



The Association Between Parental Separation and The Development of Alcohol Use Disorders in Offspring

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Introduction

- On average, children of divorce are less likely to be well-adjusted socially, emotionally, and academically than children whose parents remain together (Hetherington 1999)
- Based on current literature, there is clear evidence that parental divorce or separation is a significant predictor of offspring developing an alcohol use disorder
 - Alcohol use disorder = A brain disorder characterized by compulsive drinking, loss of control over alcohol use, and negative emotions when not drinking
- While the association has been well established in literature, less is known about whether the age at which the offspring's parents separated is any indicator of an increased risk in developing an alcohol use disorder
- There is a larger risk for onset of drinking after divorce, even controlling for stress, parental alcohol involvement, and psychopathology (Thompson 2008)

Research Questions

- Does the age at which the offspring's parents separated or divorced predict an increased risk for the development of alcohol use disorders?
- Does the association between age at parent's divorce and the development of alcohol use disorders differ depending on which parent the child lived with after the separation?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n= 6914) were drawn from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC), a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Whether or not the respondent's parents got separated during their childhood was measured with the question "Did biological parents get divorced or permanently stop living together before the respondent was 18?"
- The age of parental separation was measured with the question "Age when biological/adoptive parents stopped living together." Responses ranged from 0 to 17, and I created 3 new age groups (0-5, 6-11, 12-17).
- The level of alcohol use/abuse was assessed using a sum of two questions about alcohol abuse/dependence in the past 12 months and prior to the last 12 months. Scores ranged from 0 to 3.

Discussion

- The age a child is when their parents separate/divorce may not be associated with a risk of alcohol use disorders
- Family counselors and child psychiatrists might use this information to address the psychological well-being of children right after and years after parental separation.
- There needs to be more research done on what other factors increase the risk for alcohol use disorder among children of divorce/separation, including environment and genetics

Results

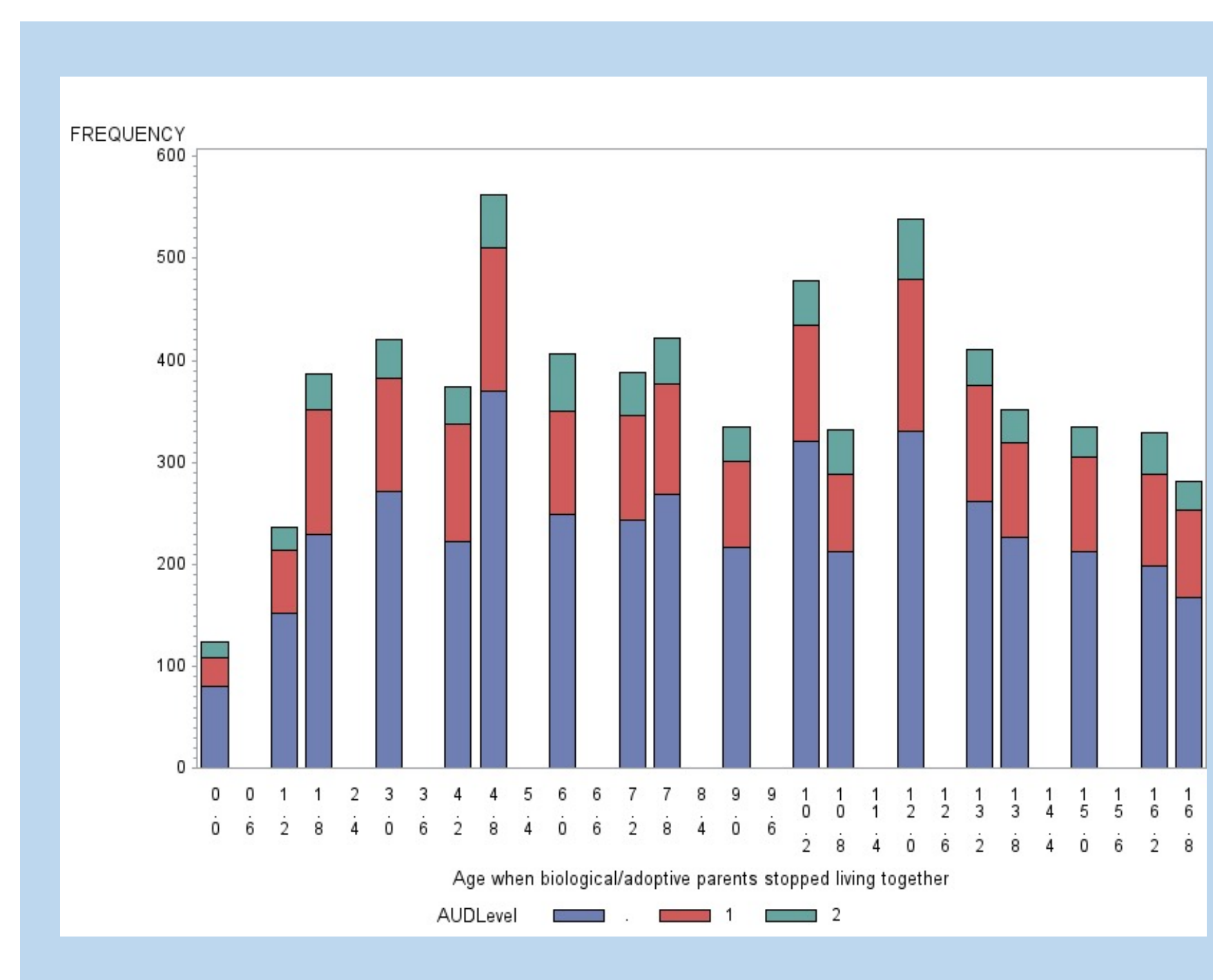
Univariate

- 78.1% of respondents lived primarily with their mother after separation
- 88.5% of respondents experienced no alcohol abuse/dependence in the last 12 months

Bivariate

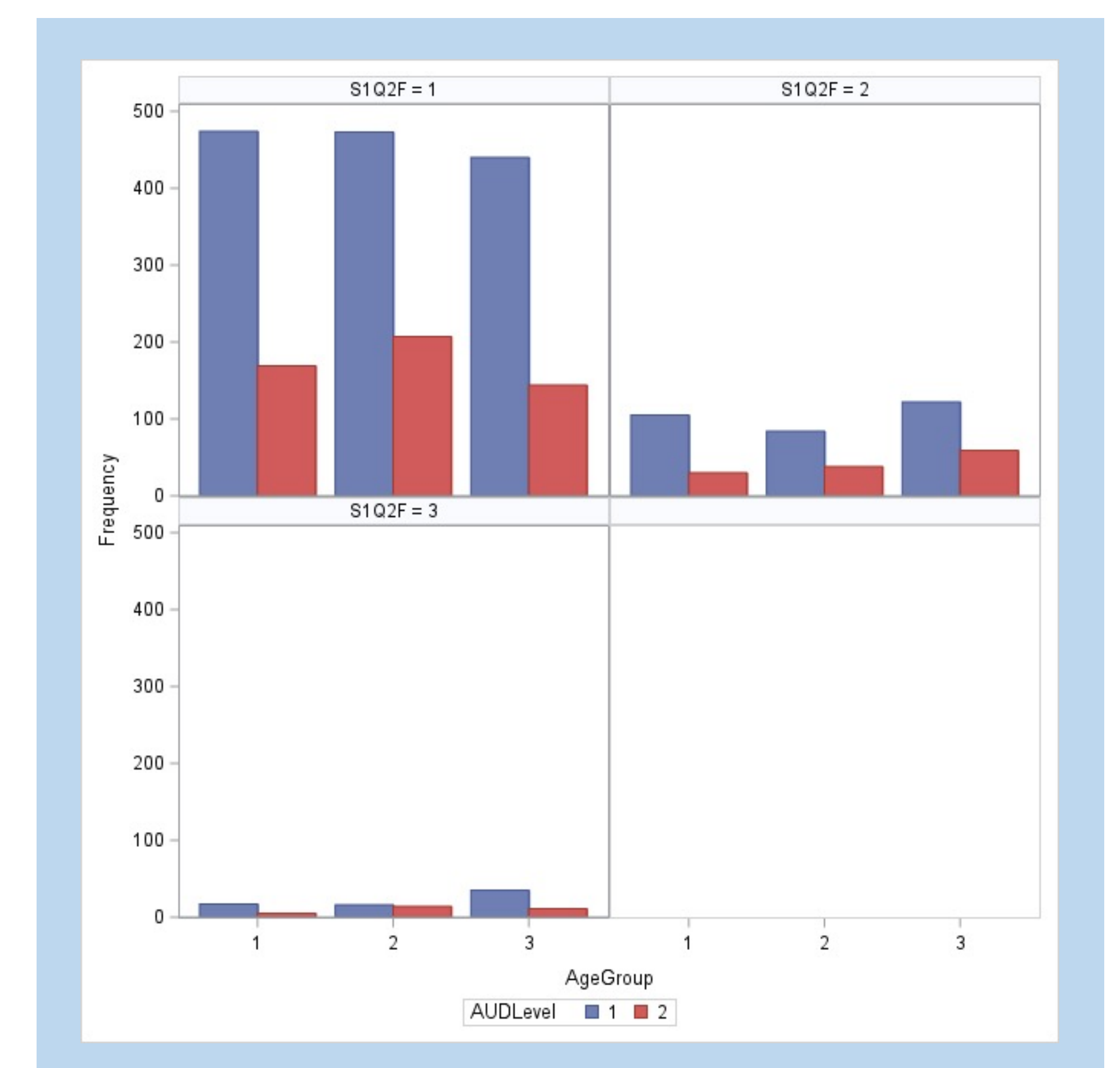
- When examining the level of one's alcohol use (response) and the age when their parents separated (explanatory), a chi-square test of independence revealed that among those with separated parents, those in AgeGroup 3 (ages 12-17) were more likely to have a level 1 alcohol use disorder (34.27%). However, those in AgeGroup 2 (6-11) were more likely to develop a level 2 alcohol use disorder (37.91%). $\chi^2 = 7.79$, 2 df, $p = .0203$.

Figure 1. Age when parents stopped living together/separated and alcohol use disorder level



- Based on a logistic regression, Parental separation (odds ratio = 0.976, confidence interval = 0.877 - 1.086) was not significantly associated with the development of alcohol use disorders.
- There appeared to be no significant association between age at parental separation and alcohol use disorder level (figure 1)

Figure 2. Age of parental separation vs. development of AUD by parent lived with after separation



Multivariate

- Parent lived with after separation does not appear to moderate the relationship between age at separation and development of alcohol use disorders (figure 2).
- After controlling for parent lived with after separation, the respondent's age at separation was not associated statistically with the development of an alcohol use disorder. ($B=0.90$, $p>0.001$).