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Quality of Relationships and Alcohol Dependence in Young Adults

Darlene Belen
Georgia State University

Allie Ramsay
Georgia State University

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Background

- Alcohol dependence and abuse in young adults is a growing problem, especially on college campuses.
- High quality parenting may limit risk of alcohol abuse (Abar, 2012). High quality parent-child relationships were associated with lower risk of alcohol abuse in young adults (Surkan, Fielding-Miller, & Melchior, 2012).
- Older sibling alcohol use was related to younger sibling alcohol use (Trim, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2006), but sibling relationship quality was not related to alcohol use (Van Der Vorst, Engels, Meeus, Deković, & Van Leeuwe, 2007).
- Having a romantic relationship was related to lower risk of heavy alcohol use (Fleming, White, & Catalano, 2010).
- Alcohol consumption in young adults was predicted by larger peer group's alcohol consumption more so than close friends' alcohol consumption, but close friends' alcohol use was also related (Overbeek et al., 2011).
- Heavy alcohol use has consistently been associated with high levels of conflict within relationships (e.g., Chermack et al., 2010).
- There are several important dimensions of relationship quality (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991), including:
 - Depth: security and stability of a relationship,
 - Support: degree of availability of the other person in the relationship,
 - Conflict: instability within a relationship.
- Existing research on associations between interpersonal relationships and alcohol use have mostly focused on the presence or absence of relationships; there is limited research on associations between the dimensions of relationships and alcohol use.

Purpose & Hypotheses

- The purpose of this study was to better understand how different dimensions of relationship quality (depth, support, and conflict) in relationships with different people (parent, sibling, significant other, and same-sex friend) relate to alcohol dependence symptoms in young adults.
- Hypotheses
 - In **parent-child relationships**, all three dimensions of relationships will be associated with alcohol dependence symptoms. Greater depth and support in the relationship will be linked to fewer symptoms, while more conflict will be linked to more symptoms.
 - In **sibling relationships**, more conflict in the relationship will be linked to more alcohol dependence symptoms. The degree of depth and support will not be associated with symptoms.
 - In **romantic relationships**, all three dimensions of relationships will be associated with alcohol dependence symptoms. More depth and support in the relationship will be linked to fewer symptoms, while more conflict will be linked to more symptoms.
 - In **same-sex friend relationships**, more conflict in the relationship will be linked to more alcohol dependence symptoms. The degree of depth and support will not be associated with symptoms.

Sample

- Students ($N=80$) at Georgia State University enrolled in Introduction to Psychology. Recruited through SONA database.

Table 1: Demographic information

Gender	84% Female
Age	$M=19.64$, $SD=1.67$, Range =18-25
Housing	46.9% live off campus with parents 53.1% do not live with parents
Ethnicity	Asian: 13.4% African American: 37.8% Hispanic: 6.1% Caucasian: 30.5% Other: 3.7% Biracial: 8.5%

Method

Procedure

- Participants completed two surveys:
 - Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Pierce et al., 1991)
 - Statements describing each relationship were rated on a 4-point scale
 - Ratings: 1=*not at all*, 4=*very much*
 - 9 items per relationship (36 items in total)
 - 3 depth items (e.g., "How significant is this relationship in your life?")
 - 3 support items (e.g., "To what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?")
 - 3 conflict items (e.g., "How angry does this person make you feel?")
 - Higher scores indicate greater depth, support, and conflict
 - Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS; Skinner & Allen, 1982)
 - Measures of drinking patterns during past 12 months
 - 25 items (e.g., "When you drink, do you stumble about, stagger and weave?")
 - Number of response choices for each item vary
 - Scores range from 0 to 47
 - Higher scores indicate more alcohol dependence symptoms
- Surveys were completed on a computer in the lab using the Survey Monkey website.
- Pearson correlations were run to test the associations between ADS scores and QRI scores.

Results

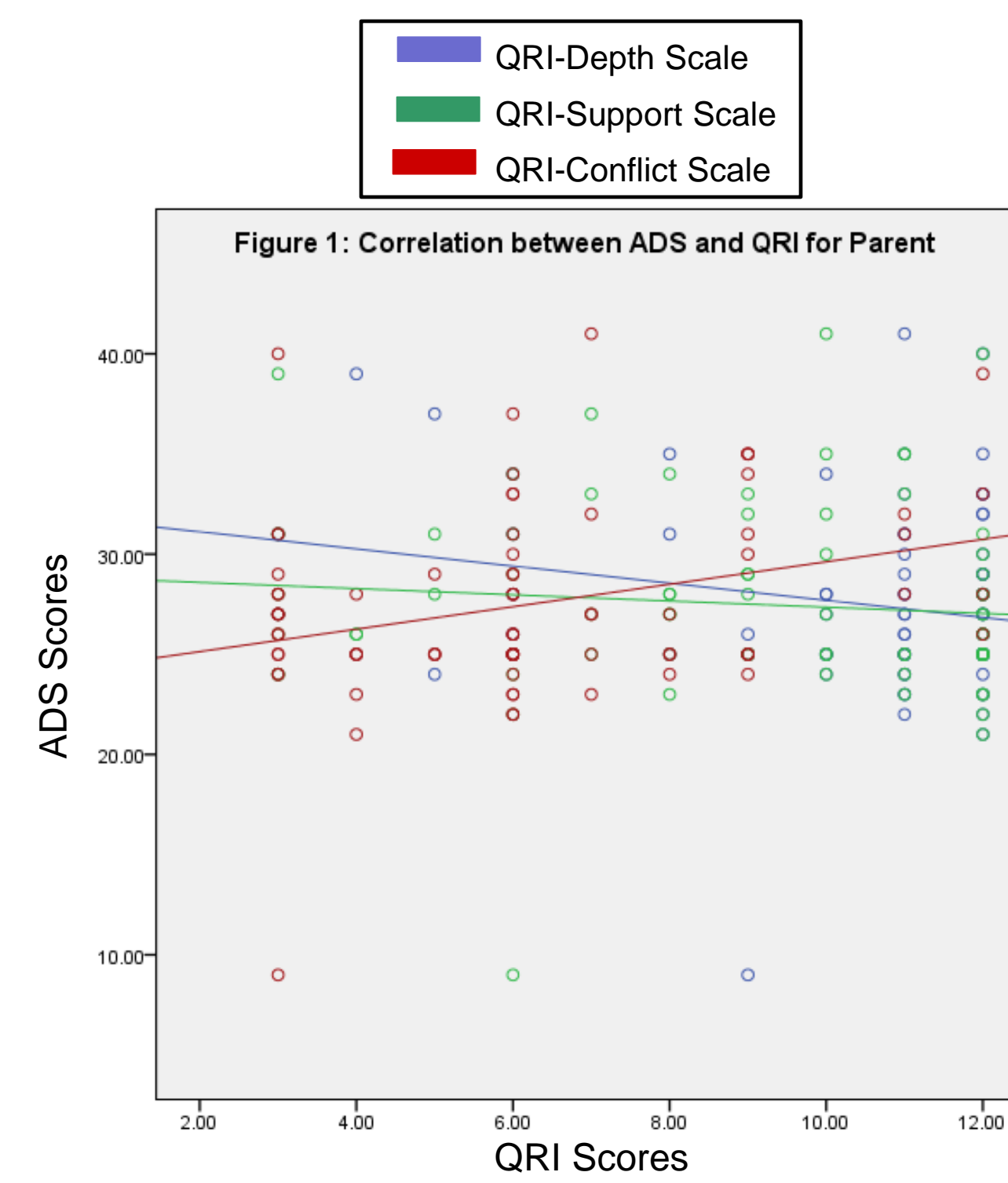


Table 2: Correlations between ADS and QRI for Parent ($N=80$)

	Depth	Support	Conflict
$M(SD)$	10.49(2.25)	9.12(3.03)	6.20(2.51)
r	-.26	-.16	.27
p	.01	.08	.008

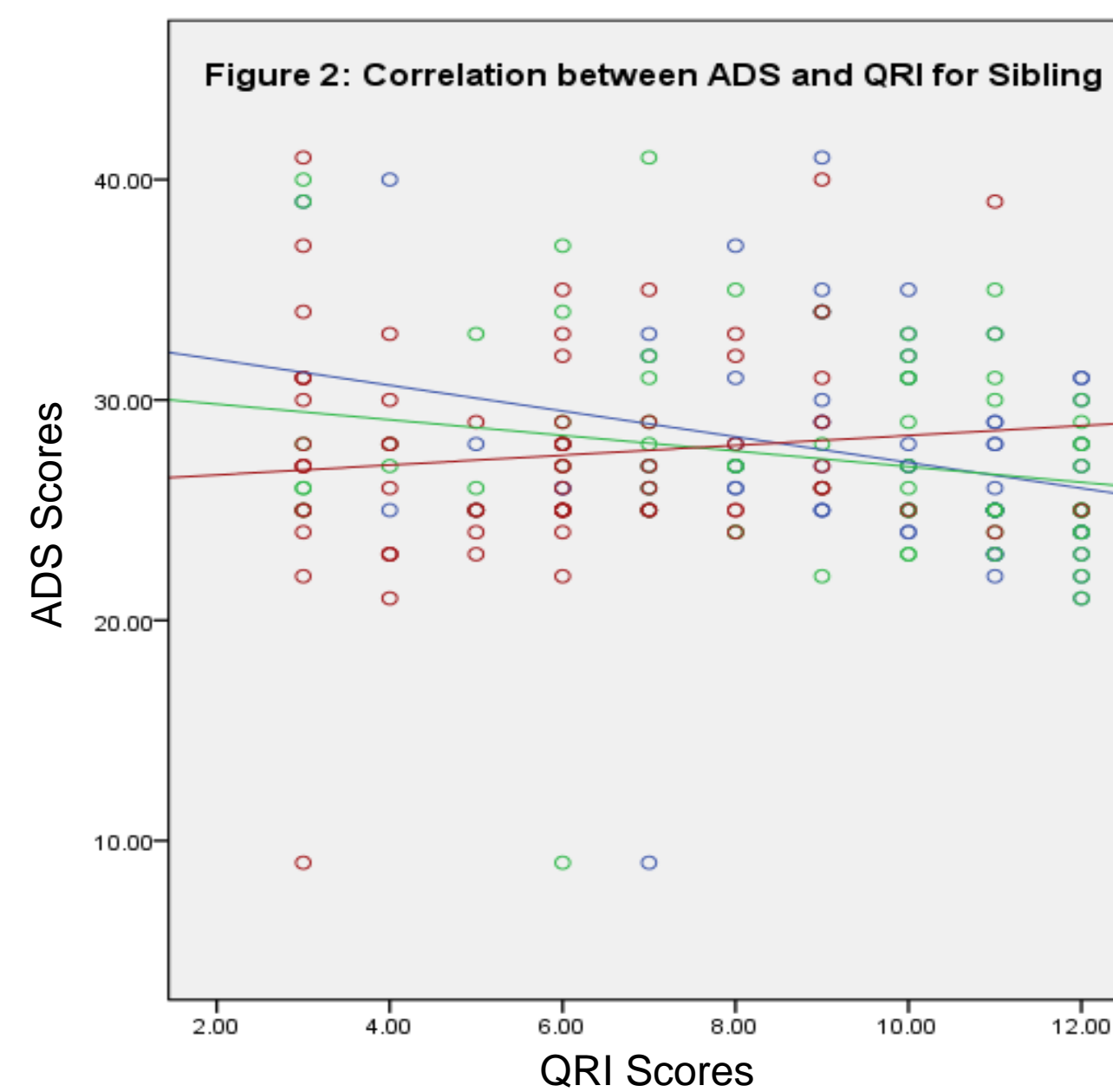


Table 3: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Sibling ($N=73$)

	Depth	Support	Conflict
$M(SD)$	9.48(2.21)	8.61(2.93)	5.88(2.30)
r	-.37	-.28	.05
p	.001	.007	.34

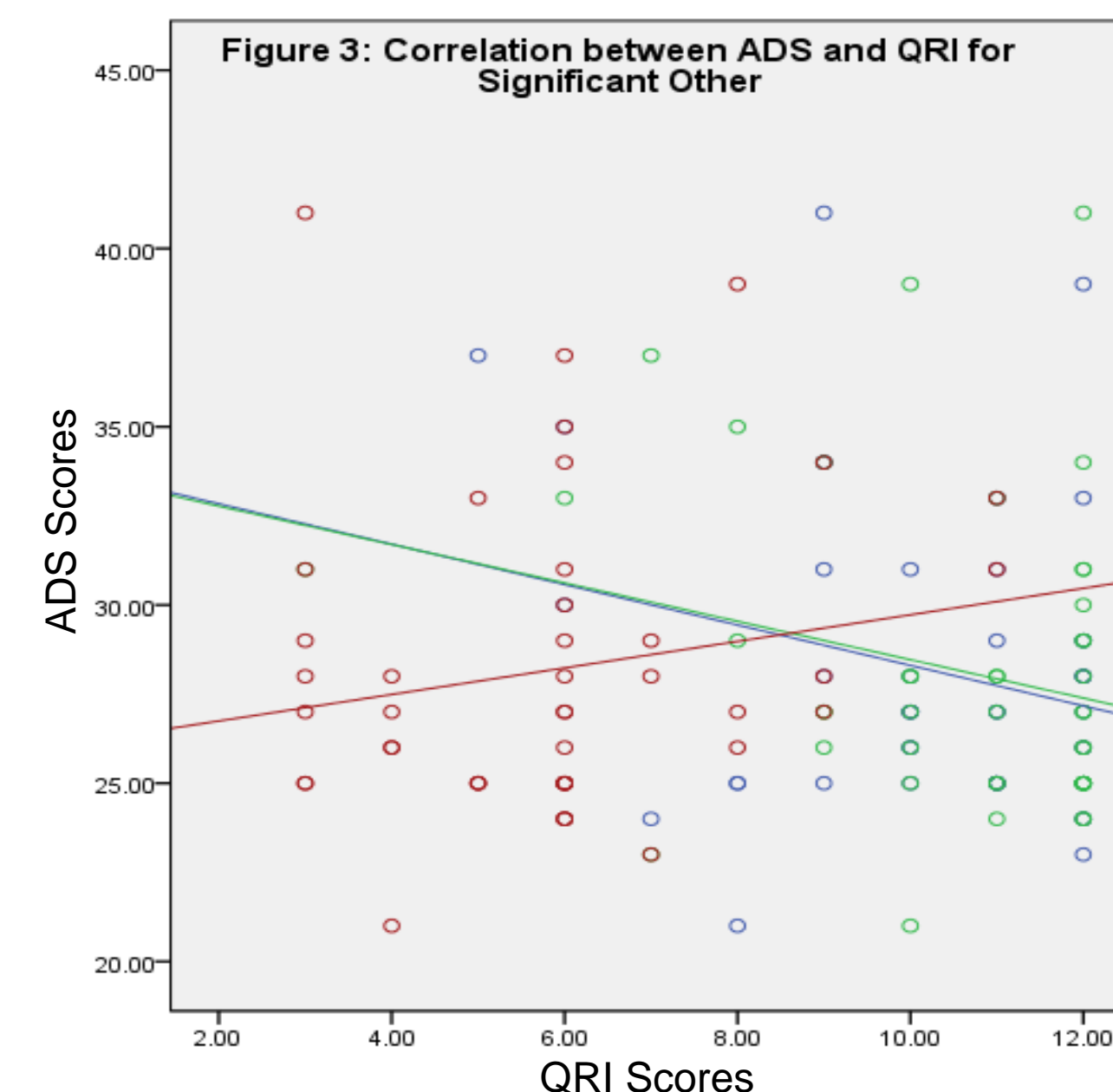


Table 4: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Significant Other ($N=45$)

	Depth	Support	Conflict
$M(SD)$	10.22(1.83)	10.53(1.98)	5.84(2.01)
r	-.24	-.25	.18
p	.054	.049	.13

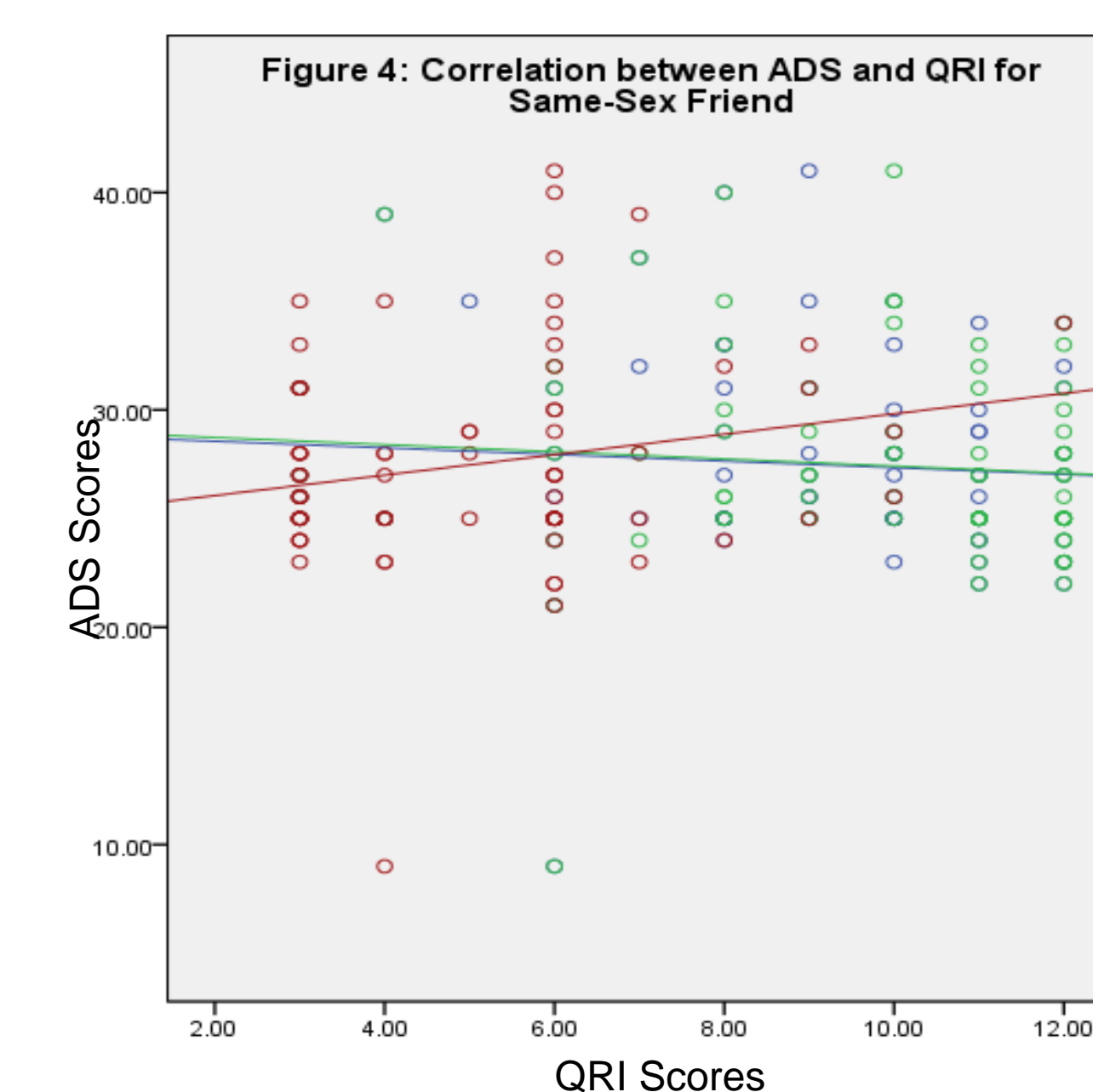


Table 5: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Same-Sex Friend ($N=80$)

	Depth	Support	Conflict
$M(SD)$	9.04(2.43)	9.56(2.61)	5.04(2.02)
r	-.15	-.17	.21
p	.10	.07	.03

Conclusion

- Parent-child relationship hypothesis was partially supported.**
 - As expected, **depth** of relationship between young adults and their parents was negatively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms, while **conflict** in relationships between parents and young adults was positively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - Contrary to our hypothesis, **support** in relationship with parent was not correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - During a developmental period when individuals transition to spending less time with parents, the stability and instability of the parent-child relationship was still correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms. Practical availability of parents was not related to alcohol dependence symptoms, which might reflect greater dependence on peers for support at this age.
- Sibling relationship hypothesis was not supported.**
 - Contrary to our hypothesis, greater **depth** and **support** in relationships between young adults and their siblings were negatively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms, but surprisingly, **conflict** with siblings was not related to alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - These findings bolster the idea that security and stability in family relationships as well as practical availability of siblings (a more age-matched family member than parents) are important for understanding risk for alcohol dependence in young adults.
- Romantic relationship hypothesis was partially supported.**
 - Consistent with our hypothesis, **depth** and **support** in a relationship with a significant other were related to fewer alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - Contrary to our hypothesis, **conflict** with a significant other was not correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - The associations between alcohol dependence symptoms and security of a romantic relationship and availability of a romantic partner are consistent with research on the role of romantic break-ups in youths' mental health (e.g., depression). The nonsignificant relationship between conflict and symptoms is inconsistent with research on associations between alcohol use and interpersonal relationships (e.g., marital conflict, partner violence), but the association is in the expected direction and the small magnitude may be due to the young age and/or low level of alcohol dependence symptoms in this sample.
- Same-sex friend relationship hypothesis was supported.**
 - As hypothesized, **depth** and **support** of a same-sex friendship were not correlated with alcohol dependence, and **conflict** with a same-sex friend was positively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
 - The link between unstable friendships and greater alcohol dependence symptoms is consistent with the literature on interpersonal conflict and alcohol use, and these findings suggest that positive friendships might not offer much buffer against alcohol dependence in young adults.

Implications

- Strong family relationships (both with parents and with siblings) may potentially be a protective factor against alcohol dependence in young adults. Moreover, these relationships seem to be more important than non-family relationships in terms of depth and strength of relationship.
- These findings may lead to new interventions on college campuses, such as intervention programs that include a family component.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Participants did not indicate for which parent they completed the QRI. In future research, we would like to distinguish mother-child and father-child relationships.
- The depth and support correlation between ADS score and QRI score for siblings was unexpected in light of existing research and suggests potentially important avenue for prevention and intervention research.

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