gender, ethnicity, SES, race.
- Participants responded to 10 questions measuring their traumatic childhood experiences via the *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)* survey (Felitti et al., 1998)
 - Example item: "Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinking or alcoholic or who used street drugs?"
- Participants responded to 10 questions measuring their problematic alcohol use via the *Alcohol Use Identification Test (AUDIT)* (Saunders et al., 1993) was presented in a randomized order for each participant.
 - Example item: "How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when drinking?"
 - The scale was internally reliable ($\alpha = .96$).
- Participants responded to 6 subscales measuring their positive friendship quality and one subscale measuring their negative friendship quality via the *Friendship Quality Questionnaire (FQQ)* (Parker & Asher, 1993).
 - Example of the positive friendship quality items: "he/she makes me feel good about my ideas."
 - Example of the negative friendship quality items: "we fight a lot."
 - The scale was internally reliable ($\alpha = .91$).

FIGURE #1

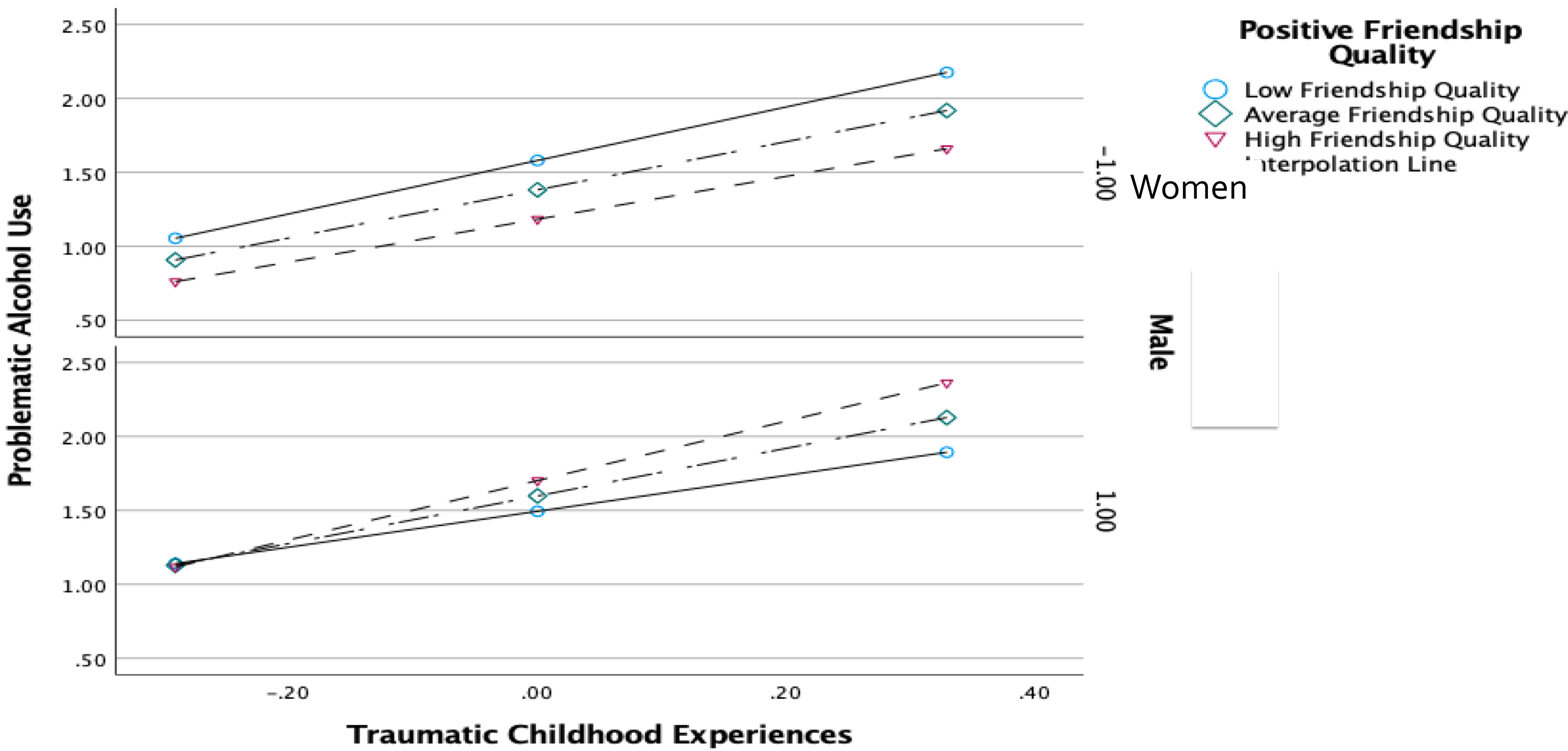


Figure 1. The association of Adverse childhood experiences with problematic alcohol use is moderated by friendship quality.

RESULTS

- T-tests indicated that men reported more problematic alcohol use, and adverse childhood experiences.
- Correlations indicated that ACEs were positively related to problematic drinking ($r = .59$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with friendship quality ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$).
- Friendship quality was negatively related to problematic drinking, but Fisher's r-to-z transformations revealed that this correlation differed for men and women ($z = 3.29$, $p < .001$). The correlation was significantly negative for women ($r = -.26$, $p < .001$) but not for men ($r = .07$, $p < .001$).
- Next, a regression analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) in SPSS was conducted to examine our main hypotheses. There was a significant three-way interaction between ACEs, friendship quality, and gender.
- As seen in Figure 1, for men, simple slope analyses revealed that the effect of adverse childhood experiences on problematic drinking was stronger at high levels (+1 SD) of friendship quality ($b = 2.89$, $SE = .28$, $p < .001$) than at low levels (-1 SD) of friendship quality ($b = 1.79$, $SE = .27$, $p < .001$).
- For women, adverse childhood experiences were more strongly associated with problematic alcohol use when they also reported low friendship quality ($b = 1.56$, $SE = .37$, $p < .001$) compared to when women reported higher friendship quality ($b = 1.23$, $SE = .28$, $p < .001$).

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- For young adult women, high quality friendships are protective and buffer them from the effects of ACEs on drinking. This is in line with previous research on the benefits of social support of adjustment (Groh et al., 2007; Wills & Ainette, 2012).
- For men, high-quality friendships may not be protective in terms of drinking. Perhaps this is because men feel more peer pressure from their male friends to drink than women (Leonard et al., 2000). Moreover, men may also be drinking more due to gender norms. Thus, men who conform to masculinity norms may be more motivated to drink because drinking is thought to be a masculine behavior (Peralta, 2007).
- Future research should consider differences amongst men's friendships and the centrality of drinking as a means of bonding between men.
- Future studies should try to diversify the to increase generalizability to other populations and try a longitudinal design to determine causality.
- Lastly, it may be interesting for future studies to examine how different categories of adverse childhood experiences are associated with friendship quality and problematic alcohol use. Different categories of adverse childhood experiences are associated with different outcomes, especially relating to friendship quality (Drapeau & Perry, 2004).

REFERENCES



Scan me!