

My name is Kaitlyn Komar, and I am currently a counseling psychology doctoral student at Saint Elizabeth University in Morristown, New Jersey. I am conducting a dissertation that is looking at the correlations between attachment styles, adverse childhood experiences, and substance use. My dissertation committee consists of Christina Liparini, PhD, LPC, Daniel Balboni, PsyD, and Jill Caruso, PsyD, who are all licensed psychologists and professors at Saint Elizabeth University. At this point, my proposal has been successfully defended and approved by my committee, and I am now moving onto submitting my proposal to the IRB at my university. I am hoping to be able to collect data through SMART Recovery.

The specific research question for my dissertation is “Does drug of choice and attachment style affect the length of sobriety before relapse?” This study is to learn about if there is a specific drug and attachment style that is correlated with more frequent relapses and less sobriety time. This study is also intended to investigate how adverse childhood experiences affect attachment style in adulthood and result in drug use in adulthood. The gap this study is intended to fill is if there are specific types of drugs that are correlated with an insecure attachment style and how that affects the length of sobriety and relapse for individuals. Understanding sobriety and relapse will be useful for this population to better predict and prevent relapse, understand which individuals may be more high-risk, and improve treatment interventions. SMART Recovery will be especially useful in regard to this study because it is my goal to collect data from individuals who are currently in sobriety. This study will be completely anonymous, voluntary, and will consist of a survey that is assessing their attachment style, adverse childhood experiences, problems that have occurred as a result of drug use, and their ability to cope in difficult situations without drug use.

It has already been shown that having a secure attachment style is a protective factor against substance use, and that having an insecure attachment style is a risk factor for substance use (Schindler et al., 2019). However, this study will add to this existing literature by further identifying if there are specific types of drugs that are correlated with an insecure attachment style, as well as if specific types of drugs are correlated with a higher number of relapse rates and less sobriety time in between relapse. This study will also add to the existing literature by being able to identify which type of individuals (based off attachment style and specific drug use) may be more high-risk for a higher likelihood of relapse. Identifying the profiles of these individuals will better be able to tailor treatment interventions and identify high-risk individuals and intervene before there is a relapse.

This study is also intended to collect information regarding adverse childhood experiences and prior research has shown that as individuals who have experienced an adverse childhood experience get older and experience more insecurity in their life, they will also face more difficulties in regulating emotions, and having healthy relationships with others. As a result, using substances becomes a maladaptive way to “fix” this problem, by helping regulate emotions, cope with stress, and to replace relationships (Schindler et al., 2019). This study will also add to this existing literature by providing more information on how adverse childhood experiences and attachment style affect adulthood, specifically how these adverse childhood experiences negatively impact the individual into adulthood and can lead to substance use. Identifying further risk factors for substance use and understanding what led to substance use, is important in preventing and treating these individuals when they become adults.

References

Schindler, A. (2019). Attachment and substance use disorders—theoretical models, empirical evidence, and implications for treatment. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 10, 727.

Flier/Announcement to Volunteers

Dear Participant:

Throughout my clinical work thus far, I have recognized the importance of substance use interventions being developed that incorporate specific factors that could lead to drug use. These factors include attachment styles with people whom you have developed close relationships with and stressful situations that may have led to drug use.

I am conducting a study that looks at the correlation between drug use, attachment style, and adverse childhood experiences and I want to elicit your feedback. The study is part of my doctoral program at Saint Elizabeth University. The Institutional Review Board has approved this study and results should provide information that we can use to tailor and develop substance use interventions that will be more effective for some individuals.

I am asking that you complete an anonymous online survey about your experiences with drug use and adverse childhood experiences. The survey takes about twenty minutes to complete, your participation is voluntary, and you may skip any question that you do not want to answer. Since it is impossible to identify respondents, there is no way to penalize or reward anyone for participating or declining to participate. Due to some employers using tracking software, participants should use a personal computer to complete the online study. Participants should also not leave the survey open if using a public computer or a computer that others have access to. Participants may also wish to clear their browser cache and history after completing the survey.

Please feel free to contact me at kkomar@steu.edu or (732) 850-1966 if you have questions about this survey.

By continuing with this survey, you are agreeing to participate, please go to (URL here) to take this survey.

Thank you!

Kaitlyn Komar, MA

Doctoral Student

Saint Elizabeth University