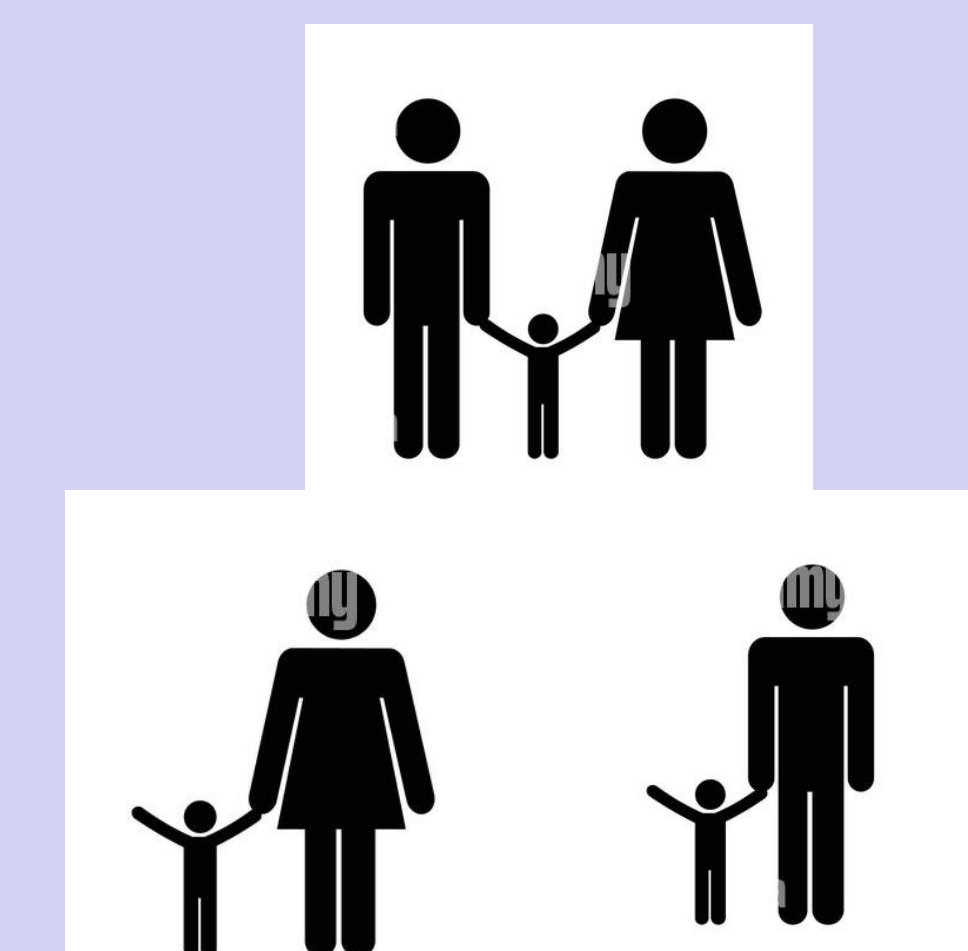


# Predictors of Reunification for Children and Their Parents in Cases Involving Parental Substance Use in Louisiana

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## Introduction

- Substance use inhibits a parent's ability to care for their children, putting them at risk for neglect, maltreatment, danger, and possibly foster care.
- It is estimated that 50-80% of children in foster care have at least one parent with a history of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) [3].
- The Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) works with families whose children are in foster care to support the goal of reunification. Parents attempt to remediate risk factors to protect their children.
- The LSUHSC Infant Team evaluates parent-child relationships and offers mental health services to these families.
- Children of substance-abusing parents remain in foster care longer, have lower reunification rates, and have greater rates of parental rights being terminated [7]. In addition, poverty in the family, along with the age and race of the children, have been found to predict parental outcomes for parents with SUDs [1].
- A parent's completion of substance abuse treatment is a positive predictor for family reunification [4,5].
- Other studies have revealed that two-parent households reunify more quickly [1].
- However, research is scarce regarding the demographics of parents who were substance users and were able to reunify with their children.

## Methods

- Purpose:** To analyze the demographics of families who reunified after the children were brought into state custody due to parental substance abuse (e.g., exposure in utero, neglect due to SUDs, etc.).
- Sample:** Families with young children who had been in the foster care system and received psychological services from the LSUHSC Infant Team within the Louisiana Southeastern area.
- Hypotheses:** A parent's substance use disorder will be negatively associated with the rate of reunification and White parents, older aged parents, employed parents, and partnered parents will predict reunification in cases involving parents with SUDs.
- Method 1:** Chi-Square Test to identify the relationship between SUDs and Reunification rates (N=416).
- Method 2:** Binary Logistic Regression test (BLR) using two subsamples of parents with SUDs (mothers, n=178; fathers, n=125) to identify demographic factors that predicted reunification.

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## Data

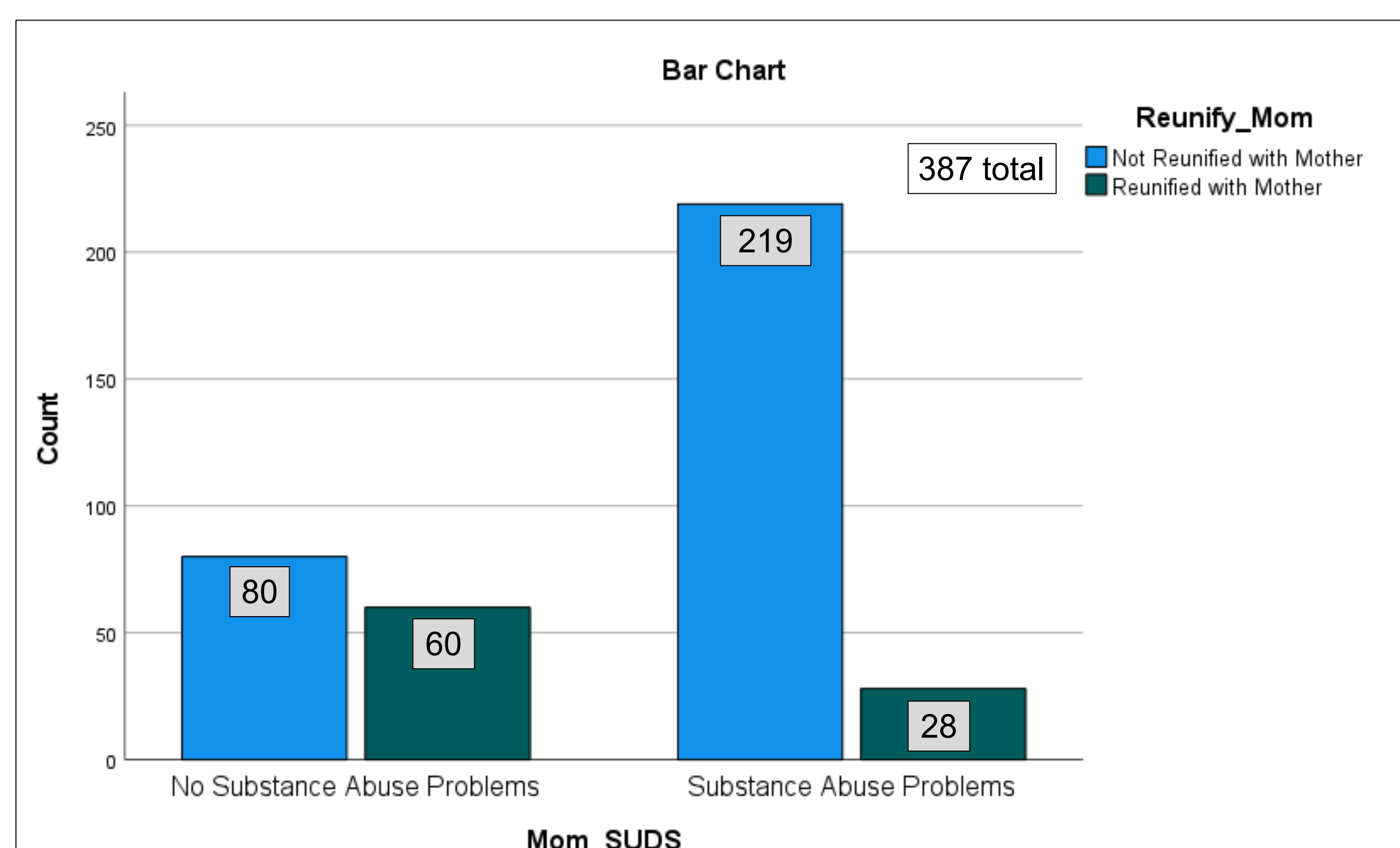


Figure 1. Mothers with and without SUDs and Reunification

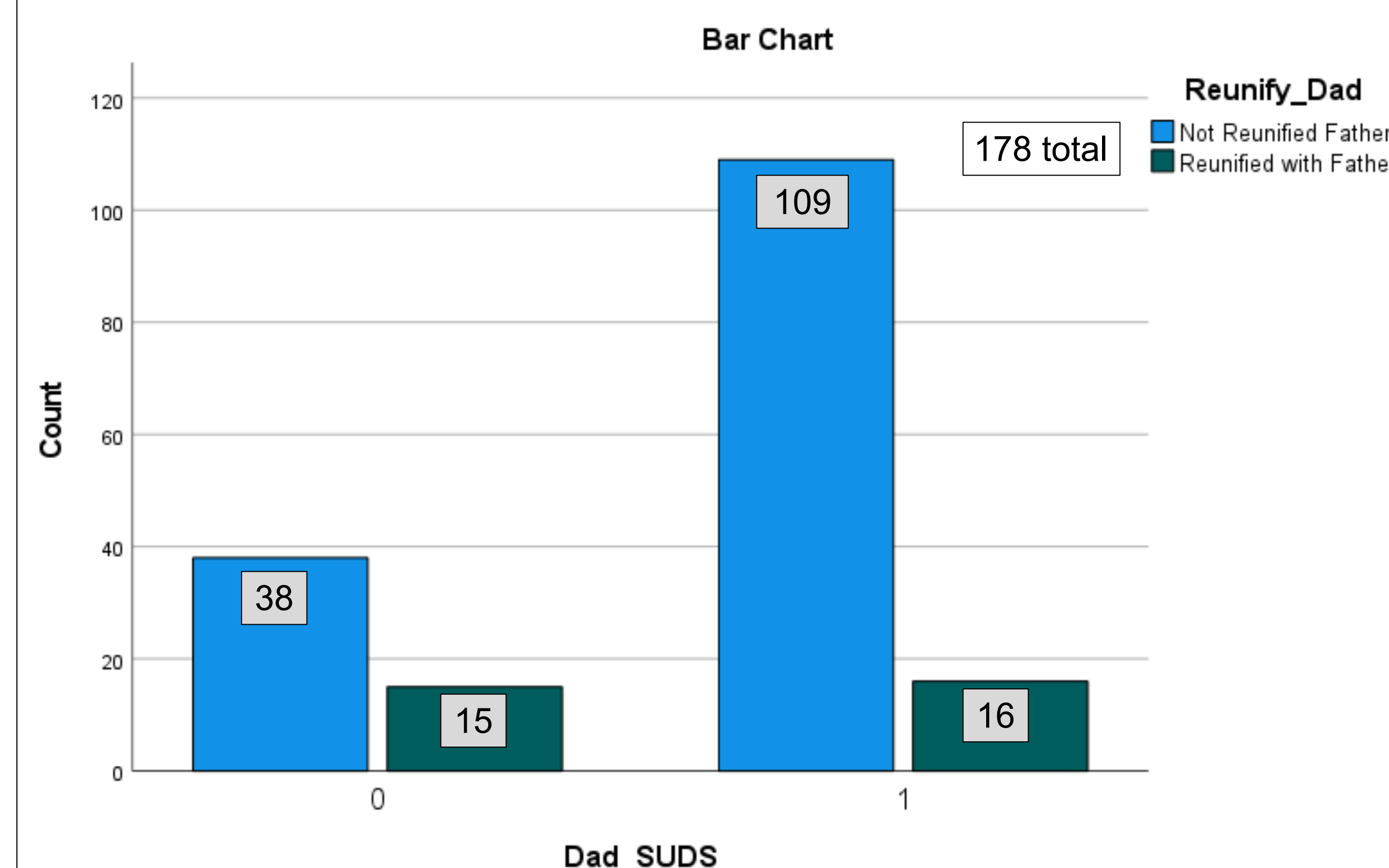


Figure 2. Fathers with and without SUDs and Reunification

Variables in the Equation		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Race(1)	.529	.579	.836	1	.361	1.698	.546	5.282
	Age(1)	1.137	.546	4.336	1	.037	3.118	1.069	9.093
	Marital Status(1)	.375	1.432	.068	1	.794	1.455	.088	24.098
	Employment(1)	2.492	.608	16.809	1	<.001	12.084	3.672	39.770
	Constant	-3.531	.741	22.684	1	<.001	.029		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Race, Age, Marital Status, Employment.

Figure 3. Demographics of Mothers with SUDs and Reunification

## Results

### Fathers (N = 178)

- 25 had SUDs, of these, 16 (13%) reunified, which the Chi-Square showed significant association between SUDs and reunification ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.219$ ,  $p = 0.013$ )
- For fathers with SUDs who reunified only, the Omnibus Test of Model Coefficient (OTMC) found no significant association between the demographic variables and reunification,  $\chi^2(4) = 4.043$ ,  $p > 0.05$
- Hosmer and Lemeshow test (HL) indicated a good fit,  $\chi^2(7) = 1.927$ ,  $p = 0.964$
- BLR test did not find demographics selected to be significant predictors of reunification; found "Employment" to be approaching significance: odds of reunification occurring increased by 6.110 (95% CI [0.889, 41.991],  $p = 0.066$ )

### Mothers (N = 387)

- 247 had SUDs, of these, 28 (11%) reunified; found to be a significant association ( $\chi^2(1) = 50.534$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )
- For mothers with SUDs who reunified only, the OTMC found a significant association between demographic variables and reunification,  $\chi^2(4) = 20.901$ ,  $p < 0.05$
- HL test indicated a good fit,  $\chi^2(4) = 0.521$ ,  $p = 0.971$
- BLR test found that,
  - Employment increased the odds of reunification by 12.084 (95% CI [3.672, 39.770],  $p < 0.001$ )
  - Older age (30+ years old) increased the odds of reunification by 3.118 (95% CI [1.069, 9.093],  $p = 0.037$ )
  - Race ( $p = 0.361$ ) and relationship status ( $p = 0.794$ ) were not found significant predictors of reunification

## Discussion

- Substance use disorders are negatively associated with reunification for parents with children in foster care. Parents struggling with SUDs may require more support than parents without SUDs.
- Because the subsample of fathers with SUDs showed only 7 reunifying, accurate generalizations about this group cannot be made. However, the contradictory statistical test results suggest that perhaps with a larger subsample, employment could be a predictor of reunification for fathers with SUDs.
- When observing the commonalities among mothers who reunified, older mothers (30+ years) had higher odds of reunifying than younger mothers (16-29y). This may be because older parents may have had more years attempting to address their substance use problems and their maturity level may have helped them reunify with their children.
- Older mothers may have more stability and security regarding their lifestyles, as it was observed that employment was also a significant predictor of reunification.
- While the results did not find race to be a predictor, it is hypothesized that this may be in part due to the data's limited racial diversity, as 73% of the mothers were African American. It is interesting to note that 14.7% of White mothers with SUDs reunified with their children as compared to 9.3% of African American mothers.
- Relationship status may not have been statistically significant enough to be a predictor because of the few number of mothers who reunified (24) and the few number of mothers who were married or partnered (3).

## Implications

- A larger sample size may be helpful in better understanding the demographic factors that increase reunification for parents with SUDs.
- Targeted support for parents can then aid in increasing the likelihood of reunification, especially those that target educational and employment opportunities [2,6].
- Economic and advancement support is crucial to mitigate the negative consequences that SUDs create in the community.
- The hope is that by paying closer attention to these demographics and providing extra assistance where needed, we can increase the likelihood of reunification for cases involving parental SUDs.