

# Childhood maltreatment and alcohol problems in young adulthood: coping style as a mediator and potential intervention target

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## Outline

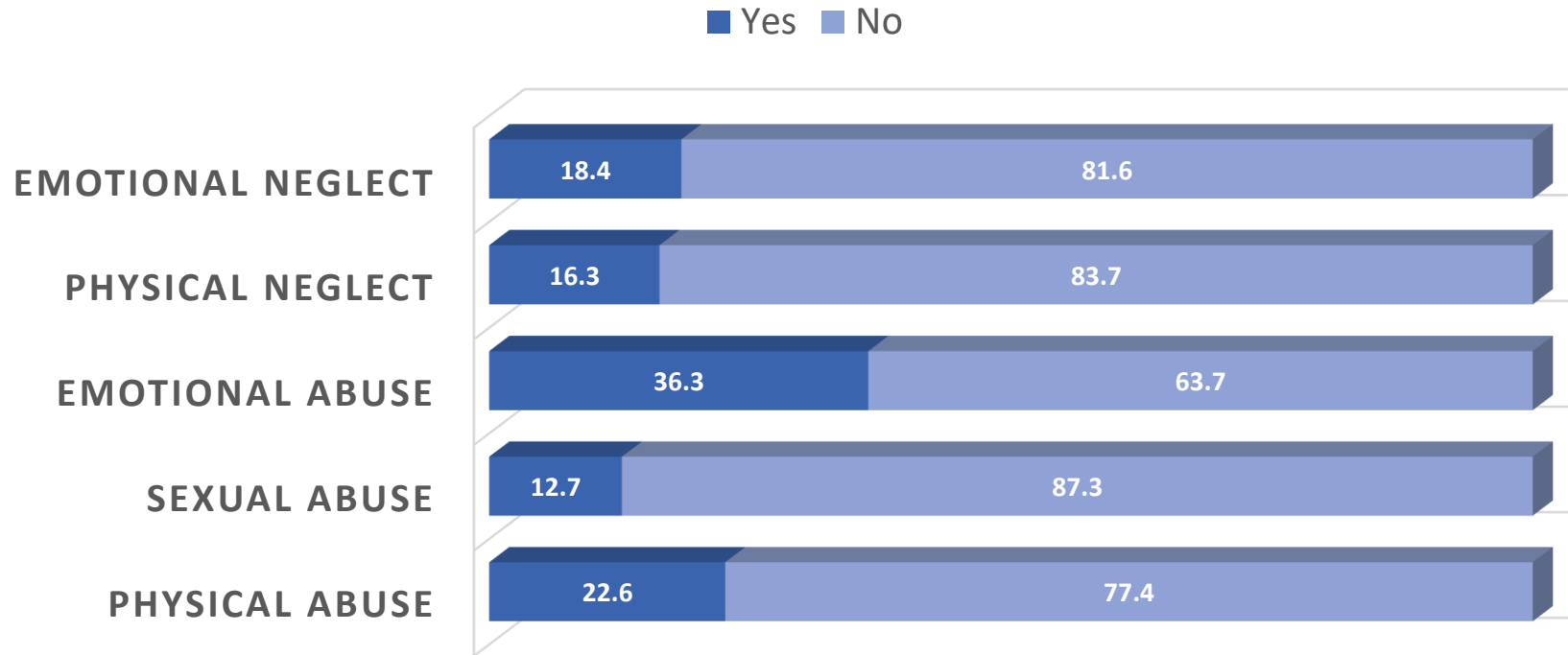
- **Childhood maltreatment**
- **Childhood maltreatment and alcohol use problems**
- **Preventing alcohol use problems in those exposed to maltreatment**
- **The current study**

**No conflicts of interest to declare**



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# Childhood maltreatment



## Child maltreatment and alcohol use problems

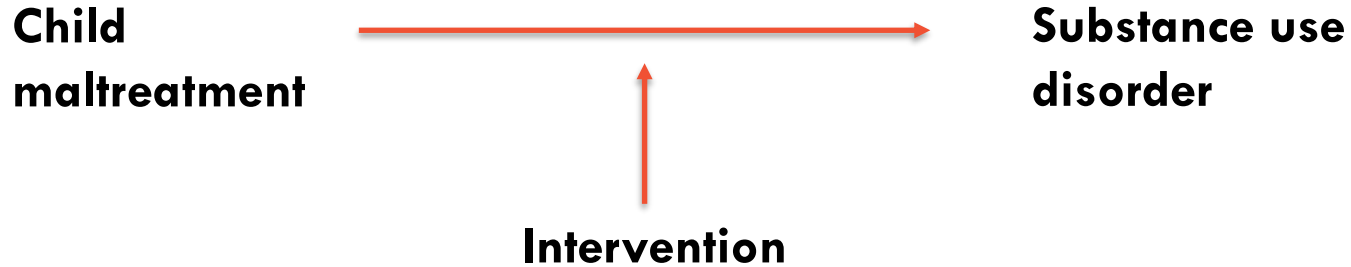
**2 x the odds of developing SUD**

**2.84 x the odds of developing AUD**

**4.96 x the odds for multi-type maltreatment and AUD**

## But...

- Not all those exposed to child maltreatment develop problems



# The case for prevention

- **Huge potential to alleviate burden of SUDs**
  - Existing treatment gap
  - 18-year delay of first treatment contact for AUD
  - Over-burdened treatment services post-pandemic
  - Optimal treatment coverage could avert 40% of the burden of mental and substance use disorders
  
- **Adolescence / early adulthood are important periods for prevention**
  - Substance use typically begins and escalates over this period
  - Peak age of onset of SUD is 19.5 years

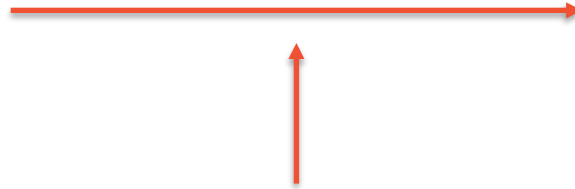
Andrews, G., et al. (2004). Utilising survey data to inform public policy: Comparison of the cost-effectiveness of treatment of ten mental disorders. *Br J Psychiatry*.

Chapman, C., et al. (2015). Delay to first treatment contact for alcohol use disorder. *Drug Alcohol Depend*.

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# Identifying targets for prevention

**Child  
maltreatment**



**Substance use  
disorder**

**Intervention**

- **What links childhood maltreatment to elevated SUD risk?**
- **How individuals respond in the face of later stressors**
  - Coping style – behaviours used to deal with problems or stressors
  - Self-responding – how you treat yourself in the face of stressors or personal shortcomings

# How individuals respond when faced with later stressors

## **Avoidant coping**

- Attempts to deny or distract from stressors
- Maltreated children may be more likely to engage in denial or distraction attempts
- Previously adaptive when faced with a situation outside their control e.g., abuse/neglect

## **Uncompassionate self-responding**

- Self-criticism; feeling isolated in one's pain and flaws; becoming absorbed with one's pain and problems
- Maltreated children may exhibit more uncompassionate self-responding
- May have received repeated implicit or explicit messages of being unlovable, flawed, or to blame for abuse/ neglect





Source: John Arano

## Aim

- Do avoidant coping and uncompassionate self-responding mediate the association between child maltreatment and hazardous alcohol use and mental ill-health in young adulthood?

## Methods

- Recruited young adults (aged 18-20) through social media, 2018 – 2019
- Australian arm of the International Study of Pro/Anti-social Behaviour, coordinated by Institute of Applied Psychology (ISPA) in Lisbon
- Ethics approved by the University of Sydney

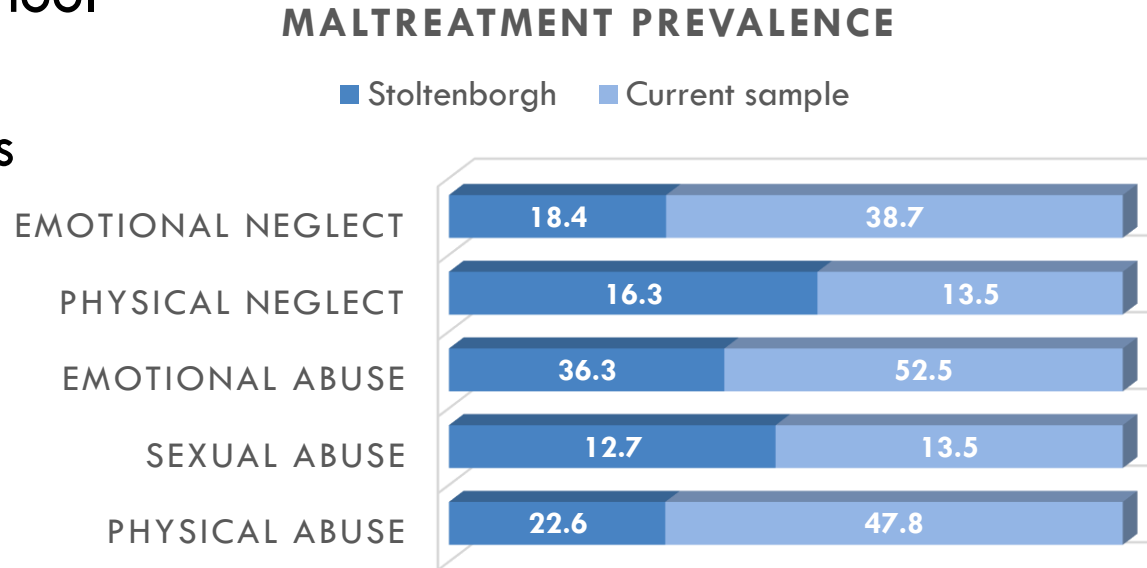
Wave 1 (2018 – 2019)	Wave 2 (2020)	Wave 3 (2021)
Child maltreatment (ACE questionnaire, continuous)	Self-responding (SCS-SF)	Alcohol use (AUDIT)
	Avoidant coping (Brief COPE)	Mental health – depression, anxiety, stress (DASS-21)

## Methods (cont.)

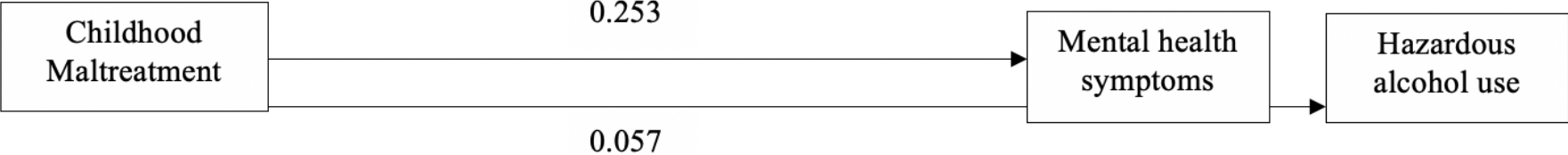
- Multiple imputation to handle attrition
- Mediation analyses using PROCESS macro in SPSS
- Controlled for age, gender, education, SES, other adverse childhood experiences

# Results

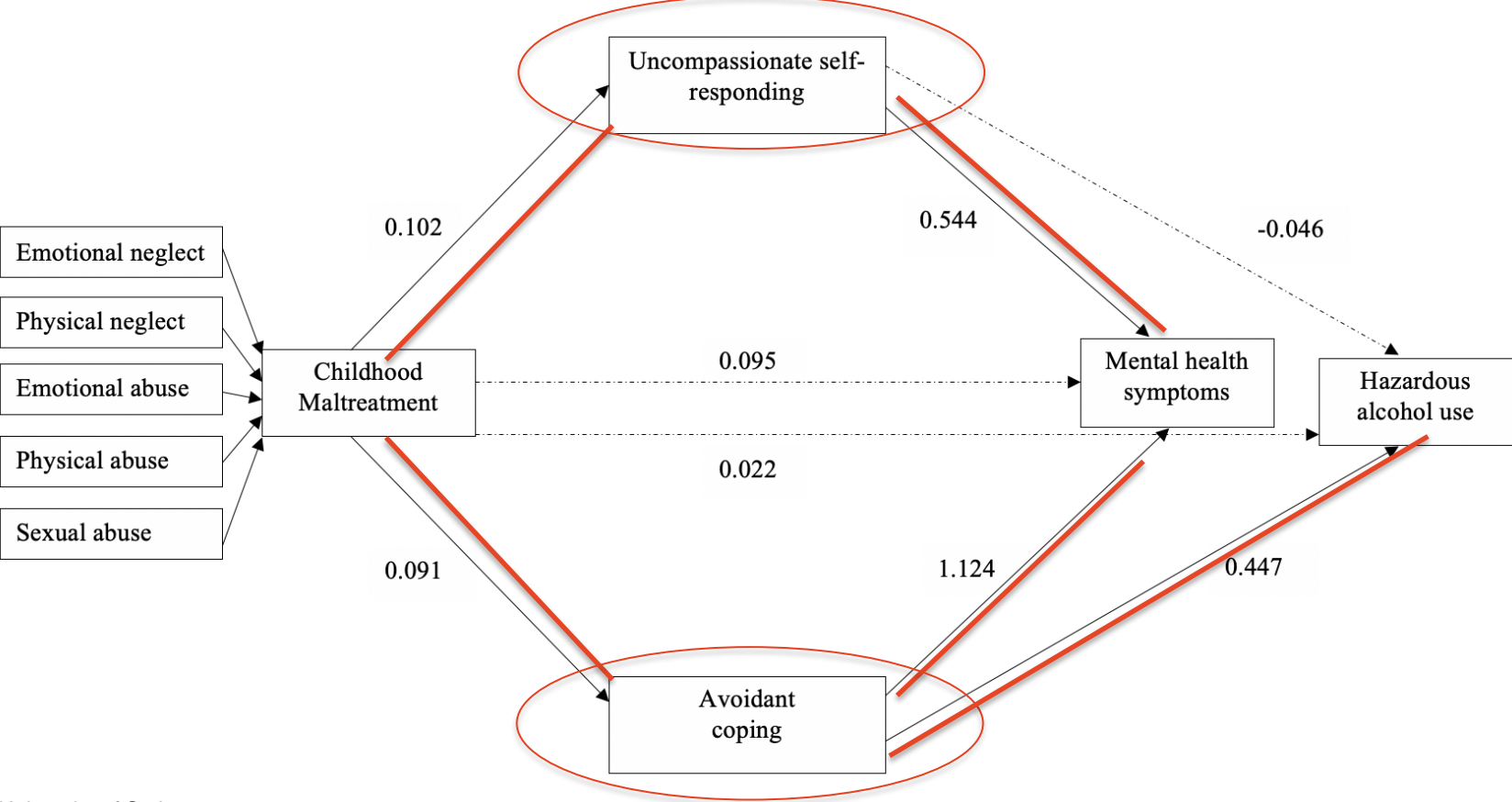
- Mean age 21.39 (SD=0.96) at Wave 3, range 20-23 years
- 70% female; 26% male; 4% transgender or other gender
- 94% with a high school education
- N=568 participants



# Total effects



# Mediation



## Discussion

- Young adults exposed to childhood maltreatment may use more avoidant coping strategies to deal with stressors, and these strategies may fuel greater alcohol use problems.

**Child  
maltreatment**



**Substance use  
disorder**

**Avoidant coping**

- Reducing uncompassionate ways of responding e.g., self-criticism, could prevent mental distress

# Implications

- Address avoidant coping and uncompassionate self-responding through school-based or online preventive interventions
- Some existing prevention programs address avoidant coping and have evidence of efficacy in preventing alcohol use and related harms
- Next step to test efficacy of these programs among young people exposed to maltreatment





# Strengths and Limitations

## Strengths

- Longitudinal data
- Multiple imputation
- Controlling for other adverse childhood experiences

## Limitations

- Sample not representative of population
- Retrospective, self-report of maltreatment
- Potential unmeasured confounders may affect mediator – outcome relationship
- Data span 2-3 years period over early adulthood

# Funding

**LRG is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. The funders have no input into the conduct of this work.**

# Acknowledgements

**Thanks to co-authors:**

**Erin Kelly, Emma Barrett, Siobhan Lawler, Katrina Prior, Lexine Stapinski, Nicola Newton**

**Thanks to the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use for funding my attendance at Lisbon Addictions**



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