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# Associations among impulsivity, adverse childhood experiences, and desirability of first sexual experience on substance use and sexual risk taking in justice-involved male adolescents

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**Long Abstract:**

Adolescent substance use is a serious public health problem (Johnston et al., 2016). Notably in adolescents, adverse childhood experiences including unwanted sexual experiences (Wills et al., 2001; Negriff, Schneiderman, & Trickett, 2015) and impulsive sensation seeking (impulsivity) (Donohew et al., 2000; Fernández-Artamendi et al., 2016) are linked to adolescent substance use and high-risk sexual behaviors. Research also suggests delinquent youths are particularly vulnerable to substance use disorders and sexually risky behaviors (Pinto et al., 2015). Given the health consequences of both prolonged substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors, identifying additional risk factors is critical to help inform interventions for high-risk youth.

Data from 314 males, recruited as part of a randomized clinical trial ( $N = 460$ ) evaluating a theory-based intervention to reduce sexually risky behaviors among justice-involved adolescents, were used for this analysis. Participants completed assessments of adverse childhood experiences, impulsivity, sociosexuality, substance use histories, alcohol/marijuana problems and dependency, and sexual histories. Structural equational modeling (SEM) was used to examine the influence of impulsivity, adverse childhood experiences, sociosexuality, and desirability of first sexual encounter on sexual risk taking and substance use. The final structural

equation model including desirability of first sexual encounter, adverse childhood experiences, and impulsivity as exogenous predictors revealed good model fit,  $\chi^2(28) = 37.758$ ,  $p = 0.1031$ , RMSEA = .033 (90% CI [.000–.058]), CFI = 0.976, WRMR = 0.678. More adverse childhood experiences were associated with higher levels of substance use ( $\beta = 0.206$ ,  $p = .002$ ), greater desirability of first sexual encounter was associated with more sexual risk taking ( $\beta = 0.246$ ,  $p = .007$ ), and higher impulsivity was associated with higher levels of substance use ( $\beta = 0.464$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and more sexual risk taking ( $\beta = 0.336$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Implications for future research and interventions for this vulnerable population are discussed.