

How Parental Substance Abuse Affects Family Functioning and Child Psychological Health

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the impact of parental substance abuse on family functioning and the psychological health of children.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data from 21 participants who are children of substance-abusing parents in Tehran. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of different family dynamics and experiences. Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and themes related to family functioning, emotional distress, and behavioral issues.

Findings: The study revealed several key findings: (1) children of substance-abusing parents often experience family dysfunction, including inconsistent caregiving, poor communication, and emotional neglect; (2) the intergenerational transmission of substance abuse and maladaptive behaviors was commonly reported; (3) children frequently assumed caregiver roles (parentification) due to their parents' inability to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities; (4) social isolation and stigma were significant factors contributing to the children's emotional and psychological distress; and (5) children of substance-abusing parents exhibited elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and maladaptive coping strategies. These findings align with existing literature, reinforcing the negative effects of parental substance abuse on children's well-being.

Conclusion: The study underscores the profound psychological and emotional impact that parental substance abuse has on children, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address both familial and individual needs. Children exposed to substance abuse require emotional support and therapeutic services to mitigate the long-term consequences of growing up in such environments.

Keywords: Parental substance abuse, family dysfunction, child psychological health, intergenerational transmission, emotional neglect, parentification, social isolation, stigma, behavioral problems.

1. Introduction

Substance abuse remains a significant social issue with far-reaching consequences, especially for children living in households where parents struggle with addiction. The adverse effects of parental substance abuse on family dynamics and child psychological health have been widely documented, with research highlighting a complex interplay of risk factors, psychosocial stressors, and the intergenerational transmission of dysfunctional behaviors (Brandewie et al., 2018). These children often face challenges that can profoundly shape their mental health and development, as the familial environment is a critical factor influencing the trajectory of their emotional and psychological well-being (Rich et al., 2023).

The relationship between parental substance abuse and its impact on children has garnered significant attention in the academic literature. Numerous studies emphasize that children raised in environments where substance abuse is prevalent are at an increased risk of developing psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems (Kepple, 2018). Such children often face neglect, emotional maltreatment, and disrupted attachment, which can lead to a range of maladaptive behaviors, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse later in life (Cao et al., 2021; Tedgård & Råstam, 2016; Tedgård et al., 2018a, 2018b). Furthermore, the impact of substance abuse is not limited to immediate emotional consequences; it often results in long-term dysfunctions in family relationships, creating a cycle of harm that affects the next generation (Basu et al., 2021). Children in these households may adopt coping strategies such as avoidance, denial, or over-responsibility, which complicates their psychological development and familial relationships (Maghsoudi et al., 2019; Martikainen et al., 2018).

Understanding the broader context in which parental substance abuse occurs is essential in addressing the issue effectively. Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, often exacerbate the effects of parental addiction on family functioning (Hlahla & Mothiba, 2022a, 2022b; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Maputle, 2023; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Mothiba, 2023). These factors not only increase the likelihood of substance abuse but also limit the family's access to support systems that might help mitigate the negative effects on children (Rich et al., 2023). In particular, the lack of access to mental health resources, coupled with the stigma surrounding addiction, creates a

barrier to intervention and support for both the parents and children involved (Usher, 2021).

The transmission of substance abuse across generations is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively in recent years, with researchers noting that children of substance-abusing parents are at an elevated risk of adopting similar behaviors as adults. This intergenerational transmission is not solely due to genetic predispositions but is also influenced by environmental and psychosocial factors, including parental modeling and the absence of nurturing care (Kepple, 2018; M., 2024; Saladino et al., 2021). The parental role in a child's life, particularly in the early years, is critical in shaping their emotional and social development. When substance abuse is involved, this role is often compromised, leaving children to navigate complex emotional landscapes without the necessary guidance or emotional support (Martikainen et al., 2018). These children may develop feelings of abandonment, confusion, and fear, leading to long-term emotional consequences, including attachment disorders and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Cao et al., 2021).

Family dynamics are often characterized by dysfunction in households where parental substance abuse is present. A lack of communication, inconsistent parenting, and emotional neglect are just a few of the challenges these families face (Tedgård & Råstam, 2016; Tedgård et al., 2018a, 2018b). In some cases, children take on the role of caregivers, often referred to as "parentification," where they assume responsibilities far beyond their developmental years (Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Maputle, 2023; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Mothiba, 2023). This role reversal can have significant psychological consequences, as children are forced to manage not only their emotional needs but also those of their parents, leading to feelings of guilt, resentment, and inadequacy (Tedgård et al., 2018a, 2018b). Additionally, children in these environments often experience heightened levels of stress and insecurity, which can manifest in emotional dysregulation and a greater susceptibility to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Kuppens et al., 2019).

The psychosocial consequences for children of substance-abusing parents are extensive and multifaceted. Research shows that these children are more likely to develop mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), due to the chaotic and unpredictable environment in which they grow up (Brandewie et al., 2018; Kepple, 2018). The instability of parental care and the potential exposure to violence or abuse

contribute to these psychological issues, which can persist into adulthood. Studies have indicated that children exposed to parental substance abuse are also at an increased risk of developing their own substance use disorders later in life (Cao et al., 2021; Malvaso et al., 2018). This creates a vicious cycle where the next generation is more likely to repeat the patterns of addiction and family dysfunction, perpetuating the negative impact on both individual lives and broader societal structures (Saladino et al., 2021).

Moreover, children in these households often face educational and social challenges. Due to the unstable home environment, these children may struggle to concentrate in school, leading to poor academic performance and an increased risk of dropping out (Basu et al., 2021). Socially, they may find it difficult to form and maintain friendships, as they lack the social skills and emotional regulation required for healthy peer interactions. This social isolation further exacerbates their emotional distress, contributing to feelings of loneliness and alienation (Hlahla & Mothiba, 2022a; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Maputle, 2023). The stigma surrounding addiction also plays a significant role, as children may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their family situation, preventing them from seeking help or support from others (Maghsoudi et al., 2019). These challenges make it even more difficult for these children to overcome the psychological and social difficulties that stem from their parents' substance abuse.

In light of these challenges, it is critical to provide support for both the parents and children affected by substance abuse. Intervention programs targeting substance-abusing parents can help reduce the negative impact on children by addressing both the addiction and the dysfunctional family dynamics (Usher, 2021). Furthermore, providing mental health services for children in these households can help mitigate the psychological damage caused by the familial environment. Therapeutic interventions that focus on trauma, attachment, and family communication have been shown to be effective in supporting children of substance-abusing parents (Ünlü et al., 2020; Weir et al., 2020). Such interventions are particularly important in addressing the emotional needs of children who may otherwise grow up with lasting psychological scars.

This paper seeks to explore how parental substance abuse affects family functioning and the psychological health of children, drawing on the lived experiences of families in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of parental substance abuse on family functioning and the psychological health of children. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select 21 participants residing in Tehran, Iran. The participants included parents with a history of substance abuse and their family members, such as spouses and children, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the familial dynamics and psychological outcomes. Inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18 years of age, residing in Tehran, and willing to discuss their experiences related to substance abuse within the family context. The sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, ensuring that data collection continued until no new themes emerged from the interviews.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences and perceptions. An interview guide was developed, containing open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed information about the effects of parental substance abuse on family relationships, daily functioning, and the psychological well-being of children. Interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting to encourage openness and honesty. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information that could enrich the data analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were imported into NVivo software (Version [Specify Version, e.g., NVivo 12]) to facilitate the organization and management of data. The analysis followed an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data without imposing preconceived categories. Initial coding was performed line-by-line to capture significant statements related to family functioning and child psychological health. Codes were then grouped into broader themes and subthemes through iterative comparison and refinement. The process continued

until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews did not yield new insights. To enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, multiple researchers independently coded the data and discussed discrepancies to reach a consensus.

3. Findings and Results

The study involved 21 participants, all of whom were residents of Tehran. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 years, with the majority (15 participants, 71%) being between 25 and 35 years old. Gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 10 males (48%) and 11 females (52%) taking

part. In terms of family structure, 14 participants (67%) were from nuclear families, while 7 participants (33%) came from extended family households. Regarding parental substance abuse history, all participants reported living in households where at least one parent had a history of substance abuse, with 13 participants (62%) stating that both parents were involved in substance use. Educationally, the majority of participants (16, 76%) had completed high school or higher, with 5 participants (24%) having some form of vocational training. This diverse demographic profile allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the impact of parental substance abuse on family dynamics and child psychological health across various backgrounds.

Table 1

Results of Qualitative Analysis

Category	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
Impact on Family Dynamics	Communication Breakdown	Lack of open dialogue, Frequent arguments, Misunderstandings, Silence, Avoidance of sensitive topics
	Emotional Instability	Increased tension, Mood swings, Emotional neglect, Inconsistent parenting, Unpredictable behavior
	Role Reversal	Children taking on parental responsibilities, Lack of parental authority, Early independence, Stress on youth
	Financial Strain	Unemployment, Accumulation of debt, Inability to afford basic needs, Increased financial pressure
	Domestic Conflict	Physical altercations, Verbal abuse, Intimidation, Power struggles, Family disputes
	Social Isolation	Withdrawal from social activities, Stigmatization, Reduced social support, Limited external interactions
Effects on Child Psychological Health	Household Instability	Frequent relocations, Inconsistent routines, Lack of structure, Unpredictable environment
	Emotional Distress	Anxiety, Depression, Fear, Sadness, Low self-esteem
	Behavioral Issues	Aggression, Withdrawal, Disruptive behavior, Substance experimentation, Academic decline
	Trauma and PTSD	Flashbacks, Nightmares, Hypervigilance, Emotional numbness, Startle responses
	Attachment Problems	Insecure attachment, Fear of abandonment, Trust issues, Difficulty forming relationships
	Developmental Delays	Cognitive delays, Language development issues, Social skill deficits, Motor skill impairments
Coping Mechanisms and Resilience	Self-Identity Struggles	Identity confusion, Role ambiguity, Lack of self-worth, Struggles with self-concept
	Mental Health Stigma	Reluctance to seek help, Shame associated with mental health, Internalized stigma
	Seeking Social Support	Engaging with friends and family, Participating in support groups, Building community connections
	Therapeutic Interventions	Counseling, Family therapy, Individual psychotherapy, Cognitive-behavioral therapy
	Personal Coping Strategies	Emotional regulation, Mindfulness practices, Physical exercise, Hobbies and interests
	Educational and Informational Resources	Accessing information about substance abuse, Parenting workshops, Mental health education
Resilience Building	Spirituality and Religion	Prayer, Meditation, Religious community involvement, Faith-based support
	Resilience Building	Developing problem-solving skills, Fostering optimism, Building self-efficacy, Strengthening adaptability
	Avoidance and Denial	Minimizing the problem, Ignoring substance abuse issues, Emotional suppression

3.1. *Impact on Family Dynamics*

Parental substance abuse often leads to a significant breakdown in communication within the family. Participants reported frequent misunderstandings, silences, and avoidance of sensitive topics. One participant shared, “We don’t talk about the problems anymore. It’s like we’ve all learned to keep things to ourselves, even when it hurts.” The inability to express emotions openly or resolve conflicts constructively creates an atmosphere of tension and emotional distance. The lack of open dialogue not only deepens family rifts but also hinders the ability to cope with everyday challenges.

Emotional instability is another prominent theme that emerged from the interviews. Parents under the influence of substances often exhibit mood swings, neglect emotional needs, and display unpredictable behaviors. One participant explained, “One moment he’s angry, the next he’s apologizing. We never know what to expect.” This inconsistency leaves children feeling insecure and unable to rely on their parents for emotional support. As a result, family members are constantly navigating an emotional roller coaster, which further exacerbates the challenges in maintaining healthy relationships.

In families affected by parental substance abuse, children often find themselves assuming parental roles, such as taking care of younger siblings or managing household chores. A participant reflected, “I had to grow up fast. I became the one who made sure my younger sister was fed and that we had food at home.” This role reversal creates a sense of responsibility that is disproportionate to the child's age and emotional maturity. It also reduces the opportunities for children to engage in normal childhood experiences, such as education and play, and may foster resentment toward the parent who is unable to fulfill their role.

The economic impact of parental substance abuse is another significant aspect affecting family functioning. Participants noted that substance abuse often leads to job loss, increased debt, and financial instability. One interviewee shared, “We didn’t have enough money for the basics, but the money for his addiction always seemed to be there.” This financial strain not only impacts the quality of life for family members but also causes additional stress, contributing to the overall dysfunction within the household. Children in these situations often face material deprivation, which can lead to feelings of shame and insecurity.

Families coping with parental substance abuse frequently experience heightened domestic conflict. Participants described physical altercations, verbal abuse, and constant power struggles within the home. One participant described, “There were times when we were so scared that we locked ourselves in our rooms, just to avoid the shouting and fighting.” These conflicts create an environment of fear and instability, which is particularly detrimental to children’s emotional development. The ongoing exposure to violence and aggression contributes to long-term psychological damage and undermines the sense of safety that every family member needs.

The social isolation experienced by families affected by substance abuse is another recurring theme. Participants noted that the stigma associated with substance abuse led to withdrawal from social activities, both for the parents and children. One participant shared, “We stopped inviting people over. It felt like everyone was judging us, so we kept to ourselves.” This isolation limits opportunities for social support and exacerbates feelings of loneliness. As a result, family members struggle to form meaningful connections outside the home, further contributing to their emotional distress and making it more difficult to cope with the situation.

Household instability, marked by frequent relocations and disrupted routines, was another theme that emerged in the interviews. Children in such households often face a lack of structure, which undermines their sense of security. A participant explained, “We never stayed in one place for long. Every time things started to feel okay, we had to move again.” This lack of consistency can interfere with children’s ability to establish stable relationships and academic continuity, further complicating their developmental trajectory.

3.2. *Effects on Child Psychological Health*

Children exposed to parental substance abuse frequently experience emotional distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. One participant reflected, “I felt like I couldn’t breathe all the time. The weight of everything on my shoulders made me feel like I wasn’t good enough.” These feelings of distress often manifest in withdrawal, sadness, and heightened fearfulness. The emotional toll of living in an unstable environment, compounded by the neglect and emotional unavailability of the parent, creates lasting psychological scars that may persist into adulthood.

The children of substance-abusing parents often display behavioral issues, including aggression, defiance, and a tendency to act out. One participant stated, “I started acting out in school because I couldn’t handle what was going on at home. I just didn’t care anymore.” These behavioral problems may be a coping mechanism for the emotional pain caused by neglect and abuse. Additionally, the lack of consistent discipline and structure at home contributes to these issues, as children are often left to navigate their emotions without proper guidance.

Exposure to parental substance abuse can lead to trauma and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in children. Several participants spoke about flashbacks, nightmares, and hypervigilance. One participant shared, “I would wake up in the middle of the night, sweating, because I thought he was coming to yell at me again.” The emotional and physical abuse associated with substance use can create an ongoing sense of fear and helplessness in children, which manifests as PTSD symptoms. These traumatic experiences often hinder the child’s ability to develop healthy emotional coping mechanisms.

Attachment issues were prevalent among children in families affected by substance abuse. Children often exhibit insecure attachment, developing a fear of abandonment and difficulties trusting others. One participant expressed, “I couldn’t get close to anyone. I was always afraid they would leave me, just like my dad did.” The lack of stable and responsive caregiving creates challenges in forming secure attachments, which may affect relationships later in life and contribute to mental health struggles, such as anxiety and depression.

Substance abuse within the family can lead to developmental delays in children, particularly in areas such as cognitive and social development. A participant noted, “I had trouble learning at school because I couldn’t concentrate. I was always worried about what was happening at home.” These delays may manifest as academic struggles, language development issues, or social skill deficits. The chaotic and neglectful environment associated with parental substance abuse often interferes with the child’s ability to thrive in educational and social settings.

Children exposed to parental substance abuse often face challenges in developing a healthy sense of self. One participant stated, “I didn’t know who I was anymore. My identity was all mixed up with the chaos at home.” The instability in the home environment and the neglect experienced often lead to confusion about self-worth and

identity. Children may struggle to define themselves outside the context of their family situation, which can lead to a lack of self-confidence and difficulties in establishing personal goals and aspirations.

The stigma surrounding mental health in families dealing with substance abuse can prevent children from seeking help. One participant shared, “I didn’t want anyone to know I was struggling. I felt ashamed, like it was my fault.” The negative perceptions of mental health issues, compounded by the shame of living in a substance-abusing family, create barriers to accessing support and treatment. This stigma can further isolate children and exacerbate their mental health challenges.

3.3. *Coping Mechanisms and Resilience*

Despite the challenges, some children of substance-abusing parents seek social support from friends, extended family, or community resources. A participant stated, “I started talking to my aunt about everything. She was the only one who understood me.” These relationships provide a sense of safety and validation, allowing children to process their experiences and find emotional relief. Social support is often a crucial factor in helping children cope with the distress associated with parental substance abuse.

Therapeutic interventions, including family therapy and individual counseling, were frequently mentioned as beneficial in addressing the psychological effects of parental substance abuse. One participant shared, “Going to therapy really helped me understand that I wasn’t the cause of everything. It gave me hope.” These interventions offer children the tools to cope with trauma, regulate emotions, and build healthier relationships within the family.

Children who demonstrated resilience often developed personal coping strategies, such as engaging in hobbies, physical activities, or mindfulness practices. One participant explained, “I started drawing and running. It helped me forget about the chaos at home for a while.” These strategies allowed children to manage their emotions and gain a sense of control over their lives, despite the challenges they faced at home.

Access to educational and informational resources about substance abuse and mental health helped some children and families better understand their situation. A participant mentioned, “We attended a workshop on how addiction affects families. It really opened my eyes to what was going on.” These resources provided families with essential

knowledge, enabling them to seek appropriate interventions and support.

Spirituality and religion were often mentioned as sources of comfort and strength for both parents and children. One participant shared, "Praying and going to the mosque gave me a sense of peace, even when everything else felt out of control." Religious practices provided a framework for understanding suffering and finding hope, helping some individuals cope with the emotional turmoil caused by parental substance abuse.

Resilience Building

Some children developed resilience by focusing on personal growth and problem-solving. A participant explained, "I decided that I wouldn't let my dad's addiction define who I was. I focused on doing well in school and helping others." These resilience-building strategies helped children gain a sense of empowerment and purpose, despite the adversity they faced at home.

Avoidance and Denial

In contrast, some family members adopted avoidance and denial as coping mechanisms, minimizing the severity of the problem or ignoring the effects of substance abuse. One participant remarked, "We just pretended everything was fine, even though it clearly wasn't." This denial can delay intervention and perpetuate the dysfunctional family dynamics that ultimately harm children's well-being.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the ways in which parental substance abuse affects family functioning and child psychological health. The findings reveal a complex relationship between these variables, highlighting both direct and indirect consequences for children and their families. The participants in this study reported experiencing disrupted family dynamics, emotional distress, and behavioral problems that stemmed from living in households where substance abuse was prevalent. The findings are consistent with existing research on the impact of parental substance abuse, which has consistently shown that children in such households are at an elevated risk for a variety of psychological, emotional, and social problems (Kuppens et al., 2019; Tedgård & Råstam, 2016; Tedgård et al., 2018a, 2018b).

One of the most prominent themes identified in this study was the role of family dysfunction, which manifested in inconsistent parenting, poor communication, and a lack of emotional support. This is consistent with the work of Hlahla

and Mothiba (2022a; b), who noted that children of substance-abusing parents often face disruptions in family functioning, leading to emotional neglect and a lack of stability in their environment. In households where substance abuse is prevalent, parents may struggle to provide consistent caregiving, which can lead to children feeling neglected or abandoned. As a result, these children are more likely to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms such as emotional suppression, detachment, or aggression (Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Maputle, 2023; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Mothiba, 2023). Additionally, children in these environments often experience heightened levels of stress, which can contribute to the development of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders (Cao et al., 2021).

The findings also align with the literature on the intergenerational transmission of substance abuse. Participants in this study reported experiencing both direct and indirect effects from their parents' addiction, including the modeling of addictive behaviors and the lack of healthy coping strategies. This intergenerational cycle of substance abuse is well-documented, with studies showing that children of substance-abusing parents are more likely to develop substance use disorders themselves in adulthood (Brandewie et al., 2018; Kepple, 2018). This phenomenon is partly due to the role of parental modeling, where children learn maladaptive behaviors from their caregivers. Additionally, the emotional and psychological toll of growing up in a household affected by substance abuse can make it more difficult for children to develop the emotional resilience and coping skills necessary to navigate life's challenges (Saladino et al., 2021). The lack of adequate parenting in such households also inhibits the development of secure attachments, which are crucial for healthy emotional and social development (Kuppens et al., 2019).

Another significant finding in this study was the prevalence of parentification, where children assumed caregiver roles due to the inability of their parents to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities. This theme has been identified in previous research, with Tedgård et al. (2018a; b) discussing how children of substance-abusing parents often take on responsibilities that are beyond their developmental capacity. This role reversal, while meant to help the family function, can have significant psychological consequences for children, as it forces them to mature prematurely and take on emotional burdens that they are not equipped to handle. The children in this study reported feeling an overwhelming sense of responsibility, as they often had to look after younger siblings or provide emotional

support for their parents. This parentification can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and guilt, as children may internalize the belief that they are responsible for their parents' well-being (Tedgård et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Additionally, children in these households often experience social isolation, as they may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their family situation. The stigma surrounding substance abuse further exacerbates these feelings of isolation and makes it more difficult for children to seek help from peers or external support networks (Maghsoudi et al., 2019). This isolation can lead to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships, as children may struggle with trust and emotional intimacy. As noted by Hlahla and Mothiba (2022a; b), the lack of social support and the stigmatization of addiction can make it even more challenging for children of substance-abusing parents to overcome the negative effects of their upbringing (Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Maputle, 2023; Hlahla, Ngoatle, & Mothiba, 2023).

The findings also support the broader body of research on the psychological effects of parental substance abuse on children. Studies have shown that children of substance-abusing parents are more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kuppens et al., 2019; Brandewie et al., 2018). The findings from this study also revealed that participants experienced emotional dysregulation, trauma, and an inability to cope with stress in healthy ways. The chaotic home environment created by parental substance abuse often leads to a lack of emotional security, which can disrupt children's emotional development and increase their susceptibility to mental health disorders (Malvaso et al., 2018). Furthermore, the lack of emotional support in these households can create a void that children attempt to fill through unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and other forms of self-destructive behavior (Kepple, 2018; Martikainen et al., 2018).

Despite the rich insights gained from this study, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the research. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 21 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the experiences of these participants provide valuable insights into the impact of parental substance abuse on family functioning and child psychological health, further research with larger, more diverse samples is needed to explore whether these findings hold true across different cultural and demographic groups. Additionally, this study relied on self-report data, which may

be subject to social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recalling past experiences. Future studies could benefit from using multiple data sources, such as interviews with both parents and children, as well as observations or case studies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of parental substance abuse on children.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which does not allow for an examination of causal relationships between parental substance abuse and child psychological health. Longitudinal studies that track children over time could provide more robust insights into how parental substance abuse affects children's development and whether interventions can mitigate the long-term psychological consequences. Furthermore, while the study focused on a specific cultural context—Tehran—there may be unique cultural factors that influence the way parental substance abuse impacts children. Cross-cultural studies that examine the role of culture in shaping the experiences of children of substance-abusing parents would provide valuable comparative data.

In terms of future research, it would be beneficial to explore the role of resilience and protective factors in mitigating the negative effects of parental substance abuse on children. While children of substance-abusing parents face significant challenges, some children manage to develop healthy coping strategies and maintain psychological well-being despite their circumstances. Understanding the factors that contribute to resilience in these children could provide valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and support systems (Usher, 2021). Additionally, future research could examine the effectiveness of different therapeutic interventions for children of substance-abusing parents, such as trauma-focused therapy or family-based interventions, to assess their impact on improving family functioning and child psychological health.

In terms of practice, it is crucial to provide adequate support for both parents and children affected by substance abuse. Intervention programs that address the needs of children, such as counseling or family therapy, can help mitigate the emotional and psychological effects of parental substance abuse. Furthermore, programs that provide support for parents, such as substance abuse rehabilitation and parenting skills training, can help improve family functioning and reduce the impact of addiction on children. Support groups for children of substance-abusing parents can also provide a safe space for these children to share their experiences, connect with others who understand their

struggles, and learn healthy coping strategies (Weir et al., 2020). It is also essential to provide education and resources to help reduce the stigma surrounding substance abuse, as this can help children feel more comfortable seeking support and reduce feelings of shame and isolation.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of parental substance abuse on family functioning and child psychological health. The findings highlight the complex relationship between parental addiction and its consequences for children, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address the psychological and emotional needs of both parents and children. By understanding the multifaceted impact of parental substance abuse, researchers, clinicians, and policymakers can better support families affected by addiction and work towards breaking the cycle of substance abuse and its negative effects on future generations.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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