

# Do Children Who Experience Neglect Differ Significantly From Children Who Experience Other Traumas Relative to Developmental Delays?

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## Introduction:

- Child Neglect involves caregivers failing to meet children's basic needs. In the U.S., neglect affects 74.3% of children, making it the leading cause for children to enter foster care. (American SPCC, 2024)
- The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) may intervene if a child is reported as neglected. DCFS works with families to create a safer environment for the child.
- Neglect can prevent young children from achieving crucial developmental milestones essential for their overall well-being (CDC).
- Neglect can lead to issues such as language delays, attachment issues, and difficulties with social skills and emotional regulation. Research indicates neglected children suffer impacts on social-emotional, physical, and neurodevelopmental aspects (Peterson 2014; Passmore 2022).
- This study sought to explore different types of traumas (including neglect) and the developmental trajectory of young children.

## Methods:

### Analysis 1 (N=334):

- **Sample:** Young children who had been in foster care and received care from the LSUHSC Infant Team.
- **Hypothesis:** Neglected children will have higher rates of being developmentally delayed as rated by the clinician.
- **Methods:** Pearson Chi-Square Tests comparing children's developmental delay based on their experiences. (Physical/Sexual Abuse, Neglect, and Drugs in Utero).

### Analysis 2 (n=33):

- **Sample:** Young children whose caregivers had completed a developmental questionnaire (DECA).
- **Hypothesis:** Children who experienced neglect will have lower DECA scores as compared to children with other experiences.
- **Methods:** One-Way ANOVA Test comparing DECA scores for children exposed to Physical Abuse, Neglect, and Drugs in Utero.

## Results:

### Analysis 1 (N=334):

- There was no significant association between the type of trauma a child experienced and whether the child was developmentally delayed.  $\chi^2(2) = 2.064, p = 0.356$ .
- Allegation Type:
  - Neglect = 186
  - Drugs in Utero = 87
  - Physical/Sexual Abuse = 61
- Developmental Delays:
  - Yes: 166
  - No: 168

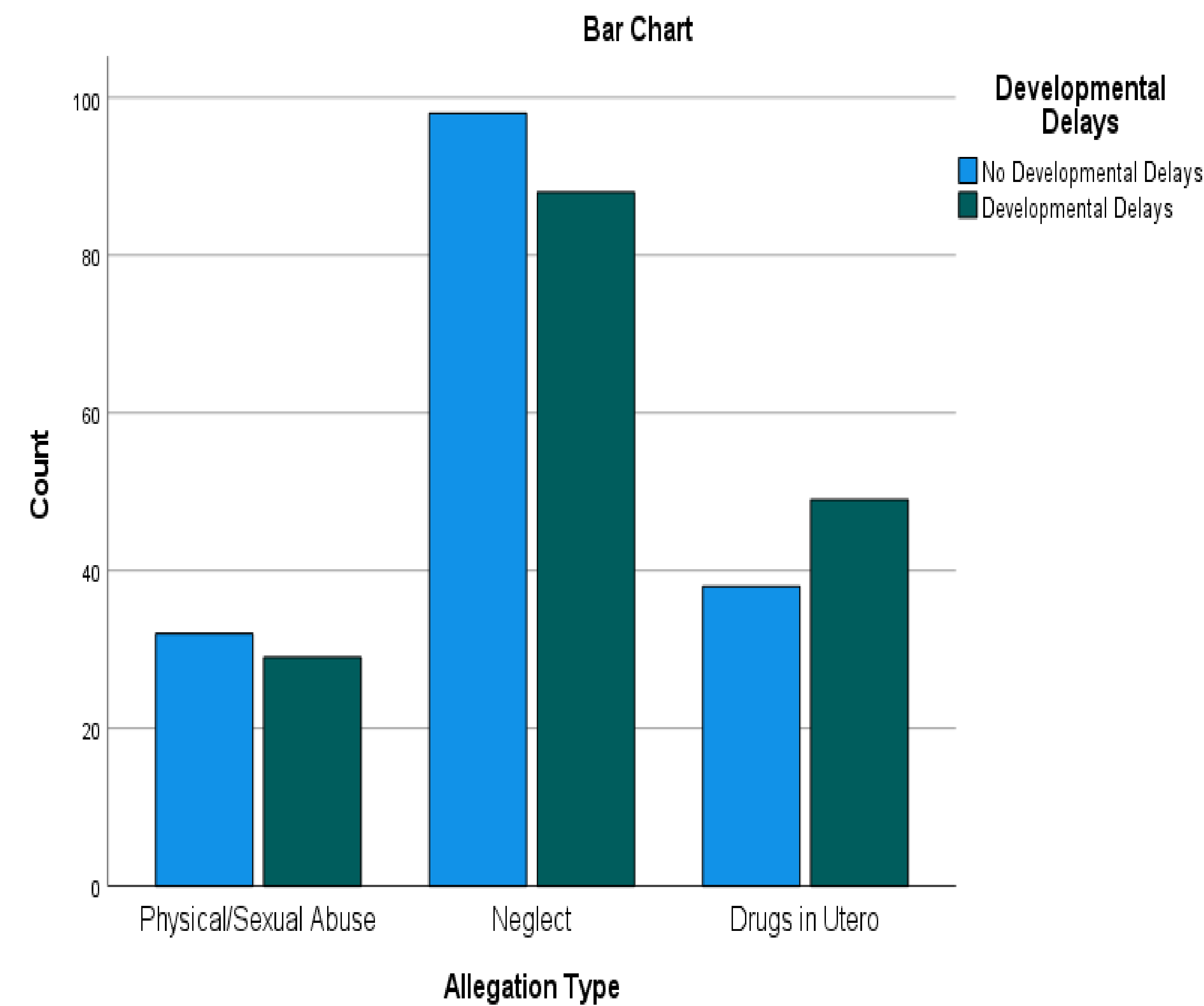


Figure 1: Association between Traumatic Experience and Developmental Delays

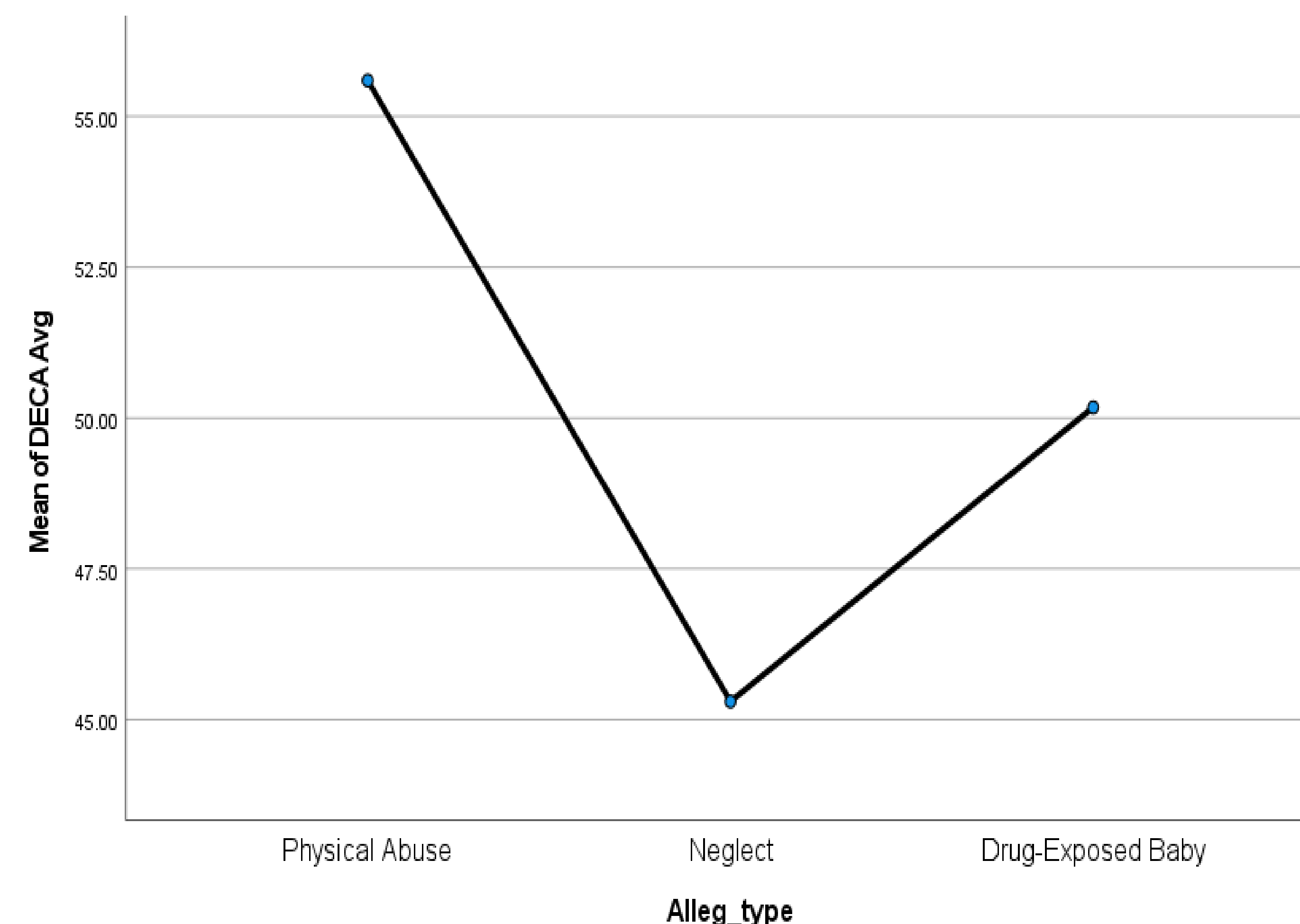


Figure 2: Association between Traumatic Experience and DECA Scores

### Analysis 2 (n=33):

- Physical Abuse group (n = 8): M = 55.59, SD = 8.31.
- Drugs in utero group (n = 10): M = 50.18, SD = 6.25.
- Neglect group (n = 15): M = 45.30, SD = 7.06.
- Significant difference between groups (F(2,3) = 5.519, p = 0.009).
- Tukey post hoc test results:
  - Neglect had significantly lower DECA scores than the Physical Abuse group. (p = 0.007).
  - No significant difference between the Physical Abuse and Drug in Utero group (p = 0.263).
  - No significant difference between the Drugs in Utero and the Neglect group (p = 0.233).

## Discussions:

### Analysis 1 (N=334)

- The study did not find significant differences in development between children who experienced neglect and those who experienced other traumas.
  - "Developmental Delays" was treated as a categorical variable (yes/no).
- Neglect, Physical/Sexual Abuse, and Drugs in Utero might all result in developmental delays but may be expressed in different ways.
- Research has consistently shown that trauma, including neglect, can affect brain development, particularly in areas regulating emotions (Peterson, 2014).

### Analysis 2 (n=33):

- Neglected children had significantly lower DECA developmental scores than the Physical Abuse group, which indicates that neglected children may experience worse developmental outcomes than children physically abused.
- Physically abused or drug-exposed children had higher DECA scores than neglected children, likely due to quicker intervention prompted by visible physical outcomes.
- DECA scores might not differ significantly between neglected children and those exposed to drugs in utero, given similar emotional and behavioral challenges related to timing of home placement.
- Children experiencing any trauma, including neglect or abuse, tend to have poorer cognitive outcomes later in life (Matte-Landry et al., 2023).

## Implications:

- Prioritizing the prevention of neglect is imperative.
- Improving education about child development and the importance of providing a stable environment is essential in preventing further neglect of children.
- Support services for families who struggle with stress, addiction, and mental health issues will help these families access the resources and assistance they need to foster a healthier environment and relationships with their children.

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