

# Exploring Sex Differences: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Risk Factors and Substance Use Disorder in Sexually Abused Justice-Involved Adolescents

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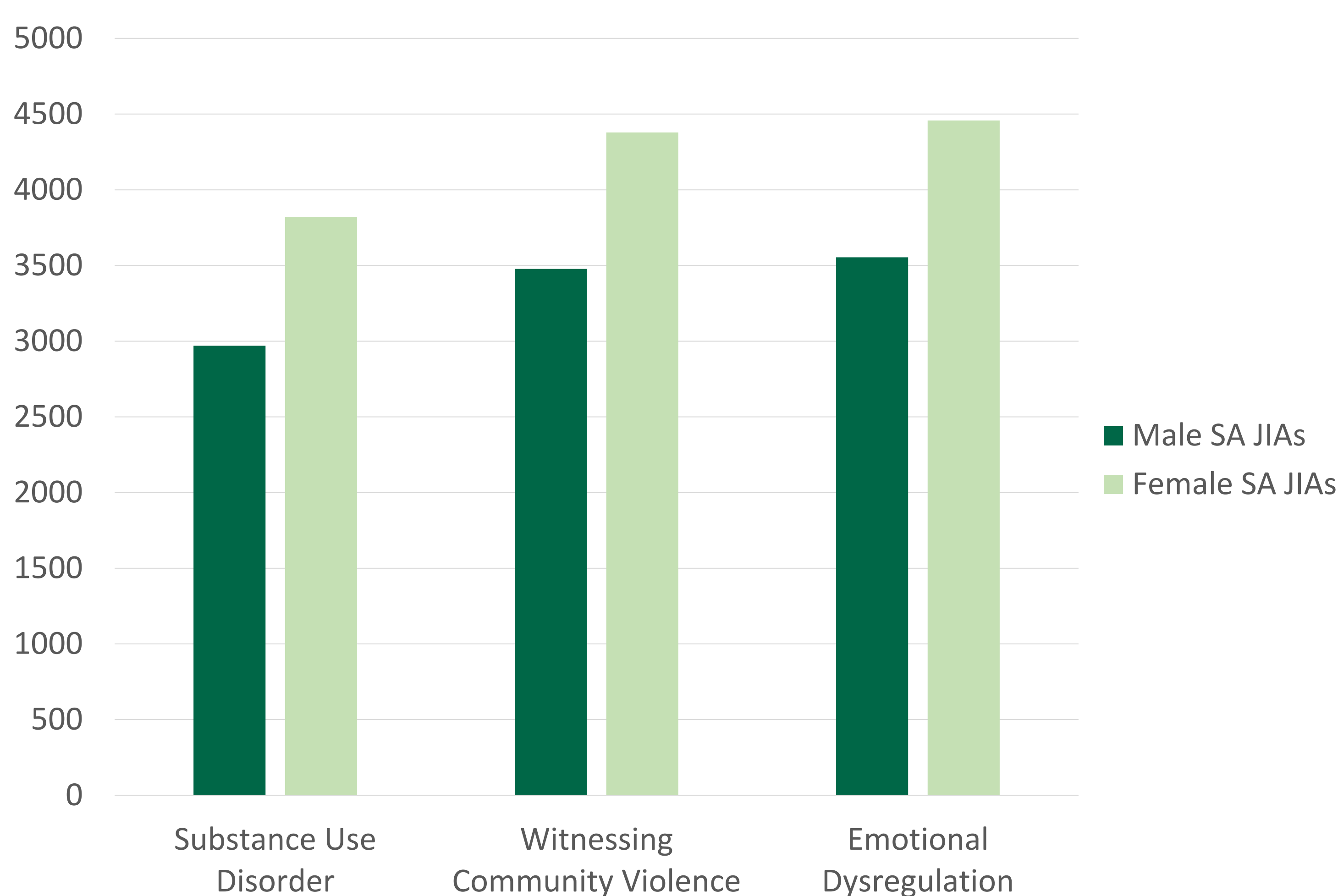
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## Introduction

- The prevalence of substance use disorders (SUDs) remains a significant public health concern. At-risk populations such as sexually abused justice-involved adolescents (SAJIAs) are particularly vulnerable
- The relationship between these risk factors and SUDs is not well established in the JIA population, especially when considering those who have been sexually abused.
- Individually, these risk factors have shown associations with SUDs and increased risk of victimization among sexual abuse victims. It is still unknown how these risk factors compound with one another concerning the risk for SUD.
- It was hypothesized that female SAJIAs with the two risk factors are more likely to experience SUDs, compared to male SAJIAs.

## Results

**FIGURE 1.** Comparison of Male SAJIAs and Female SAJIAs



- Figure 1 compares male SAJIAs to female SAJIAs on each of the variables measured in the study.

- The bars representing “Witnessing Community Violence” and “Emotional Dysregulation” had similar totals. The similarity between these variables aligns with the literature that observes marginally significant paths between witnessing violence and emotional dysregulation.

The literature also observes significant paths between violent victimization (sexual abuse) and emotional dysregulation in both males and females.

- The graph shows that both male and female SAJIAs experience the three variables, but these issues are more common among females. It is important to consider that male SAJIAs may underreport sexual abuse, which can affect the data. This considered, the graph suggests a need for support programs to help SAJIAs, with an emphasis on the challenges faced by SAJIAs and the underreported issues among males.

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## Methods

- A subsample of 9,953 SAJIAs from a larger sample of 79,960 JIAs collected by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.
- Multivariate logistic regressions analyzed the association between risk factors and SUD prevalence among SAJIAs.
- The study controlled for race, age at first offense, and household income.
- A Positive Achievement Change Tool assessment was employed where JIAs self-reported each of the risk factors and SUD (binary: 0 = no experience with variable, 1 = experience with variable)
  - IV:** Witnessing community violence and emotional dysregulation.
  - DV:** Presence of SUD

## Results

**TABLE 1.** Logistic Regression Estimating SUD Rates among Male SAJIAs

	aOR	CI
Risk Factors Absent (reference)	-	-
Witnessing Community Violence Present	1.97***	[1.66, 2.34]
Emotional Dysregulation Present	1.69***	[1.45, 1.97]

Note. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

- Male SAJIAs who witnessed community violence exhibited a nearly doubled likelihood (aOR = 1.97) of developing an SUD than Male SAJIAs who did not.
- While both variables are statistically significant, witnessing community violence has a somewhat stronger association (aOR = 1.97) when compared to emotional dysregulation (aOR = 1.69).
- These results suggest that both risk factors are significantly associated with developing an SUD.

**TABLE 2.** Logistic Regression Estimating SUD Rates among Female SAJIAs

	aOR	CI
Risk Factors Absent (reference)	-	-
Witnessing Community Violence Present	2.08***	[1.77, 2.45]
Emotional Dysregulation Present	1.86***	[1.61, 2.14]

Note. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

- Female SAJIAs who witnessed community violence are more than twice as likely (aOR = 2.08) to develop an SUD than Female SAJIAs who have not witnessed community violence.
- Similar to Male SAJIAs, both variables are statistically significant, however, witnessing community violence has a somewhat stronger association (aOR = 2.08) when compared to emotional dysregulation (aOR = 1.86).
- These results suggest that both risk factors are significantly associated with developing an SUD.

## Discussion and Conclusion

- The findings indicate a need for the implementation of trauma-informed SUD treatment programs specific to victims of sexual abuse, especially those involved in the justice system. Such programs can help reduce harmful coping mechanisms while fostering healthy behaviors. Consequently, reduce the risk of further victimization and future recidivism.
  - These adolescents would benefit from trauma-focused treatment such as Prolonged Exposure or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, both of which could simultaneously help with the risk factors and potentially SUD.

