



The Association Between Mental Health Disorders in Children With or Without Alcoholic Parents

Molly Simon, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Children who grow up in a household environment with alcoholic parents will have more unpleasant experiences, than those who grow up living with healthy living parents (Anda et al., 2002).
- Children are seen to struggle with many mental health disorder such as anxiety and depression when their parents struggle with alcohol abuse (Pitts et al., 1999).
- Parental Alcoholism is not the only association with the mental health disorders of their children. They are not just destined to develop these psychological disorders from when they are born (West & Prinz, 1987). In some cases, for example, the way parents punish their children correlates to them developing mental health disorders like depression (Holmes & Robins, 1998).

Research Questions

- Are child mental health disorders associated with parental alcohol abuse?
- Does the association between children's mental health disorders and parental alcoholism differ when children suffer from suicidal thoughts?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=43,093) were drawn from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC). The survey represented, non-institutionalized United States civilians who were 18 years old or older.

Measures

- The main explanatory variable **Parental Alcoholism** and the main response variable **Child Mental Health Disorders** (0=no, 1=yes) were determined from the respondents answers to a series of face-to-face interview questions.
- An additional explanatory variable which is **suicidal thought** (0=no, 1=yes) was also determined from the multiple interview questions.

Multivariate

- After controlling for suicidal thoughts in children with alcoholic parents, mental health disorders in children is still significantly associated with parental alcoholism (B=1.36956, p<2e-16).
- Children who are also suffering from suicidal thoughts have a chance of developing mental health disorders that is 2x higher than those with just alcoholic parents.

Results

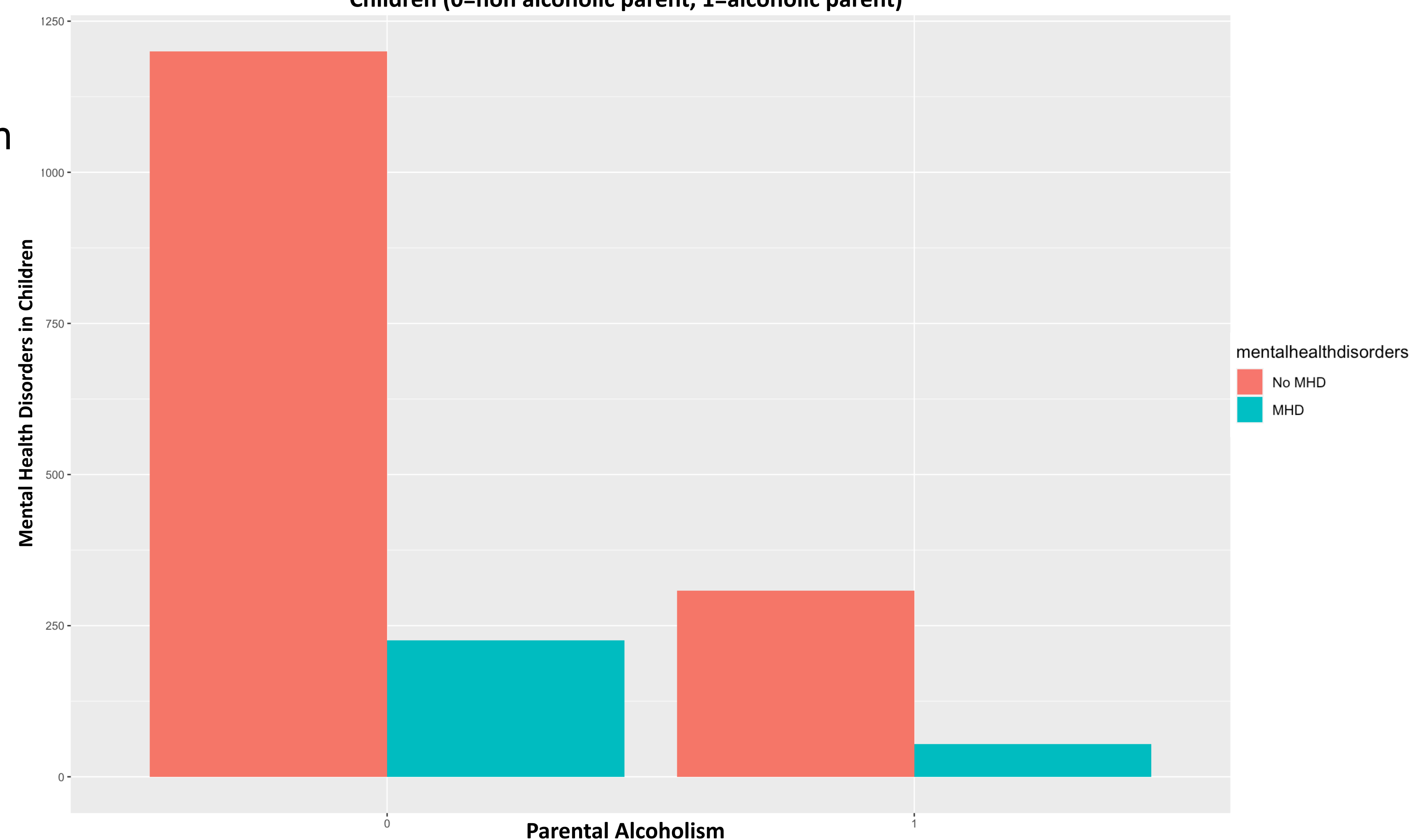
Univariate

- 3.64% of participants reported having a parent who suffered from alcoholism
- 7.33% of participants indicated that they suffered from mental health disorders.
- 7.26% of respondents indicated that they were suffering from suicidal thoughts.

Bivariate

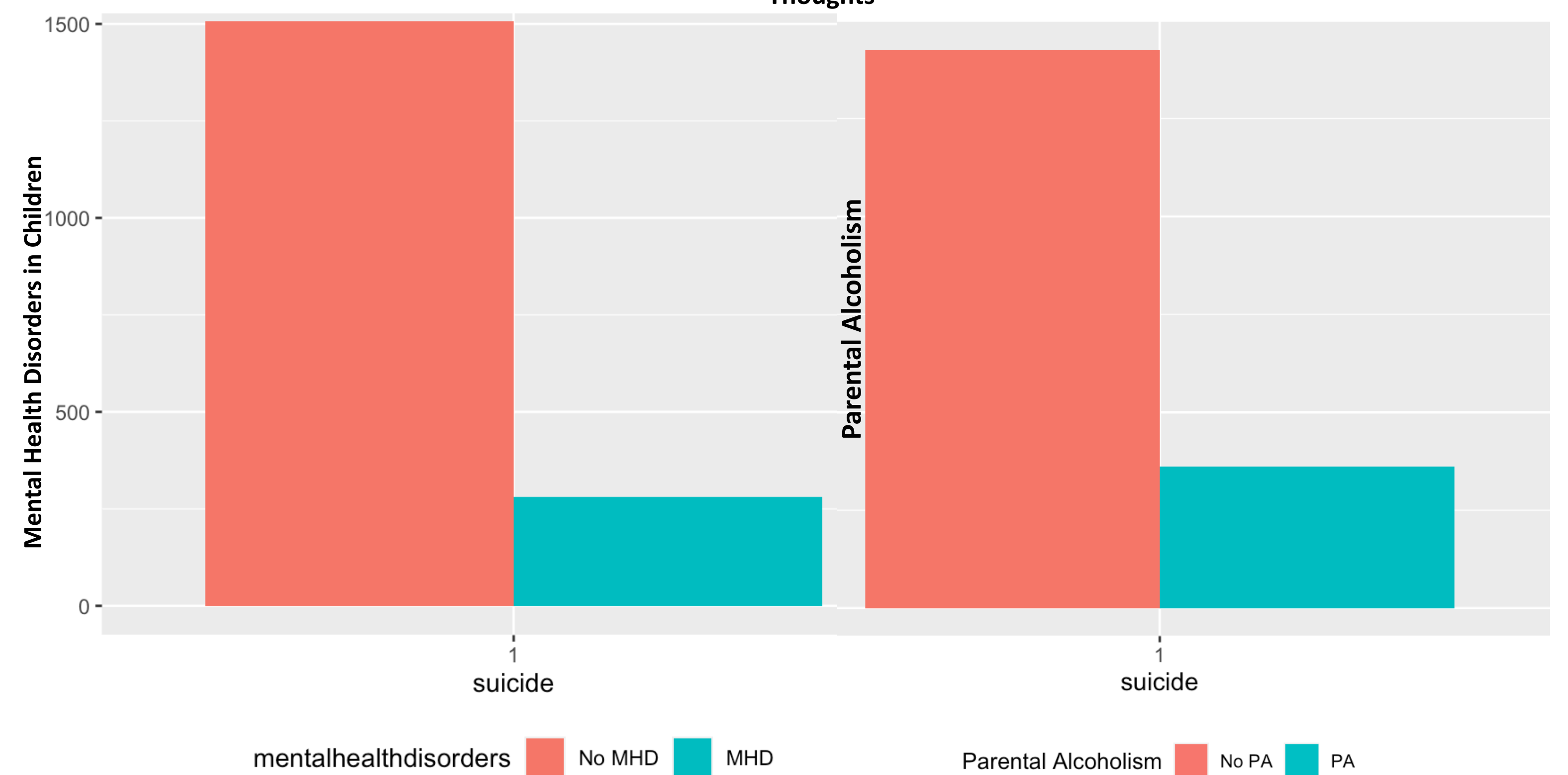
- A Chi-Squared correlation test showed that there is definitely a significant correlation between child mental health disorders and parental alcoholism ($\chi^2 = 14.985, p < 2e-04$).

Figure 1: The Relationship Between Parental Alcohol Abuse and The Mental Health Disorders of Their Children (0=non alcoholic parent, 1=alcoholic parent)



- A child who grows up with an alcoholic parent has a 1.5x higher chance of developing mental health disorders than a child with healthy parents.

Figure 2: The Association between Child Mental Health Disorders and Parental Alcoholism After Controlling a Child's Suicidal Thoughts



- The logistical regression shows that the variable suicidal thought is not a moderator in the relationship between parental alcoholism and mental health disorders. However, it is a confounder because it has a significant relationship with both variables.

Discussion

- There is a direct correlation between parental alcoholism and child mental health disorders. However, it cannot be proven that parental alcoholism has a direct causation to the development of the disorders.
- While the relationship between parental alcoholism and child mental health disorders is still significant when controlling suicidal thoughts, it is difficult to prove if it is a moderator. It is a confounder because of its significant relationship with both variables.
- Further research is needed to determine with the sex of the parent is a moderator in the relationship between Child mental health disorders and Parental Alcohol Abuse. In addition, further research is needed to discover if parental drug abuse can also correlate with the relationship between the two main variables.